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The Year 2002 in Review

Thomas G. Sticht

INTRODUCTION

The year 2002 marked 35 years since President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Adult Education Act early in fiscal year 1967, thereby creating the Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) of the United States.^{1,2}

Since its creation, the AELS has increased in terms of both fiscal resources and the numbers of adults who participate in it each year. Expressed in constant 2001 dollars, the AELS in fiscal year 1967 received

¹In August 1964, Public Law 88-452, the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), Title IIB: the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program, was passed. Two years later, the ABE Program was removed from the EOA and renamed the Adult Education Act. Early in fiscal year 1967 (November 1966), it was incorporated as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 entitled Title III: The Adult Education Act. In 1991, the Adult Education Act was renamed the National Literacy Act, and in 1998, it was renamed once again and incorporated into the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 as Title II, The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Sticht, 2002d, pp. 33–38). As the federal fiscal year extends from October 1 of one year to September 30 of the following year, there were 35 years from fiscal year 1967 to fiscal year 2002.

²In this chapter, the Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) is defined as those programs operating by the funds, rules, and regulations of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act.

funds of some \$106 million from the federal government, with matching funds from state and local sources of around \$53 million (Sticht, 1998, p. 4). This provided education for more than 377,000 adults. By 1999, federal funds had increased to more than \$383 million, while state and local funds increased to more than \$1.1 billion in constant 2001 dollars, and enrollments rose to more than 3.6 million adults (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a).

During 2002, adult educators in New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, California, and Washington held meetings at which the AELS was celebrated (Sticht, 2002c). Altogether, more than 2,000 educators, adult students, government officials, business representatives, and others learned about the history and achievements of the AELS, and the hundreds of thousands of teachers and administrators who have worked in the AELS, and the more than 75 million adults (Sticht, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2002a) who studied and learned in the AELS in the last third of the 20th century, were recognized.

Overview of Chapter

This chapter first discusses activities of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), which has federal oversight of the state grants that fund the AELS. It then discusses additional topics of special interest in 2002, including adult reading research and instruction; assessment of adult learning; issues of race, ethnicity, and racism in adult education; and the second year of the National Literacy Summit 2000 Action Agenda.³ Following the discussion of these topics, some important milestones in the field during the year are noted.

DAEL AND THE AELS OF THE UNITED STATES

This section discusses three major activities from the DAEL in 2002: the first report on the use of an early version of the National Reporting System

³Special topics for review in this chapter were selected following a survey of Internet discussion lists; journals on adult education, reading, and literacy; review of Web-based reports and forums; participation in conferences and meetings; discussions with adult educators, researchers, and policymakers; and from comments by reviewers of earlier drafts of the chapter.

(NRS) to obtain accountability data from the states about the AELS, a report outlining the OVAE/DAEL strategic plans for the field in the near future, and a report on the final funding for the AELS and several other federal adult literacy programs for fiscal year 2003.

Accountability Data From the States

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), enacted as Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, is the principal source of federal support to states for adult education and literacy programs and activities (Sticht, 1998). In the act, Congress made accountability for results a central focus, setting out new performance accountability requirements for states and local programs that measure program effectiveness on the basis of student academic achievement and other outcomes.

To document these accountability requirements, the DOE and each state agreed on performance levels for each of several core indicators. In May 2002, the OVAE/DAEL released a report to the Congress and the public with performance data for Program Year (PY) 1999–2000, a transition year in which states first implemented the accountability requirements of the AEFLA (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a).

In summary, the report showed that a number of states met or exceeded their performance targets in PY 1999–2000, based on an average of their performance on the indicators required by the AEFLA. On average, 41 states exceeded their performance indicator targets for the percent of learners demonstrating improved literacy skills, 25 states exceeded their targets for high school completion, 22 states exceeded their targets for the number of learners in adult education programs going on to further education and training, 41 states met or exceeded their performance targets for learners gaining unsubsidized employment, and 39 states exceeded their performance targets for learners who retained employment or advanced on the job.

In addition to the performance data, the report revealed huge differences across the states in federal funding per enrollee. It indicated that funding for PY 1999–2000 was \$365 million, and enrollment in the AELS totaled 2,891,895. This amounts to an average of about \$126.21 per AELS enrollee across the United States. But on a state-by-state basis, the funds per enrollee fluctuate wildly, from a high of \$509.45 in North Dakota to a low of \$46.48 in South Carolina. In 12 states, the funding per enrollee was less than \$100. In 18 states, it was over \$200, and in four states, it was over \$300. The report does not address the large differences across the states in per-enrollee funding (Sticht, 2002a).

The report did not note that enrollments dropped by 1,128,655 from the 4,020,550 figure in PY 1997–1998 (Sticht, 2002b). California accounted for 979,716—or about 87%—of the drop. Not surprisingly then, given California’s large population of Hispanics, Asians, and Pacific Islanders, examination of the change in learner characteristics in PY 1997–1998 and PY 1999–2000 indicates that of the 1,128,655 drop in enrollments, Hispanics accounted for 634,378, or some 56% of the total decline of 1,128,655 from PY 1997–1998 to PY 1999–2000. Enrollments of Asian or Pacific Islanders dropped by 23.5%, Whites by 16.5%, and African Americans by 4%. No firm explanation of the decline’s cause has been forthcoming from either the states or federal government.

A Strategic Plan for Adult Education and Literacy

During 2002, the DOE released a report called Strategic Plan 2002–2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). The plan includes six goals for the next 5 years. Of the six goals, two are of special relevance to the adult education and literacy field. Goal 4, transform education into an evidence-based field, includes two subgoals: 4.1, raise the quality of research funded or conducted by the DOE, and 4.2, increase the relevance of research to meet the needs of customers. The Strategic Plan says of Goal 4:

We will change education to make it an evidence-based field. We will accomplish this goal by dramatically improving the quality and relevance of research funded or conducted by the department, by providing policymakers, educators, parents, and other concerned citizens with ready access to syntheses of research and objective information that allow more informed and effective decisions, and by encouraging the use of this knowledge (especially within federal education programs). (p. 59)

The Goal 4 plans led in 2002 to the reporting of evidence-based approaches to adult reading instruction and the search for new measures of adult learning for accountability purposes.

Goal 5 of the Strategic Plan calls for enhancing the quality of and access to postsecondary and adult education and includes Subgoal 5.5, enhance the literacy and employment of American adults. To enhance adults’ literacy and employment skills, the plan calls for the DOE to fund demonstration, evaluation, research, and training activities with state and local partners. Through this means, the DOE says it will develop new models of basic education and English literacy services to help a larger percentage of

America's adult population receive the literacy skills they need for workplace learning, postsecondary learning, and lifelong personal and career growth.

As a performance measure of Goal 5.5, the Strategic Plan aims to reduce the percentage of adults in the lowest level of literacy, presumably Level 1 as measured by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), from an estimated 19% in 2002 to 17% in 2004 and 15% by 2006. To obtain these performance data, which will be adjusted based on the results of the NAAL of 2002, the report states that the DOE is considering a biennial assessment of adult literacy using the NAAL.

Funding for Adult Education and Literacy

In April 2002, President George W. Bush submitted his Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 proposal for funding of the state grants that provide the federal share of support for the AELS (Gullion, 2002). The funds requested were \$575 million, the same as for FY 2002. The President's budget included \$9.5 million for national leadership activities in support of the AELS, the same as in FY 2002, and \$6.6 million for the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), an increase of \$40,000. Additionally, the President's proposed budget reduced funding for Even Start from \$250 million to \$200 million, and it eliminated funding for incarcerated youth offender programs (\$15 million), prison literacy (\$5 million), and community technology centers (\$32.5 million).

In July, the Senate's proposed budget designated FY 2003 funds equal to those of FY 2002 for the state grants for the AELS, national leadership activities, NIFL, Even Start, prison literacy, and community technology centers, and it raised funds for the incarcerated youth offender program from \$17 million in FY 2002 to \$20 million in FY 2003 (Gullion, 2002).

By the end of 2002, Congress had failed to act on new budget proposals for FY 2003 and instead passed a continuing resolution that kept funding for adult education and literacy at the same levels as for FY 2002.

TOPICS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Four topics were of special interest in 2002. The first two, adult reading research and the search for improved methods of assessment of adult learning in programs, were in line with Goals 4 and 5 of the Strategic Plan 2002–2007. The third topic, issues and activities regarding race, ethnicity,

and racism in adult education, rose to prominence in response to adult literacy providers' concerns during the year. The fourth topic tracks the progress of the National Literacy Summit 2000's Action Agenda in its second year.

Adult Reading Research and Instruction

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, changed the 30-year direction of the Adult Education Act by taking long steps away from dealing strictly with educational policy toward influencing the practice of adult education by emphasizing certain instructional methods. In particular, it emphasizes that agencies assessing grant applications from educational providers should consider whether or not the program “. . . uses instructional practices, such as phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension that research has proven to be effective in teaching individuals to read.”

The interest in adult reading instruction, supported by research in the AEFLA, has led to additional research, dissemination of new research, and the reporting of new research in scientific journals.

In 2000, NIFL and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) formed the Adult Basic Education Reading Research Working Group (RRWG) to identify and evaluate existing research relating to adult literacy reading instruction. Their goal was to provide the field with research-based products, including principles and practices for practitioners. In late 2001, the RRWG produced two reports that reviewed research on alphabets (decoding), fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and computer technology. One report focuses on principles that can be derived from the research and provides a research agenda for the future. The second report focuses on instructional practices that can be drawn from the existing research base. In 2002, these reports were published by NIFL (Kruidenier, 2002b).

Maintaining the new focus on evidence-based reading instruction for adults, in 2002, NIFL, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the DOE provided grants totaling some \$18.5 million over a 5-year period for research on adult reading processes and instruction (National Institute for Literacy, 2002b). Additionally, in a partnership with the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), NIFL established the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Reading Project. This project will develop a train-the-trainer model to support family literacy programs

in integrating scientifically based reading instruction and EFF's constructivist approach to teaching and learning (National Institute for Literacy, 2002a).

In a first for a peer-reviewed journal, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, the official journal of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading, published a special issue entitled "Reading Development in Adults." The journal was edited by Richard L. Venezky and John P. Sabatini, who noted that "basic research on the reading processes of low-literacy adults is impoverished" (Venezky & Sabatini, 2002, p. 217). The journal includes four articles that explore basic processes of phonological awareness, comparisons of children's and adults' word-reading and spelling errors, adults' word-reading efficiency, and patterns of word-recognition errors among native and nonnative speakers of English in adult education programs. The editors concluded in an overview that "together, these studies do not make any major breakthroughs or overturn any cherished beliefs. . . . As the study of low-literacy adults matures, we can expect to see stronger theoretical foundations" (Venezky & Sabatini, 2002, p. 219).

A review of ongoing reading research by NCSALL and NIFL, and research reported in major journals concerned with reading, revealed the absence of reports focused on adults that provide theoretical foundations for reading considered as a second signaling system for listening—the basic idea behind teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency—or reading as the use of graphic devices such as tables, figures, charts, schedules, and other "real world" displays, such as those found on the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). Consequently, a paper covering these topics, entitled "Teaching Reading With Adults," was prepared and made available on the Internet (Sticht, 2002e).

Assessing Learning in Adult Literacy Programs

Obtaining good measures of student learning gains is one of the perennial problems facing adult basic education programs. For many years, nationally normed, standardized tests that provide measures of learning have been recognized as ill-suited for use in adult basic education (ABE) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programs (Kruidenier, 2002a). One reason is that adults usually attend such programs for fewer hours—less than 100—compared to a K–12 school year of more than 1,000 hours. In the relatively brief amount of time that adults attend programs, they cannot show much gain in learning on tests designed primarily

to rank people's learning rather than to indicate how much of a specified domain of knowledge has been learned.

Because of the difficulties in using standardized, nationally normed tests in adult basic education programs, the OVAE/DAEL and NIFL asked the National Academy of Science's Board on Testing and Assessment (BOTA) in 2001 to examine the feasibility of using performance assessments to meet the requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS) for valid and comparable measures of learning related to six levels of learning gains for ABE and six for ESOL.

The BOTA released its report in 2002, indicating that ABE and ESOL faced serious challenges in using performance assessments (National Research Council, 2002). First, such assessments are difficult and expensive to develop, and most ABE/ESOL programs have neither the technical expertise nor the financial resources to develop and maintain the assessments as changes in what is taught become necessary or desirable.

Second, technical difficulties in developing such assessments may make it next to impossible to develop measures that are comparable across programs. The development of comparable performance assessments requires teaching comparable knowledge and skills content. Currently, the thousands of programs across the nation that make up the AELS do not teach the same knowledge (i.e., vocabulary, facts, principles, concepts, rules, and skills).

Third, technical methods for aligning performance assessment tasks with the NRS learning levels and for establishing their equivalence to various standardized tests or other performance assessments used to show growth in the NRS levels are either not available or, like the technique of "social moderation" (which amounts mostly to having judges guess comparability and equivalence of measurement), are of dubious value in validating learning and progression up the six NRS education levels in either ABE or ESOL.

The BOTA report suggests that using technology might be useful, but beyond the need for more research and development, it did not offer specific recommendations. It was further concluded that it might be useful if programs pooled resources or worked with established test publishers, using their resources.

As a general conclusion, the report noted, regarding the particularly vexing problems of developing validity and comparability across the performance assessments of different programs and different states, "Greater comparability could be achieved through standardization (i.e., same content standards and tests across states), but it would come at the cost of

decreased flexibility at the program or state level in choice of assessments. Thus the tradeoffs need to be kept in mind” (p. 102).

The BOTA project has provided advisory input to the NIFL’s ongoing EFF project, which for several years has been engaged in developing content standards and performance assessment procedures for measuring learning in ABE and ESOL programs. This work, some conducted in cooperation with the NRS of the DAEL, involves ABE and ESOL practitioners in developing an approach to performance assessments that is based on the EFF framework of 16 content standards. Reports on the EFF content standards and assessment projects can be found at the EFF special collection pages on the Web (National Institute for Literacy, 2002b).

Race, Ethnicity, and Racism

In 1993, the report of the National Center for Education Statistics on the findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) presented data for three types of literacy scales—prose, document, and quantitative—and five levels of literacy for each type, with Level 1 the lowest level of literacy for each of the three types (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993).

Table 1.1, Column 2 presents data from the NALS prose literacy scale showing the percentages of various racial and ethnic groups in the lowest level of the prose literacy scale. In all cases, minorities had anywhere from

TABLE 1.1
Racial and Ethnic Group Membership in Relation to Performance
on the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) and Enrollment
in the Adult Education and Literacy System (AELS) of the United States

<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>	<i>Column 5</i>
<i>Racial/Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Percentage in NALS Prose Level 1</i>	<i>Percentage of NALS Prose Level 1</i>	<i>Percentage of the AELS in 1980</i>	<i>Percentage of the AELS in 2000</i>
White	14	51	46	34
African American	38	20	22	21
Hispanic	50*	23	22	36
Asian/Pacific Islander	36	4	9	7
Native American/ Alaskan Native	25	1	1	1

*This is the weighted average for five categories of Hispanics.

twice to more than three and one half times the percentage of adults in the lowest level of prose literacy as Whites. Findings for document and quantitative literacy were similar to those for the prose scale.

Whereas Column 2 of Table 1.1 shows the percentages of each ethnic group who scored in Prose Literacy Level 1, Column 3 shows the percentage of adults in Prose Literacy Level 1 who were of each race/ethnic group. Thus, thinking of all the adults of each ethnic group in the United States, only 14% of White adults in the nation were in Prose Literacy Level 1 (Column 2). But when considering just the adults in Level 1 who are of each ethnic group, Whites made up 51% of those in the lowest literacy level (Column 3). African Americans and Hispanics each made up about 20% of the Level 1 adults, Asian/Pacific Islanders made up about 4%, and Native American/Native Alaskans were around 1% of the least literate.

Column 4 shows the distribution of ethnic group members in the AELS in 1980, when about 2 million adults enrolled in the AELS, and Column 5 shows the distribution for 20 years later, in 2000, with some 2.9 million enrollments. The data indicate that from 1980 to 2000, the proportion of adults enrolled in the AELS fell over 20% for Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders, stayed about the same for African Americans and Native American/Alaskan Natives, and rose by some 63% for Hispanics.

Interestingly, the data of Table 1.1 indicate that although Whites make up more than half of the least literate in the nation (Column 3), they were underrepresented in the AELS in 2000, whereas Hispanics appear to be overly represented in relation to their distribution in Prose Literacy Level 1 (Column 3).

In the AELS, the primary criterion for program funding is the percentage of adults without high school diplomas in each state or territory. Based on this criterion, in the 2000 population age 15 or older, there were some 45,485,846 youth and adults without a diploma (U.S. Census, 2000). Of these, 57% were White, 24% Hispanic, 15% African Americans, and 4% others. Using this criterion, it seems once again that Whites are underrepresented in the AELS, whereas other racial and ethnic groups are overrepresented.

Looking at each racial and ethnic group separately, Hispanics are the most in need of the AELS services because 47% of those over the age of 15 lack a high school degree or GED. This contrasts with 28% of African Americans, 20% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 17% of Whites who lack these educational credentials.

Data such as those of Table 1.1, Column 2, showing that a disproportionate percentage of minorities have very low literacy skills, and the data

on lack of high school credentials among minorities, have suggested to many literacy practitioners that more needs to be done to combat racism as a source of inequality in education and literacy. During 2002, the meetings of the Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) in Charleston, South Carolina, and ProLiteracy Worldwide (made up of the merged Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy International organizations) in San Diego, California, showcased institutes, workshops, and roundtables to allow adult educators to discuss and raise their consciousness about issues of racism and their relationships to participation in adult literacy education (Corley, 2002).

Numerous messages discussing issues related to race and racism were posted to the National Literacy Advocacy (NLA), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Poverty, Race, and Literacy (POVRACLIT) discussion lists in February and March of 2002. These discussions were initiated by Isserlis's (2002) message to the ESL electronic list related to a concern about the annual COABE conference being held in South Carolina, where an NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) boycott was in place to discourage tourists and conventioners from spending money in the state. During the year, discussions on Internet lists led a number of adult educators to call for developing adult instructional programs leading to higher levels of literacy; greater tolerance of racial, ethnic, and other differences among adults; and greater social justice in housing, criminal justice, medical, and other areas in which racial and ethnic factors may lead to discriminatory and unjust practices against adult learners and others.

National Literacy Summit 2000 Action Agenda Year 2

In September 2000, the National Literacy Summit 2000 steering committee launched an Action Agenda for literacy (National Institute for Literacy, 2000). The Action Agenda called for a system of high-quality education services for adult students with ease of access to these services and sufficient resources to support quality and access. The goal was to improve the adult education and literacy system by 2010. Two years into the Action Agenda, it is not clear how much has been achieved.

The Summit steering committee presented no information during the second year of the Action Agenda. Therefore, there was no way to judge whether or not there has been an increase or improvement in the quality of services for adult students in any programs of literacy provision. No information was forthcoming to indicate whether or not access to adult

education and literacy development services has improved over the last 2 years.

In terms of resources, the Action Agenda in September 2000 included the goal of persuading Congress to raise appropriations for the AELS to \$1 billion by the year 2010. But as already noted, no new budget was in place for FY 2003 at the end of 2002, and funding for the AELS was continued at the same \$575 million level as for FY 2002. There was no movement in the direction of the Action Agenda target of \$1 billion for the AELS as of the end of 2002.

To understand how the effectiveness of the National Coalition for Literacy might better accomplish its goals for advocacy, including improving the achievement of the goals of the Action Agenda, the Coalition sponsored a study of its workings by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL). The major recommendation of the study was that the Coalition needed to become a nonprofit organization that could provide full-time professional support to its advocacy activities (Chisman, 2002). By the end of the year, the National Coalition for Literacy had followed this recommendation and was restructuring as a nonprofit organization.

TRANSITIONS

In January 2002, the OVAE/DAEL announced that Dr. Ronald Pugsley, who served for 12 years as director of the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), was leaving that position to become the Assistant Secretary's senior advisor on international education. During Pugsley's tenure, funding for the AELS rose from \$258 million to \$575 million in constant 2001 dollars. He initiated numerous major activities, of which the National Adult Literacy Survey and the National Reporting System are perhaps the best known and most controversial. Replacing Pugsley as the DAEL director during the year was Cheryl L. Keenan, former director of the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education in Pennsylvania. Well known to the adult education community, Keenan brings a wealth of practical experience in implementing the accountability and other requirements of Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of the WIA, at the state level. This experience is expected to be of value in formulating revisions to the WIA when it is renewed.

The field of adult literacy lost a great professional and activist when Susan Green of the National Institute for Literacy passed away in March. She was a long-time associate of former First Lady Barbara Bush and for

more than a quarter century was instrumental in helping formulate a wide array of adult literacy activities and programs both inside and outside the federal government. Her legacy lives on in a Susan Green Memorial Fund established to benefit VALUE (Voice of Adult Literacy United for Education), an organization of adult learners (EFF list, 2002, March 1, <http://literacy.nifl.gov/nifl-4eff/2002/0092.html>).

CONCLUSION

After 35 years of growth and development of the AELS, many adult educators across the nation took time to recognize and celebrate the work of hundreds of thousands of their colleagues and tens of millions of adult learners. Their efforts have made the AELS a viable component of the U.S. public education system. However, there is still a need for a wider audience, including policymakers, to have a greater understanding and recognition of the AELS as a major contributor to our nation's education goals. This was indicated by the fact that 2002 was the second year in a row in which those responsible for formulating the education policies and funding requests for the Bush administration did not request additional funds for the AELS.

Whether the field will be successful in raising awareness of the AELS and other adult education and literacy providers in the future is not clear. The National Literacy Summit 2000 Action Agenda—the major hope for the field's advancement in the last two years—appeared moribund in 2002. Despite activities during the year to improve the quality of education in the field, including research on more effective approaches to teaching reading with adults, better learning assessment methods, and attempts to confront issues of ethnicity and racism, it will be difficult to bring about any new changes in educational practices without large increases in funding. But media reports throughout the year of looming budget deficits at both federal and state levels lead one to suggest that large increases in funds for adult education and literacy development will not be forthcoming in the near future. Instead, just holding on to what the field already has may be the best that can be achieved in these hard times.

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