

**LITERACY & LIBRARIES**  
*Learning from Case Studies*



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## Public Library Literacy Programs

### *A Blueprint for the Future*

MARTÍN GÓMEZ

My goal here is to outline a possible future blueprint for public library-based literacy programs. You might wonder what qualifies me to speak on this topic. I'm wondering too! I am not a literacy expert. But I have spent the last 23 years of my professional life working in public libraries in San Diego, Oakland, and at one time in Chicago, my home town. For the past four years I've served as the executive director of the Brooklyn Public Library in New York City.

During my career I've had the opportunity to work closely with Gary Strong (see chapter 14) and Al Bennett as a member of the library development team that implemented the California Literacy Campaign. As director of the Oakland Public Library, I had the pleasure of working with Leslie McGinnis (see chapter 3) and Norma Jones, supporting their efforts to develop the Second Start Literacy Program. And today, I am pleased to be working with Susan O'Connor (see chapter 16), director of literacy services for the Brooklyn Public Library, shaping programs for students enrolled in our literacy programs.

### **A Look at the 1980s**

But for me, the last half of the 1980s will always serve as a benchmark in the public library-based literacy movement. In 1984 the California State

Based on a speech given at the Libraries and Literacy: Partnerships and Perspectives Conference, Chicago, Illinois, September 9, 1999.

Library launched a statewide literacy initiative. It was an incredibly exciting time for me professionally. Within a two-year period, 48 public libraries were granted LSCA dollars to establish literacy instruction programs. Within four years, the California State legislature passed the California Literacy Act, providing a consistent source of funding for public library literacy efforts.

That experience has shaped my perspective about public library-based literacy programs. And it has given me some insight regarding what public libraries and librarians might do to make a greater contribution to improve literacy in the United States.

Preparing for this presentation has been a journey for me in more ways than one. As a result of my journey, I've come to the following conclusion. Every couple of years all public library directors should be required to give a presentation on public library-based literacy programs. This act alone would force us to take inventory of what we do and don't know about the subject and perhaps even feel a bit guilty about the need to be more supportive of such an important social issue.

I have no doubt that the public library-based literacy movement has grown and matured since my days at the California State Library. But since that time I've seen the need for adult literacy services outpace the growth of our collective effort. At the very least, the movement within public libraries has held ground. But we are still swimming upstream and the current is getting stronger.

Recent national statistics indicate that roughly one out of five adults in the United States are still in need of basic literacy assistance. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 21 to 23 percent of the adult U.S. population (or between 40 to 44 million) displayed difficulty using certain reading, writing, and computational skills considered necessary for functioning in everyday life.

### **Definitions of Literacy**

The importance and necessity of being "functionally literate" have grown significantly due, in great part, to the explosion of information technology. The ability to have access to and competency in using technology has become a fundamental requirement in today's labor market. This has created a de facto demand for enhanced literacy skills. And without a solid foundation of basic reading and writing skills, opportunities for meaningful employment are severely limited.

To add confusion to the issue, the word "literacy" has been attached to so many issues that the focus on the basic literacy needs of our adult population has gotten lost in sound bites like "cultural literacy," "computer literacy," and "financial literacy." I'm talking about public library programs that enhance one's ability to read and write. Or, as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey of 1993, "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential."

As I set out on my journey, I wanted to know what has happened to the public library-based literacy movement over the past ten years, not just in California but nationally. How have public libraries shaped national policy and how has that policy shaped the role and nature of the public library-based adult literacy landscape? But most importantly, I wanted to know if we've made a difference.

Unfortunately, I didn't find the answers to the questions that I posed. But I did identify a handful of critical milestones that have, in theory, contributed to the movement. My conclusion, with some exceptions, is that even with these major milestones we, the public library community, have not done enough to enhance our commitment to literacy. Here's what I found.

In 1988 the University of Wisconsin at Madison produced *Libraries and Literacy Education*, a seminal report by Douglas Zweigig, Jane Robbins, and others. This report, which surveyed hundreds of public libraries in the nation, developed key definitions regarding the various types of literacy efforts by libraries, identified the important roles that libraries play in providing literacy education, and pinpointed the importance of library management's attitude toward literacy efforts.

About the same time, the American Library Association established the National Coalition for Literacy, a group of nonprofit organizations and literacy service providers. The purpose of the coalition is to be the "authoritative commentator on emerging literacy issues and works to expand public awareness, foster collaboration, provide communication, encourage applied research, and provide a leadership voice for the literacy movement."

In 1991 the National Institute for Literacy was created to "be the hub of national literacy efforts. By serving as a resource for the literacy community, the Institute assists in addressing urgent national priorities, upgrading the workforce, reducing welfare dependency, raising the standard of living and creating safer communities."

One of its responsibilities is to "assist in uniting the national effort to reach National Education Goal 5 for adult literacy and lifelong learning.

Goal 5 states that "by the year 2000 every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skill necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

In 1993 the National Adult Literacy survey was completed. The survey established the first comprehensive, statistically reliable source of data on literacy in the United States, and established three literacy "scales"—prose, document, and quantitative literacy—each scale reflecting a different type of real-life literacy task. But, more importantly, the survey gave us a common language by which to measure individual literacy levels.

Recently, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund invested more than \$4 million in 13 public libraries to support a series of innovative literacy instruction methods that will, we hope, result in the identification of strategies that not only work but can be replicated by other public library-based literacy service providers. Literacy in Libraries across America was designed by ALA in concert with the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund to "coordinate technical assistance to the 13 participating libraries and to provide leadership services to the field."

### Work in the 1990s

In 1998 the Workforce Investment Act was signed into law and has the potential to have a major impact on the adult literacy movement. Public libraries need to be ready with proposals for creative projects that can demonstrate how our adult literacy programs will help under- and unemployed populations make the transition from welfare to work.

Also in 1998, the Reading Excellence Act became law. Hundreds of millions of dollars are available as competitive grants to states to improve reading skills of students and the instructional practices of teachers. The act also expands family literacy programs and early childhood intervention programs. Again, public libraries need to be ready with proposals for creative projects that can demonstrate how we can help schools, teachers, and other qualified agencies to develop creative early intervention literacy programs for students and their families.

In 1998 ALA's executive board voted to provide funds for enhancements to the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) to enhance the association's ability to provide effective leadership for library-based literacy efforts. And in April 1999, National Literacy Forum published a five-page set of recommendations calling for expanded public support for

literacy improvements to teaching quality for literacy instruction, and strengthening the role of libraries in providing and supporting literacy services, to name just a few.

As public libraries, how have we benefited from these policy initiatives? How have they helped shape our programs and enabled us to improve services in our communities?

Public libraries have generated increased visibility regarding the issue of literacy, efforts aimed at improving literacy, and the need for action in our communities.

New national, state, and local partnerships have been established.

In some cases, these initiatives have resulted in enhanced funding opportunities.

In many instances, public libraries have gained a place at the national policy table. And locally, many public libraries are leading the public policy debate on literacy.

How have our programs benefited from these efforts?

Public library–based literacy programs have expanded from one-on-one instructional methods to group and small classroom oriented techniques.

By having educators involved in the design of our programs, we have learned more about the process of learning or how people learn.

In addition, we have learned that a learner-centered curriculum is a more effective one.

And we are beginning to learn that we have to be more accountable to internal stakeholders

We have also learned that successful programs are ones that are more fully integrated into traditional library services.

But with all of this “learning” we are still swimming upstream. For all of our effort, for all of our achievements, public libraries have not fully exploited their role as literacy-centered institutions. I know that there are some notable exceptions to what I’ve just said, but overall, we, the public library community, have not risen to the challenge. We have not assumed our share of responsibility for improving literacy levels in this country.

Perhaps our slow organizational response to literacy efforts is a reflection of the challenge that public libraries have assumed in relation to

information technology. This is not a bad thing, simply a reflection of the leadership within the public library movement and the critical need that we’ve had to position our institution as the public provider of information technology at this moment in time. I might add that Bill Gates has had something to do with this.

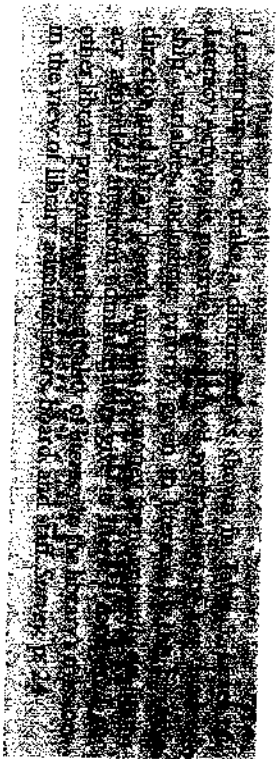
Every librarian can tell you that as a result of computer technology and the Internet, the nature of library work has changed more than any of us could have imagined ten years ago. Technology is changing the public library. But then, maybe this is just an excuse?

I don’t think it’s too late for public libraries to assume greater responsibility and I’d like to offer some suggestions about how we might do just that and what we might consider.

1. Public libraries could reposition their mission statements to reflect a greater responsibility for creating a literate population. As staff from ALA said in their report to the executive board, “librarians must claim literacy as a central issue and a professional value.”
2. Strong mission statements are policy positions that can lead to plans of action.
3. We could adopt a 10 percent solution. Public libraries could pledge to commit ten percent of their resources to improving literacy services within their respective communities by the year 2009, a significant challenge to be sure, but the impact of such a shift would be felt throughout the country. And if an organization like ALA joined in this effort—need I say more?
4. This would mean that libraries would most likely have to begin to shift resources away from “traditional” library programs. Our staff and patrons would need to be convinced about the larger social value of this effort, not as a reduction in other services.
5. We need to get more political. I mean this in the best and worst definitions of the word. We should identify and support candidates that support our literacy agenda. We need to support them financially and volunteer on behalf of their campaigns. What elected officials are we cultivating locally, in the statehouse, or on capitol hill? This is incredibly important. Letter-writing campaigns are important but we must also develop and execute a well-crafted legislative strategy that includes all of our partners. And, when necessary, we should include public demonstrations. We did it with technology (LSTA, eRate). Why can’t we do it with literacy?

6. We must make a commitment to further institutionalize literacy efforts in our libraries. This means holding other library departments responsible for making commitments to support the literacy office. It means creating opportunities for library staff to meet students and tutors, to participate (on work time) in the program either as students or tutors.
7. We would need to find ways to strengthen or introduce (or in some cases, reintroduce) literacy service to inmates in our communities.
8. It's time to "legitimize" literacy instruction as a discipline that requires support from institutions of higher learning, including graduate library schools.
9. We would have to ask our librarians to become educators and, in some respects, ask our teachers to become librarians. We might even have to ask our literacy program staff to become certified literacy instructors. And we should support the development of a credential program in literacy instruction for librarians and teachers.
10. We must develop coalitions with labor. Public libraries are in a strategically advantageous position to develop literacy programs that complement welfare-to-work programs currently being funded at the federal level. And our experience with technology makes this an even more attractive proposition.
11. It's time to begin providing instructional services to preschoolers and elementary kids who are at risk, establishing public library-based early intervention programs, much in the same way we did for adults in California and other parts of the country in the 1980s.
12. Children's service programs can easily begin to develop early intervention programs with Head Start and elementary schools; early reading intervention initiatives are not only politically attractive to elected officials but there is a generation of children out there who need our help.
13. We must get the welfare mentality out of literacy. Let's continue on framing literacy as an economic issue that will help build productive communities.

And, as former Senator Paul Simon said, public library directors need to assume greater leadership on behalf of literacy in our communities. Are there any takers?



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### The American Library Association's Literacy Initiatives

#### *History and Hope*

PEGGY BARBER

Libraries, librarians, and the American Library Association have been involved in literacy services since the earliest days of public libraries and the 1876 launch of the association. Most of this good work has gone unnoticed by everyone, including the library profession and ALA. A quick review of this history documents opportunities lost, but also suggests progress and hope: hope for the continued growth of excellent literacy programs in all types of libraries; hope that librarians will embrace the issue and seize the power, satisfaction, and recognition for providing a vital and valuable service.

As early as the end of the nineteenth century librarians at ALA conferences were debating the appropriate role for libraries in teaching adults to read. The debate focused on "Americanization" of new immigrants. Should they be taught English, or should libraries collect books in foreign languages? Should librarians teach?

In 1916 at the ALA conference in Asbury Park, New Jersey, John Foster Carr, Immigration Publication Society director said that he found remarkable all the profession had accomplished in teaching literacy. Carr said his organization knew of more than 500 libraries with programs for the foreign born. "The sad part," he said, "was that librarians had achieved their accomplishments so quietly that the public was unaware how great an effort they had expended, how dedicated they were, or how much success they had realized."<sup>1</sup> Carr said his organization knew of more than 500 libraries with programs for the foreign born.

In more recent history, literacy has remained a "behind the scenes" issue. In 1968 ALA established the Coordinating Committee on Library Service to the Disadvantaged and founded an Office for Library Service to the Disadvantaged and Unserved. Both quietly incorporated the issue of literacy. In 1975 ALA received a Department of Education grant for a literacy program that resulted in the publication of Helen Lyman's manual, *Literacy and the Nation's Libraries*. The Office for Service to the Disadvantaged eventually became the Office for Library Outreach Services, and in 1995 its name was finally changed to the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) (emphasis is mine).

In 1981 ALA founded the National Coalition for Literacy, the organization sponsoring the Ad Council literacy campaign, which brought the problem of adult functional illiteracy to the attention of the American public. The initial campaign included establishment of the Contact Literacy Center, a national 800 number for tutors and learners and a database of literacy programs across the nation. It also inspired other public-awareness efforts such as Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS)—the unprecedented ABC/PBS collaboration that included prime-time specials, abundant public-service announcements, and community outreach. Former First Lady Barbara Bush made literacy her issue. There were prime-time National Literacy Honors specials broadcast from the White House. ALA remained involved—but not out in front. Today, ALA continues to provide staff support to the National Coalition for Literacy, and serves as its fiscal agent.

#### **Grant Support in the 1990s**

In the early 1990s, with funding from the Bell Atlantic Foundation, Cargill Inc., and the Viburnum Foundation, ALA—and OLOS—led the development of family literacy programs in public libraries. With this grant support, ALA provided libraries with funds, training, model programs, materials, and technical assistance. These programs built on the strong tradition of children's services in libraries, helping parents and children to learn to read and enjoy reading and literacy activities to break the cycle of illiteracy. At about this time, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) received a grant from the Prudential Foundation for a program called Born to Read, which involved demonstration projects between health-care providers and librarians to reach at-risk parents-to-be. Born to Read is still going strong, as are family literacy programs in many libraries.

There are literacy pre-conferences, programs, and meetings of the Literacy Assembly at ALA conferences. The Public Library Association gives an annual award to recognize outstanding library literacy efforts. ALA Graphics produces beautiful posters and other promotional materials to promote reading, libraries, and literacy. Since the mid-1990s, the Association for Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies has directed Roads to Learning, a public libraries and learning disabilities initiative funded by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation.

In 1995 ALA's literacy efforts received a major boost when the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund approached ALA to lead a three-year, \$4 million national initiative to strengthen library-based adult literacy programs. The project, Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA), provided funding to 13 of the best existing literacy programs in public libraries and developed a powerful leadership cadre that is changing the library literacy scene. When the initial project ended, ALA funded a literacy officer position beginning in 1999.

Also in 1995, ALA joined the Library of Congress Center for the Book, National Institute for Literacy, and a private donor named Harold McGraw to support a study of library-based adult literacy programs. Its purpose was to refocus attention on the important institutional and service roles of libraries in literacy. Released in 1996, the report by Gail Spangenberg was titled "Even Anchors Need Lifelines." Spangenberg said, "Judging by . . . the large number of public libraries now involved in the provision of adult literacy service (some 7,000 not counting branches), public libraries also embrace literacy as a central part of their ongoing mission, although with occasional ambivalence. They are a community anchor for literacy—or as one project advisor put it, they could well be seen as the 'irreducible backbone of the literacy movement.'"<sup>2</sup> Spangenberg's report made much of the discontinuance of ISCA Title VI, which had provided direct federal support for library literacy programs. One of the major "lifelines" is gone.

Most library literacy programs are still launched with grant funds, while librarians tend to apply for grants that say "library" in their title and are reasonably accessible. Federal funds for literacy and English-as-a-second-language training are now distributed primarily through block grants to the states. Although libraries are mentioned in the legislation, the testing and reporting requirements put federal funding out of reach for most public library literacy programs. Libraries traditionally serve the lowest level of adult new readers. They could use targeted federal, state,

and local support. Unfortunately, support for literacy programs has not been a priority on ALA's legislative agenda.

The valuable role of library literacy programs was recognized in 1995, when ALA was honored with a Leadership Award from Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) for "its profound influence over and enduring support of the literacy movement." According to the citation, "ALA has encouraged libraries to provide direct support to community literacy programs, through funding, space, staff and materials for tutors and students. It has added expertise and a strong voice to the literacy field's effort to secure supportive public policies and funding for adult basic education. And perhaps most meaningful of all, ALA has sustained the fight for intellectual freedom and access to information for all, regardless of race, religion, age, national origin, social or political views, or the ability to read or speak English with fluency." The LVA award to ALA seemed designed to encourage more leadership. Unfortunately, it was hardly noticed.

Also in 1995 ALA adopted Goal 2000, a five-year initiative to position the association and libraries for the twenty-first century. While it stressed the importance of connecting libraries to digital information networks, Goal 2000 focused on human services rather than technology. It said "The American Library Association must be as closely associated with the idea of the public's right to a free and open information society—intellectual participation—as it is with the idea of intellectual freedom." Clearly the ability to read is the most basic step toward intellectual participation. Literacy was apparently a key element of ALA's national agenda, but it wasn't mentioned in the Goal 2000 plan.

### **Literacy on the Front Burner**

Progress came in 1998 when ALA adopted five key action areas. Literacy is one of the five! Those key action priorities—diversity, education and continuous learning, equity of access, intellectual freedom, and twenty-first-century literacy—are now moving ALA's latest strategic plan, ALAction 2005. Literacy has hit the front burner. Is the fire hot? Not quite, but again there is hope.

Here are some of the reasons for hope. ALA is funding a literacy officer position. There is sustained leadership from the literacy officer and a dedicated member group—inspired and led by many of the LILAA project directors and staff. A growing e-mail list provides substantive discussion

on library literacy issues. ALA and library literacy leaders were included—and were a strong voice—in the Literacy Summit organized in February 2000 by the National Institute for Literacy. Funders such as the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund continue to recognize, support—and document with new research—the library role in literacy. There are new funders supporting library literacy programs, such as the Verizon (formerly GTE) Foundation. Literacy programs are reaching across the association. For example, ALA's Public Programs Office now has two projects funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities: National Connections and Prime Time Family Literacy provide reading and discussion programs for adult new readers and their families. A new ALA Standing Committee on Literacy was approved during the association's 2000 Annual Conference in Chicago. The school and academic librarians are leading information literacy movements. Soon the whole profession will understand that we will teach or be irrelevant.

So why has literacy been so marginal an issue in the American Library Association? Why hasn't an ALA president ever made literacy the association's focus? Why didn't our profession see what state librarian Gary Strong (now in New York City's Queens, see chapter 14) did in California? Strong invested big chunks of LSCA funding in library literacy, which inspired the state legislature to invest more than \$50 million in state funds for literacy and family literacy programs in public libraries. There are currently ongoing literacy programs in more than 150 public libraries in California. Thousands of adults have learned to read. Thousands of parents and children have found new opportunities.

Librarians and ALA stand tall for intellectual freedom issues. Why not literacy? ALA has a Freedom to Read Foundation. Do we really mean it? It's perhaps easier for us to embrace an intellectual concept such as the First Amendment, than to teach reading to adults and families who need a second chance. I'm not suggesting that we replace one professional value with another. I am suggesting that we increase our power by increasing our passion. A literate public demands good libraries; good libraries create a literate public. It makes sense.

#### NOTES

1. Deanna B. Marcum and Elizabeth W. Stone, "Literacy: The Library Legacy," *American Libraries* (March 1991): 202-5.
2. Gall Spangenberg, *Even Anchors Need Lifelines* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, 1996), p. 116.

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### Bridging the Information Chasm

#### ALA's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

SATIA MARSHALL ORANGE

Libraries "ensure access to information for all."<sup>1</sup> The message of the American Library Association (ALA), in a society where access to information is the key to survival, is that libraries must respond to the information needs of *everyone* in their communities. The sustainability of these communities is dependent on information; their information vehicles must be comfortably and equitably accessible. Libraries can and must ensure that. It is true, however, that the equitable library service mandated by ALA is not always available for *everyone* in *every* library community in the United States.

Thus, the mission statement recently revised by the Advisory Committee of the Association's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) extends ALA's message with these special emphases:

OLOS serves the Association by supporting and promoting literacy and equity of information access initiatives for traditionally underserved populations. These populations include new and non-readers, people geographically isolated, people with disabilities, rural and urban poor people, and people discriminated against based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, language and social class.<sup>2</sup>

The placement of "new and non-readers" as the first population indicated in the OLOS mission statement above is no accident. This unanimous decision by advisory committee members validates the recommendations of a comprehensive review of the office in 1997. It also



acknowledges the reality that the survival of many of the other groups included in the statement is too often complicated by their limited reading skills, for whatever reason; for example, English as a second language, limited formal education, disabilities, complications of poverty, hunger, and homelessness, etc.

Adult literacy initiatives have been a focus of OLOS for most of its existence, even when the office's target service population was described as librarians serving the "disadvantaged." An updated mission statement was set in place to more clearly and dramatically address the need for effective library services to traditionally underserved populations. The office's efforts today target library directors and administrators, trustees, and those library staff members who conceive, plan, and provide frontline delivery of information services, collections, and programs in local library communities.

### Information Chasm Rather Than Digital Divide

As the information challenges of the twenty-first century become more apparent, there are ever-increasing discussions about the digital divide. A recent exchange on an OLOS electronic discussion list highlighted the limited focus of this phrase. The list subscribers sought to identify an expressive term to describe the issue more adequately.

Conversations among researchers, politicians, practitioners, and non-profit organizations send messages translated by news media about the "haves and have nots," and their conflicting levels of familiarity with the new technology. These terms are legitimate in statement and purpose, and are validated by the numbers of high school dropouts and unemployed workers, along with the more stringent requirements for today's employment positions. However, even the use of "divide" with "digital" expresses too succinct a meaning to accurately reflect the impact on adult learner issues and those of other OLOS mission placeholders. I suggest that the term "divide" is more of a problematic description than even the term "gap."

An alternative term to consider is "chasm" rather than "divide." A chasm is more dramatic than "gap," and it suggests the need for extreme but credible (even architecturally exact) possibilities. Strategically designed efforts must be considered to bridge the great expanse between those familiar with the array of vehicles for accessing information and those less comfortable, if at all aware of information access alternatives. Considering the space between the two groups as approachable rather than divided also conveys the message that it can be strengthened with data, training, opportunities, and hope that could fill it, or at least lessen its

dimensions and its defeating impact. "Divide," on the other hand, implies the need for battling a wall or a division, a negative reference between those comfortable and well acquainted with the new vehicles for information retrieval and those who are not. The difference, I admit, is purely attitudinal.

### The Challenge

The challenge for ALA, OLOS, and you, their members, internal and external partners in supporting those for whom this information phenomenon directly impacts, is to bridge this "chasm" with opportunities for encouragement, collaboration, training, and support. The development of effective information-delivery systems purposefully designed, in part, by the people for whom they are targeted, is in many formats already in place, or at least being researched and designed in local communities, as well as on many organizations' national agendas.

Libraries of all kinds are and can continue to be the catalysts that advocate the use of adult learning systems, whether in university and community colleges, nonprofit adult literacy organizations and agencies, schools and corporations, or in the libraries themselves. Libraries, by their acceptance of municipally assigned civic responsibilities, can become more identified as one of the champions in their communities for nurturing and fine-tuning their policies and practices to eliminate the information "chasms" in their own institutions. These championship honors can be shared with others in their communities who are successfully addressing similar issues. The "community championship circle" should be flexible enough to allow for increasing involvement; the more champions, the more sustainable the communities.

And finally, OLOS encourages libraries to use similar energies and their collective expertise to share the adult learner services with other traditionally underserved populations in their communities who are faced with multiple service challenges. The experience in OLOS has suggested that although the objectives and strategies are similar, other populations' service needs do overlap.

### OLOS Support of Adult Literacy

At its last Midwinter Meeting of the twentieth century, the Executive Board of the American Library Association approved a most significant recommendation. It prioritized adult literacy in libraries by adding a literacy officer position to the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services. And the

benefits to the profession of that one appointment continue to reverberate throughout the association. ALA's achievements in garnering and solidifying external partnerships cannot be overstated. Dale Phillips Lipschitz admirably accepted the challenge and nobly and successfully administered the objectives.

The vision for the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services mandates the delivery of information services to librarians and their communities to effectively encourage and support adult literacy in their institutions. OLOS resources will allow them to make informed decisions about how to impact new and nonreading adults and families in their libraries, whether as mainstays in library infrastructures, as project initiatives, or as ongoing support of community adult literacy agencies. Throughout the association, OLOS's goal is to support libraries as they participate, on any level, on behalf of the adult literacy community, and with other service communities as well.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of ALA and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Initiative—Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA)—the office has developed a strong strategic plan with an effective path toward improved services to librarians addressing adult learners. Because of their continuing successful outcomes, these strategies now serve as models for “bridging the chasm” for other OLOS mission populations as well.

The OLOS strategic planning objectives parallel those of its literacy component. The variations can be found in their focus, however. The OLOS adult literacy component may be easier to understand because of its definition, its current prominence in the public eye, and the recent availability of significant funding. The other OLOS components cover other outreach populations, all of whom may be directly affected by the constraints of limited literacy skills. Future program initiatives will broaden the service strategies to combine both components for successful outcomes.

### Vision for the Future

OLOS is a small, non-revenue-generating office with a large responsibility within ALA, which, with the support of its advisory committee, ALA administrative staff, and the Executive Board, has a clear vision for the future that involves teaming with internal and external partners and ser-

vice recipients. The major thrust for cooperation with other units within the association and national partners who target the populations identified in the mission statement requires the appreciation and respect of multiple perspectives and the sharing of resources. Therefore, the visions for the office are to:

broaden the “consumer” base of collaborators within the association and the profession, and better address their library-focused needs through its various networks of outreach library staff;

more aggressively encourage internal (and external) partnering of association staff development initiatives, including coauthoring publications, participating in inter-unit informational initiatives on effective techniques for addressing the “information chasm,” and gleaming information from other units’ leadership and approaches for successful outcomes;

work with the ALA Public Information Office and the Publishing Department to bolster campaigns on library services to new and nonreaders as well as other populations, while supporting the collaborative efforts of libraries with their local partner organizations on local and national levels;

work closely with ALA’s Diversity Office, the Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment (HRDR), and other ALA units to ensure collaborative support for libraries that reflects diversity in planning, execution, and participation. The diversity officer also coordinates the ALA Spectrum Initiatives, which facilitates the recruitment of people of color with financial support for library school attendance;<sup>3</sup>

support ongoing dialogue and action planning with the proposed ALA Council Committee on Literacy, utilizing the combined expertise of its representative members from ALA’s member divisions and roundtables;<sup>4</sup>

link to the Internet websites of other ALA units, affiliates, and partners for shared access to resources that support adult literacy throughout the library and adult literacy communities;

keep the association leadership—i.e., Executive Board, Council, division presidents, roundtable chairs, membership, and ALA partners—appraised of new efforts, initiatives, outcomes, strategies, and

opportunities for support and involvement in adult literacy and other outreach initiatives;

cooperate with the ALA Washington and Development Offices to include adult learner issues in legislation and funding approaches for other outreach groups;

disseminate information about the Building Literacy Coalitions Initiative, recently funded by Verizon, and other adult literacy initiatives to other library outreach networks for the benefit and awareness of their local library users;

encourage emphasis on adult learners with OLOS liaison groups, especially the national associations of librarians of color, as they consider initiatives for their local service communities;<sup>5</sup>

And, finally, advocate for more contemporary curriculum emphasis in library schools that comprehensively address library outreach issues and service strategies for new professionals.

### Can We Achieve Our Vision?

A recent publication entitled *Toward an Information Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* introduces a Bill of Information Rights that enunciates the rights of governments, individuals, and corporate citizens to information.<sup>6</sup> One of the authors, Jorge Reina Schement, suggests the crucial right to information as one of universal access for all individuals.

The concept of ensuring practical access for all to a ramp onto the emerging electronic hierarchy of information presents a profoundly frightening picture for OLOS mission populations. The dangers exist in the inequities of access that truly separate our society. That "ramp" will not serve the majority of OLOS populations because they will not see the ramp, and will be unable to navigate through the information society promised in this millennium. They will not only be left behind, they will be ignored. Therein is the concern for equity as an ALA key action area versus equality, as expressed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.

Targeting ALA's internal organization and external partners is certainly a challenge, but one hampered by tradition and practice, and not by possibilities. Some public librarians feel strongly that they are already effectively addressing traditionally underserved populations. Closer review reveals, however, that too few unit contingencies within the membership divisions and roundtables focus their energies on the "information

chasm." Their interests and willingness to collaborate for more effective treatment and services for OLOS-designated populations have been stated, however, even by their leadership. Therefore, accomplishing a professionwide approach to filling the "chasm" with effective data is strongly within the realm of probability.

So there is a positive answer to what is accomplishable. Here are some examples of accomplishments already in place:

OLOS has designated funds for working with other ALA units on web-based continuing education, staff development on adult literacy and other mission populations.

The Public Library Association (PLA), a division of ALA, has included consideration for basic literacy in its recently published *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process*.<sup>7</sup>

The OLOS website at <http://www.ala.org/olos> includes resources on library services to all of the traditionally underserved populations that can be accessed by libraries via the Internet.

The first Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture was also inaugurated at the 2000 ALA Annual Conference. The first lecture, presented by ALA Past-President Barbara J. Ford (1998–1999), focused on the global approach to library outreach services, and identified the importance of including adult literacy in libraries. The second lecture, for the 2001 Annual Conference in San Francisco, will focus on adult literacy and its impact on the literacy field and library populations.

Sarah Ann Long, ALA Past-President (1999–2000), introduced the presidential theme for the 2000 Annual Conference in Chicago, as "Libraries Build Sustainable Communities." A number of programs before and during that conference, and in a separately published brochure, suggested alternatives for many in libraries who are not only traditionally underserved but also underrepresented, to participate in their communities' decisions. Long's invitation to "consider making your library the heart of the community decisions, especially those regarding the three Es of sustainability: environment, economics, and equity" provides an intriguing opportunity for libraries to increase the community participation of their users. Just think! Adult learners in libraries will have the immediate opportunity to participate in negotiating their communities' futures.<sup>8</sup>

ALA's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services can make the difference in addressing the needs of adult learners and others in library communities. Communities must be enlarged to include all the involved, especially the adult learners themselves. The American Library Association will be the resource that supports libraries and library staff for effective delivery of services to this important population. We've turned the corner and we see the bright possibilities with our internal and external partners. We can make it happen. Join us!

#### NOTES

1. The mission of the American Library Association can be found at <http://www.ala.org>.
2. Adopted by the OLOS Advisory Committee, June 1999.
3. The Spectrum Scholarship Initiative can have a great impact on the effectiveness of some literacy initiatives, since literacy professionals of color are limited in number.
4. OLOS will be the ALA staff liaison for this committee to be established by the summer of 2001; the formation of the ALA Council Committee on Literacy was presented as a resolution at the 2000 ALA Annual Conference and is awaiting final authorization by ALA's Committee on Committees for final acceptance by the ALA Council. (Passed at Annual Conference, 2000.)
5. American Indian Library Association (AILA), Asian Pacific American Librarian Association (APALA), Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), REFORMA: National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking.
6. *Toward an Information Bill of Rights and Responsibilities*, ed. by Charles M. Firestone and Jorge Reina Schement (Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute, 1995).
7. *Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process* (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1999).
8. Message from ALA President Sarah Ann Long, "Libraries Can Help Build Sustainable Communities," *American Libraries* 31 (June/July 2000): 7.

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### Coda: Word

GRACEANNE A. DE CANDIDO

On more than one occasion my family and I have trekked to Jonesborough, Tennessee, for the National Storytelling Festival sponsored by NAPPs, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (now the National Storytelling Center). These are times full of marvels, where professional tellers, librarians, preachers, schoolteachers, family historians, and people who just love a good yarn gather to listen, to tell, and to share.

During one of these trips, I was waiting my turn at the outhouse and began to chat with the woman in front of me, who turned out to be a librarian. She told me that she was in charge of the literacy volunteers in her library. One of the techniques they used was to transcribe on the library computer the family and cultural stories their students told, and use those stories as reading texts. The people learning to read were delighted to see their own words in print, different cultures and ideas were shared among the students, and the problem of textbooks was solved. I was enchanted by this: oral history, multiculturalism, grassroots use of computer technology, literacy, and the power of the word all woven together into one basic and useful basket.

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