



MESSAGE FROM MK – November 2003

An update from Mary Katherine Moen, State Director of Adult Education
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One of my favorite quotes is from David Brandon in *Zen in the Art of Helping*: "The helping process is essentially about exploring that light inside yourself and being a source, at best unintended, of others finding their own." Parker Palmer echoes this thought in *The Courage to Teach*: "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." He also states that as we learn more about who we are, we learn techniques that **reveal** rather than conceal the personhood from which good teaching comes.

I believe that good teaching comes from these perspectives. Teaching adults is rewarding, gratifying, and challenging work. It is exciting. It is holy. **Approximately 40,000 adult students were served in 2002-2003 in Nevada through our formal structure.** Folks learned English, and earned GED certificates and adult high school diplomas. They achieved individual goals of being able to read the Bible aloud in front of a church group, helping their children with their schoolwork, becoming a US citizen. Some learners studied basic skills in order to become employed or to be promoted in the jobs they already held. Others studied in order to join the military, or to advance to postsecondary education or further training. Each of these people had at least one teacher or tutor who helped them achieve their goals.

Statistics reveal a troubling picture:

- There is a strong correlation between low literacy and poverty — three of four food stamp recipients are in the lowest literacy levels.
- Seven in ten prisoners perform in the lowest two literacy levels.
- The AMA estimates that \$75 billion dollars in annual health costs is attributable to the effects of undereducation and/or limited proficiency in English.
- The Center for Law and Social Policy states that eight million working-age adults (5% of all adults) do not speak English well enough to hold high-paying jobs.

According to 2000 Census data:

- The US Hispanic population increased 58% from 1990 to 2000, compared to just 13% population growth for the nation as a whole.
- In Nevada, the Hispanic population grew 217% during the last decade. Nevada's Asian population also increased significantly, by 170%.
- The total English Language Learners population in Nevada grew 274% from 1991-92 to 2001-2002.

These are staggering statistics, especially when put in the context of adult learning. As the fastest growing State for over ten years, we can expect to have more and more adults flock to Nevada to take service jobs that require little formal education. We can further expect to see the demand for adult education services grow as these people decide to improve their lives. Our task is to assist those adults who desire to function appropriately and fully in their communities, their families, and the workplace. Our task is to provide services while simultaneously building capacity. Our task is to reveal our personhood, explore our light and to encourage our students to be their best selves.