

LEARNS Webinar: Building Youth Literacy in Mentoring Programs
March 6, 2007, 11:00 a.m. PST
Session Transcript

[Slide 1 displayed for pre-webinar conversation]

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ERICH STIEFVATER, PROGRAM ADVISOR, NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY: So, we'll officially begin. If you just joined us, this is Erich Stiefvater and Rändi Douglas at the LEARNS Project at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon. Today's Webinar is on building youth literacy and mentoring programs and we're happy that you could join us.

LEARNS is one of the Corporation for National and Community Services Training and Technical assistance providers, if you're a National Service program, and we are responsible for supporting programs in the areas of education, mentoring, out-of-school time and homework help. We'll talk a little bit at the end about some of the resources of ours that you can access for free, as a National Service program or other educational nonprofit.

But, for right now, I'm going to briefly introduce Rändi and we'll get started with today's session. Rändi is a member of the LEARNS Team here at NWREL. She has many years as an English and History teacher, teaching at multiple levels, from elementary to the college level, and recently she's developed a lot of experience and professional expertise in supporting teachers in adolescence literacy.

RÄNDI DOUGLAS, PROGRAM ADVISOR, NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY: And, Erich, my companion here, has been in AmeriCorps*VISTA and he went on to get an advanced degree in education and technology on the East Coast, and he's come back to Portland to join his family. And, he worked in the business world for quite a while, as an educational consultant and he's a new father.

STIEFVATER: Yes, with all the joy and sleep deprivation that comes with that.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Congrats.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

STIEFVATER: Thank you

[Slide 3 displayed]

So, we've scheduled an Webinar of approximately 60 minutes in length, including time for comments. And, the purpose of the Webinar is to have a discussion about ways that

people – that lay people, that is, mentors and youth volunteers can boost literacy skills in youths. And, we designed this Webinar for a particular audience – program directors, site coordinators, as well as (INAUDIBLE) volunteers in mentoring, homework help, after school and other youth programs, and we’re targeting this specifically at programs serving youths or older children in grades five through 12. Before we launch into the content, just a few housekeeping items.

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To reduce background noise, we’d like to ask you to mute your phones and you can usually do that by pressing “mute” or “mike” on your phone, or you can also use “star six.” “Star six” will mute your phone on the teleconference system. Please be careful not to use hold, as we will hear your choice in Musak. And then, also, when we pause for comments and examples and ideas, don’t forget to unmute your phones.

We’d like to ask you to hold comments and thoughts for designated times in the presentation. We’ll pause periodically for reflections, as well as ideas from the field that all of you could offer.

We know that people may have questions, especially specific to their own program, and we definitely want to be of help to you, and help you work through that. What we would ask, though, is if you could hold those types of questions to the end of the Webinar and/or you can also follow up with us one-on-one afterwards. We’ll provide you our e-mail addresses, so you can get in touch with us afterwards, and we’re happy to spend as much time today after the Webinar or afterwards via e-mail, as necessary, to answer your questions.

The way we’d like to handle the open-floor sessions are when we get to a point where we open the floor for comments and ideas, we’d like you to try to use a little tool that you should see on your screen in the lower left-hand corner. There should be a toolbar with a series of five tools, one of which is a diamond, which starts off the row, and then at the very end of the row there’s a little hand icon. Hopefully that’s apparent and, actually, what I’d like you to do real quick, if you see that, if you could just click on the “hand” icon for a second and I’ll kind of tell you what we’re seeing.

OK, so what we see here at NWREL is hands being raised in the console. Vicky , Becky raised her hand. June , Ophie – I hope I’m pronouncing that correctly – Angela and ...

DOUGLAS: Larry Matthew ...

STIEFVATER: ... and Karen .

DOUGLAS: ... Karen .

STIEFVATER: OK. So that’s the way we’d like to have you indicate that you have a comment or something to share. If you are unable to find that icon or if you are not in the

online software, maybe after we work through the raised hands we'll just kind of say, in general, "is there anyone that wasn't able to share that would like to share?" But, for the most part, please try to use that hand icon.

After the Webinar is complete, I'll be sending you an e-mail with a link to an online anonymous survey and we'd be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete that to help us improve this Webinar, as well as our other Web-based training. As I said before, in that e-mail, we will also send you a list of additional resources we won't have a chance to cover in depth today.

About an hour ago, sent out via e-mail a PDF file that has the slides we're walking through right now. My apologies for getting it out to you so late. We were making changes up until the last minute. But, if you have that available, you can follow along. Maybe some of you printed it out. And, also, if you lose your connection to the online software, or if you haven't been able to connect in online, you can always just follow along using those slides.

So, with that, we're very happy to have you and I'll turn it over to Rändi, who will be the lead presenter for the session.

DOUGLAS: Great. Thanks again for giving us your time.

[Slide 5 displayed]

We organized this Webinar to answer basic questions – five of them – and here they are: Why should we be concerned about youth literacy, how can we plan for specific literacy needs of an individual youth, how can everyday activities develop a teen's literacy skills, what can we do to improve academic literacy and, finally, what resources could we give you that would supplement this discussion, which is understandably somewhat brief.

And, here's the profile of the youth – who are the youths we're targeting? They're the ones who are saying things like, "reading don't fix no Chevy." And, we have a couple of kinds of work to do with a kid like this. First of all, to try to convince them that actually reading can fix Chevy's and it might even open up a whole new world of other things you could do with Chevy's – soup them up, design them differently, do all kinds of things.

The other kind of work is to urge youths to maybe aim a little higher. Maybe they don't just want to fix Chevy's, but maybe they'd like to run a shop, or invent a new technology, or write manuals, so that they can both learn more and earn more with advanced literacy skills.

[Slide 6 displayed]

So, first we have why is there national concern about youth literacy? Media headlines are very busy with this right now, because national statistics in the areas that you see listed

here create a very bleak picture about the expectations and possibilities for a youth with low-literacy skills, so we're going to take a closer look at these areas that are listed.

[Slide 7 displayed]

And, first I want to say that numbers in statistics are always in discussion among researchers and there's always some controversy about them. Here's an example: High school graduation rates commonly are dropouts – are cited – are dropouts from freshman enrollment. They're going to change a little bit if you also include students who dropped out before the ninth grade. They're also going to change if you include students who are in GEDs, alternative diplomas – are they going to be counted and how?

So, I want to say that the numbers here are dropouts before receiving high school diplomas from high school enrollments. And, we can see here that the figures for '98 and 2004 show that 29 percent, growing to 31 percent in 2004 students, are not graduating, and there's certain articles that I've seen just recently that are predicting that very soon one out of three students won't graduate from their high schools. We know from the rest of the data listed on this slide that dropouts with low-literacy skills will probably face unemployment and they very often also turn up in the (INAUDIBLE) inside of prisons and correctional institutions.

[Slide 8 displayed]

Here are some reading statistics. Lets just look at reading statistics across the nation now. Elementary scores appear on the left-hand two columns here and the middle school scores on the right-hand two columns. And, as you can see, reading scores are showing good gains for grades four, between '98 and 2005, but the improvements at grade eight for the same period are very small, and overall, the sad part about this for me is that for both years and in both grade levels less than half of all the students are reading at proficient or advanced levels, which is what we would want all our children to be able to do.

[Slide 9 displayed]

Now, lets look at the writing. This is even more disturbing. The breaks between writing achievement at three grade levels – basic or below writing skills are the long blue columns – proficient or advanced writing are the maroon column. You can see that there are improvements occurring between '98 and 2002, but, nevertheless, a proficient level of writing is what most kids need to move up in the world and we can see that the numbers are hovering around 30 percent who have this level of skill. And, then there's this quote – “all students lack ability to create pros that is organized, precise, engaging, coherent or convincing.”

[Slide 10 displayed]

Now we're going to look at some of the correlation between these low-literacy achievement scores and higher incomes. This is actually from a 1992 national adult literacy survey. The left-hand bar is the lowest literacy level. Now, try living a single life, not to mention raising a family on 15K a year. If you look far to the right, you'll see that adults with the highest literacy skills earn about three times what people with the lowest level earn.

[Slide 11 displayed]

Here's some look at writing skills and work. We saw that writing slide just a little bit earlier. The National Commission of Writing survey government and business (INAUDIBLE) departments and they found that in professional and salaried jobs 80 to 90 percent of the applicants are required to submit some kind of a writing sample and half of the clerical positions in the government sector also look at writing as a qualification for employment.

[Slide 12 displayed]

So, here's the picture – what conclusions can we gather? First, I think that youth with low-literacy skills are seriously at risk for all of these really undesirable outcomes. And, second, if you want to be a good friend or mentor to a young adult and truly build on their assets it makes sense to use every possible opportunity to encourage and develop their literacy skills, so ...

[Slide 13 displayed]

STIEFVATER: So, with that, we'd like to pause for a second and get some thoughts and reflections from all of you. How do these figures strike you? As Rändi said, they seem a little bleak. Do they reflect what you're seeing out in the field and in the work that you're doing? If you'd like to share a thought or two, please raise your hands, if you have that available, and if you muted your phone make sure you un mute it. So, I think there might have been some hands left up from before. Becky , did you have something you'd like to share?

BECKY : Yes, I just have a consideration. I wonder how the growth of the computer industry has affected writing. I write much more easily with pen in hand than I ever could with a computer. I wonder if that's something that's happening with young people today or not?

DOUGLAS: Well, I think young people are acculturated to keyboards much more than I was in my generation, through things now, like cell phones and iPods that have keyboard capabilities. So, I think also they're growing up in environments where keyboards are more readily available and required. It definitely does affect the pathway to literacy and you may be working with a mentoring population that has to bridge that gap a little bit. Is there anything else, June , or Barbara , or Angela ?

STIEFVATER: Yes, June Atkins , would you like to (INAUDIBLE)?

JUNE ATKINS : I don't have a question right now. I'm sorry, I didn't turn off my hand.

STIEFVATER: That's OK.

DOUGLAS: Oh, OK.

STIEFVATER: Yes, after you've shared, if you could click on the "hand" icon again. That turns it off or lowers your hand. So, Barbara Finkelstein

BARBARA FINKELSTEIN : OK, my hand was up, so ...

STIEFVATER: Oh, OK.

FINKELSTEIN : ... unnecessarily.

DOUGLAS: Right.

STIEFVATER: OK – Ophie ? Am I saying that right?

OPHIE : Yes, you are.

STIEFVATER: OK.

OPHIE : We have a lot of rural schools that we deal with. Almost all of them are converting to computer labs to computers in the individual classrooms, at this point. They just started that heavily this year, and the foster grandparents they work with tell me that what they're seeing is that children who spend all of their time on the computer and use it for writing all of their assignments in school don't worry about spelling anymore. You know, somebody else is going to do it for them, which reduces their reading skills, because, obviously, they're not learning to recognize the words spelled correctly. Is this something that other people have noticed or is there something that can be done to help this situation?

DOUGLAS: Well, do you think that your foster grandparents are saying that the computer is making it too easy?

OPHIE: Yes.

DOUGLAS: I think of cross generations. You know, we in school, and I'm in this older generation myself, had a lot of drill around things like spelling. The research actually shows that a lot of correction around grammar and spelling doesn't actually really help writing, that what helps writing the most is just writing more. So, if computers are helping kids write more that's a good thing. The lack of explicit instruction in spelling and grammar is something I actually can't comment on, because I don't know what the

studies say about (INAUDIBLE) for an entire generation, but it's something we should look at.

OPHIE : I think one of the comments that I hear most often from them is how can a child enjoy reading when they don't have that lovely comfortable book in their hands?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I know. That's a generational difference.

OPHIE : Yes.

DOUGLAS: You know, they really are acculturated to screens and I think it's something we just have to work with, us book lovers.

STIEFVATER: It looks like you might have had a response, Becky .

BECKY : Yes, I did, but now I forgot what it was.

STIEFVATER: OK. OK, well ...

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: When you have a chance, I have a question and my computer has gone black, so I'm not – I do have a copy of the slides that you sent out.

STIEFVATER: OK. We still see you, so sometimes it might take signing out and signing back in, but if you're following along on paper or the slides, we're now going to be on slide 14, and we're going to start talking about a model we can use in our mentoring programs to help support literacy with young people.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: OK. I had a question about slide 10 ...

STIEFVATER: OK.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: ... which is the literacy level. I know what literacy level one is. What are literacy level two and three?

DOUGLAS: Well, literacy level one is below basic ...

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Right.

DOUGLAS: ... literacy level two is basic skills, three is proficient and literacy level four would be advanced.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: But, what does two mean? I mean level one was, you know, couldn't fill out an application, couldn't find two items out of a newspaper article.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: What does level two mean?

DOUGLAS: That's more basic, getting along in the supermarket, reading, you know, basic instructions and things like that.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: OK. OK, thank you.

BECKY : I remembered what my question was.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: OK.

BECKY : What about families where they are not able to afford a computer?

DOUGLAS: Well, then, I think that'll come in to the discussion a little bit later. There are many community organizations that are trying to fill that gap for students who are in low-income situations. Libraries, particularly, work very hard at that.

BECKY : OK, thank you.

[Slide 14 displayed]

DOUGLAS: So, here's our model. We're going to move on now. Here's our model for literacy support for mentoring programs . We're going to talk about it in four areas. One is planning. Each of these areas is part of a puzzle. The boundaries overlap. Each area links with all the others, too, and it really creates a kind of whole piece of work.

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Planning is about meeting specific literacy needs , model and engaging has to do with what we can do with everyday interaction, away from academic work, coaching has to do with boosting academic literacy – what kind of work can a mentor do – and, finally, connecting kids to key literacy resources in the community, and our first part is planning.

The planning process encompasses learning about the youth skills and needs, setting goals and then creating a plan for achieving them. Any program director is pretty clear about what the planning process is. For literacy planning it can happen over time, even a year in the mentoring relationship, as the mentor and mentee are getting acquainted, or it can start right off. It can be part of the matching process, or it can be a little bit of both, and I'll give you an example.

A program director knows that an ELL won't even speak English yet, and so for a match he looks for a soft-spoken no-pressure mentor, who's also a Spanish speaker, and gets them started. Next, over the next few months, this mentor is going to learn a lot more. Does this shy speaker worry about pronunciation, or lack vocabulary, or has bullion created fear about speaking English? Each condition would probably require a different approach, so when the needs become clear, and this may take some time, two kinds of

planning can occur. One is that the mentor can fix up their own literacy support plan and then, finally, with the mentee, be able to craft a literacy-improvement plan that's part of the relationship.

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So, here's some ways you can start to do needs' assessment. First, clearly, is just through conversations, remembering that voice and choice are main hooks for adolescent readers. What can you learn about what they like to read – MySpace, motorcycle magazines, graphic novels, music, lyrics. Where is the starting place to get them engaged? And, you want to do the same for writing. What do they write and what do they like to write? Do they blog on a computer? Are they IMers? Do they like to write music lyrics? What are they into? And, find out if they have common literacy resources. Do they have a library card? Do they have a computer at home or how do they work with their lack of these things? And, finally, do they experience any stress over literacy requirements, either at work or at school?

[Slide 17 Displayed]

In addition to conversations, there are also observations. Simple observations can tell you a lot. And, I want to point out that we're talking about all four literacy skills here – speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking and listening are oral language proficiency skills. They're both really important foundations for reading and writing skills. So, a match log for a tutor might contain observations like this: Emily speaks very fast and in complex sentences, but she can't sit still and listen for 30 seconds. She's a great talker, but when she read aloud she stumbles a lot and she just hates writing. So, this kind of a profile might tell you that you want to practice some listening skills with Emily. You might want to read aloud in unison with her some to develop her fluency and you definitely want to work on her writing attitude.

Here's another kind of a profile: John only reads graphic novels. He doesn't talk in groups at all. He has bad grades in English because he says he's bored with the assignments. And, this might take a completely different kind of approach. You want to start with where he is. Start with the graphic novels, see if you can get him to talk about them, report on them, work on bringing him out in groups and probably work towards having a discussion with the teacher.

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We're going to look at outside opinions and evaluations, which can also help you understand the literacy of your student. You can't always get results from the top two. Program records and school records are sometimes confidential, but classroom teachers can tell you and family members can tell you what they are, and the youth themselves can also provide information. When you're contacting classroom teachers, we always recommend that you try first with an e-mail. They're so busy now and have so many things on their plate that's probably the best way to get some idea about your student.

But, the ultimate source always is the youth themselves. How have their grades been and why do they think this is true? That's a very key question that will give you some clues about where to begin.

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And, finally, now you have all of this information in – talk, observation, school records. It's time to create a plan. Mentors can match mentees' needs with their own strengths and see if they can find one or two areas of worth. A youth over time might be willing to say things like, "you know, I'd actually like to do better at writing." And, at this point in time, you can work with the youth to craft a mutual plan about how to get there.

[Slide 20 Displayed]

And, finally, in all the planning process, you want to consider always that teens respond best when they're ruling their world, so here's an example. There's a Dr. Michael Bitz, at Columbia University, who launched a comic book project nationwide, and he now has thousands of middle school members planning, writing, sketching, producing original comic books, and they even distribute them in their local communities, and these sample issues have great themes, like you are a super hero and your neighborhood is comic mysterious planet.

And, finally, look at the last bullet here from a study of Detroit high schools. The researchers were pretty surprised to learn that 90 percent of the teens did read and they read every week, but don't miss what they prefer. The first thing on this list is Web sites and then, in order, social notes and e-mails, and music lyrics and then books and magazines.

[Slide 21 Displayed]

STIEFVATER: OK, so we'd like to pause a second here and get some comments and thoughts from all of you listening and watching online. And, we're curious to know if any of you, in your mentoring or youth program, have developed ways to plan around the literacy needs of youths and maybe examples of how you do that. As before, we'd ask you to raise your hand if you're connected into the software, and we'll see if anyone else has thoughts after we work through those. So, we see that Karen has a comment.

ISABEL GEFFNER : Hi, this is actually Isabel Geffner , who works with Karen at UNC and ...

STIEFVATER: Oh, OK.

GEFFNER : ... (INAUDIBLE) the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy (INAUDIBLE) if you're out there, hi.

STIEFVATER: Yes, she is, I think.

GEFFNER : Yes, I see her on the list. We've developed a program called "Student to Student," which is a curriculum really for college student tutors who are working with adolescents. And, a lot of what you're saying here, certainly in terms of sort of how to get kids engaged, in terms of giving them choice and respecting the kinds of reading and writing that they're actually already doing, which may not be what we, as teachers, or mentors, or academicians, for that matter, believe are the best choices for them, but sort of going where kids are is really the strongest way to work with them from a literacy point-of-view. Now, on our Web site, we've got lots of resources, and even our tutoring (INAUDIBLE) up there, which might be of interest (INAUDIBLE) folks who are listening today.

STIEFVATER: Do you want to share that Web site URL real quick?

GEFFNER : Readwriteact – all one word, in lowercase – dot org.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: If we type it into the (INAUDIBLE) will others be able to see it?

STIEFVATER: Yes, I think I can ...

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Would you repeat that?

STIEFVATER: (INAUDIBLE) see if I can type in online here. So, what is it?

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: (INAUDIBLE) or we're trying to anyway.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Readwriteact – all one word.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Yes, I typed it into the public chat .

STIEFVATER: OK.

DOUGLAS: OK, so you see that in question one. Does everybody see that on their ...

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: And, the only thing I want to say, there's – under "scaled programs," on that Web site, the particular program we're referring to there is Student to Student.

STIEFVATER: OK.

DOUGLAS: Student to Student?

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Yes.

DOUGLAS: OK, great. Thanks a lot. Nice to hear from you.

STIEFVATER: Yes.

GEFFNER (?): Thanks for having this.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

STIEFVATER: Are there other examples or thoughts people would like to share? I don't think we see any hands raised. Is there anyone that's not online that would like to share something? No? OK. I think we'll just keep moving, in the interest of time.

[Slide 22 Displayed]

DOUGLAS: So, in action number two – action number one was planning – we're talking about modeling and engaging everyday in everyday activities, not (INAUDIBLE) horrible study. I think about myself, as a parent, and how I tried to reach my own teenagers, and I used to plan road trips, because I knew they'd be trapped in the car with me and I'd have a chance to talk to them and I'd have a plan for what we'd talk about.

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So, we're going to look at all four types of interaction listed here and I'm going to start with my own personal favorites, which has to do with sharing stories of success. Shared stories really hold people together, even teens to respond to them, so what kind of stories can you think of or find that would actually inspire your own youth? English language learners love stories about people who came here from another country or had to learn English. Those are good stories to work for.

But, who are your teen's idols? You need to start there. Forget Abe Lincoln by candlelight. What can you find out about Shakira?

Well, here's some things about Shakira. She was born in Lebanon. She lived in the U.S. She moved to Columbia and started recording mostly in Spanish, and then the critics said her English was too weak for her to even try an English album, and she took this as a challenge. She took a year off. She recorded one and sold 13-million copies. Now, you may wonder how I know this, from my generation, and I have to tell you I just went to Wikipedia and mentors can do that. They can actually search for (INAUDIBLE).

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Here's literacy practice and daily routines. We've listed some ways, common ways that people get together around reading. Supposing you're in a restaurant and the menu describes gut-buster or tree-hugger burgers. You can always read those kinds of entries aloud and have a talk with the kid about what kind of people they're trying to appeal to. You can look for movies and reviews. I think it's great to find a critic's review of a movie that some teen has liked and get them to respond to it. What do they think of that critic's response? And, you can read captions together at a museum, and really trying to

get an e-mail exchange going about common experiences, what you liked or didn't like is a great way. Remember that social communication preference.

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You can also work on verbal communication, as a social tool. A skill here will definitely impact social acceptance, so you're really working on two things at the same time. Mentors often get training on active listening, so why not turn the training around to the mentee and you can practice with each other. It's a good kind of training for any person to have in a situation.

When a youth speaks up in groups there's all kinds of ways you can encourage them. You can say things like, "what you said during that discussion really made me think," or "this was a great remark. It made everybody laugh. It showed you had a sense of humor about yourself." And, finally, you can practice the kind of concise speech – we talk about elevator speeches that are – work on things like job interview questions, so a student can respond very concisely to certain kinds of queries.

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And then, finally, here's the best use of literacy for most of us and that's how to learn how to do new things. You can get involved with cell phones with kids, consulting the manual. Maybe you don't know how to text message and you can get your youth to help you do that. Read and follow instructions. In our office, actually, somebody did a project making handbags out of duct tape and there was quite interesting instructions connected to that. Making a traditional dish for a potluck, working with a recipe. If you have fashion nuts, you can create some kind of new-look poster and news headlines (INAUDIBLE) photos. And, finally, passing the driver's test is really a key thing that all teenagers want to do and it's literacy based.

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STIEFVATER: And, those are all good activities that have literacy building or literacy support built into them. I'm curious, or were curious to know if people have other examples, or ideas, or actual items or activities you've incorporated into your mentoring programs? So, as before, we'll use the raise hand icon, if you have it available, to see if anyone has any additional (INAUDIBLE). Oh, I'm sorry, I know Karen is not Karen, but I see a hand raised for Karen Venaga again.

GEFFNER (?): I'm sorry, I forgot to put my hand down.

STIEFVATER: Oh, OK, no problem.

GEFFNER (?): My apologies.

STIEFVATER: OK. Well, I mean one thing that kind of occurs to me, Rändi, is that an MT may be into something that we ourselves or our mentors don't necessarily understand. We were talking yesterday about the whole manga publishing sphere and community and, you know ...

DOUGLAS: Yes.

STIEFVATER: ... I'd like to think I'm pretty well, you know, plugged into things, but that's something that's escaped me. Or, maybe for mentors that are little less text savvy and feel a little daunted by their mentee, who spends have the day in MySpace. Is there a way that mentors can kind of overcome that resistance or lack of understanding of what they are (INAUDIBLE) into?

DOUGLAS: Well, I think an obvious and charming way is to just ask the mentee to teach you something about that. Express an interest in it and say that you don't – you know, admit your ignorance and see what they can help you with. It's great way to build the relationship, to begin with, and it can lead to your maybe being able to do things together. You might say to somebody, "I'd love to know how to instant message and will you teach me how and we can try it. Please forgive me, I may be a little slow, but I'd love to learn." I think a lot of teenagers would respond to that.

STIEFVATER: Barbara , you had a thought?

FINKELSTEIN : Well, before we started, I was mentioning my wonderful high school English teacher. What she used to do when we got to Shakespeare was say, "go to the library and take out (INAUDIBLE) albums and tapes or CDs of Paul Scofield reading the play." And, she said, "so, the first time you go through Hamlet, you know, listen to Paul Scofield and, you know, read along with him, and then read it again yourself." Because we didn't know, when we were reading this, whether it was being sarcastic or serious or, you know, he was crying, so that gave us, you know, a insight into the play.

And, today there's so many books on tape. I would think you could give kids a book on tape and have them listen to it, or even just have them listen to, lets say, half of it, and then give them the book for the second half.

DOUGLAS: Yes, I'm so glad you brought that up. Actually that's exactly how I learned Shakespeare, too, going through and listening to the emotional content, so you actually understood something of what it was about. I think books on tape are a great idea and they sort of fit into our next section, which has to do with academic support. So, are there other comments?

STIEFVATER: Sure, are people that aren't connected to picture talk that would like to share a comment real quick? No? OK.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: (INAUDIBLE).

STIEFVATER: (INAUDIBLE) go on.

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DOUGLAS: So, we've talked about everyday activities and just looking for common situations that are literacy based, but now we're going to talk about more focused coaching that you can coach youth through literacy projects and I've listed the common projects in all four areas – speaking, listening, reading and writing. This has to do with developing specific academic skills. You don't really need to be a trained educator to get results. Very often some kind of simple commonsense coaching will help a lot, so we're going to look at, in these four areas, what a coach might do.

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But, first, we're actually going to talk about coaching. I think that all of us can remember trying to learn a sport and what kind of coaching worked for us, when we were young. You definitely don't want to be the coach that's going to holler no and kick kids off the field because they're not doing it right. When you're working with new learners, a good coach just generally does these things. They're begin by recognizing effort and find something that's being done right, so that you can always start out by saying, "well done. I can see that you really know how to do something."

And, then look for the one key thing to improve that will make a good difference. Suggest things to try out, but not too many. You don't want to actually overwhelm somebody. And, then provide some practice where you're actually paying attention to what's happening, so that if they try a strategy and it's working you can say, "I can see that things are getting better." Just kind of following that shape, as a coach, is a good thing to remember.

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Now, for oral presentations and reports, some times a youth will get comfortable enough that they may be willing to practice reports and presentations for a mentor. This is a great situation to be in. If a kid starts out with their eyes rolled back in the back of their head, sometimes they often start – they sort of look like they left themselves in the back room and then came in. The main thing you can do is help them relax physically and just learn how to breathe and make eye contact, and look at the people in the room before they settle down to work on talking clearly, with a decent pitch.

You can help them speak clearly, remember what they want to say, and that's a simple observational thing to do. You can also give feedback – I see you're forgetting when you get to this point. What can you do before you do this presentation that will help you remember? This kind of coaching will help kids immensely. It's very simple to do and the more practice the better the presentation always gets to be.

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Now, listening and retelling really has to do with comprehension. It's a basic comprehension skill. You can practice it around anything. It doesn't have to be even focused on schoolwork. Whenever you're at a movie, or you're watching a speech, or you've heard a radio program, or there's been some kind of content that's audio, ask a kid to repeat what they've heard. But, you can get them engaged by having various empathies – so, what did you like about that or what stuck out? What irritated you about what we just heard or what made you think? And, the key response – always expressing interest in what they have to say will help bring them out and become better listeners and better re tellers. You're literally helping kids discover who they are when you bring them through this kind of questioning that asks for their reaction to what they've heard.

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And, here we have reading assignments. These can be actually school assignments, or pleasure reading. And, we also want to consider textbooks here, because kids can get a lot from some help just navigating a textbook – how to read the graphs, what do the chart headings mean – where is the glossary and where do you look for summaries in this textbook, just having some skills to use what's there.

No matter what the content of what the reading material is reading aloud is the single most effective activity to build literacy skills at all ages. So, mentors can read selections to their mentee. You can take turns with your mentee, or you could read together in unison. You're developing some fluency with the printed word here, but after you finish reading you can work on these other things – on pronunciation or on vocabulary. And, clearly, the most important part about it is what does the youth understand about this (INAUDIBLE). What do they think?

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And, finally, we get to writing projects. There's some research that shows that explicit instruction in writing, even in the classroom, is not that helpful. The most helpful thing to develop writers is to get them to write and the more they write the better they get. So, there's all kinds of things that mentors can accomplish here, without needing to have the skills of an English teacher. First of all, you can help students see themselves as writers. Any time they write that you notice something about their personality and you say, "this is very effective."

You can encourage them to write in lots of ways. If they have an assignment, one thing you might do is just say, "lets both write as much as we can without stopping on that topic for five minutes, and when we get done we'll look at what you wrote and what I wrote and we'll brainstorm. We'll come up with some kind of structure for what it is that you have to write." The writing itself, without stopping, sometimes just unplugs kids. It gets them going and believing that they can do it.

And, then you can also lead them through a revision process and start talking about to you, as a reader, what's most effective. There is research that shows that peers or friends responding to kid's writing, in terms of what's effective, sometimes works just as powerfully as a teacher's remarks.

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STIEFVATER: On that not, lets pause for a second for some comments and ideas, if available, from our listeners and viewers. So, we were just talking about ways that mentors can support the academic literacy skills that their mentees are developing. Are there additional examples, or ideas or experiences people would like to share about how they support their mentees academically (INAUDIBLE) skills?

BARBARA FISHER : Well, may I ask what slide you are up to? I am not online any longer, so (INAUDIBLE) ...

STIEFVATER: OK, sure, we're on slide 34, at the moment.

FISHER : OK. I somehow only got 25 slides.

STIEFVATER: OK, maybe – lets see, who's speaking please?

FISHER : Barbara Fisher .

STIEFVATER: Barbara Fisher . OK, Barbara , I'll check that and send you a new copy of ...

FISHER : OK, thank you.

STIEFVATER: ... apologize for that.

FISHER : No problem.

STIEFVATER: OK.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Is that true of anybody else? Is this a common problem – anybody who's working with a printed copy?

STIEFVATER: There should be about 41 slides. Is that what others have, or ...

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Right.

STIEFVATER: OK, so maybe the printer jammed, but – OK. So, I'm not seeing any hands raised or the question at hand – examples of supporting academic literacy. Is there anyone not online who would like to share something?

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: I have a question about English learners and how much you stress practicing English and stress – encouraging English.

DOUGLAS: I think the first thing to say to people that aren't in the profession, about English language learners, is the process of acquiring a different language takes almost seven years. The very first part that happens is you just get – and anybody who's gone to a foreign country knows this – you just get the language that you need to get along. It's called "basic communication language," so if you learn how to find food, and the bathroom and things like that.

The academic language is acquired over a period of about three years. It can take a long time, so practice, and particularly with English language learners, verbal practice will be probably the very best thing a mentor can do, extending their vocabulary, helping them with pronunciation, just helping them feel confident speaking the English language.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Thank you.

DOUGLAS: Does that help?

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Yes, it does because ...

DOUGLAS: OK.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: ... I've noticed in some of our schools that they have people in the offices that obviously can speak Spanish, and the minute the student walks in there they speak to the student in Spanish, so that student has no chance to practice English in that situation, which I think is – and this is a middle school level, so (INAUDIBLE) ...

DOUGLAS: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: ... that's the wrong way to (INAUDIBLE).

STIEFVATER: OK. I think we'll move into our – the fourth stage of our model.

[Slide 35 Displayed]

DOUGLAS: So, this final activity just has to do with asking mentor programs to become connectors, or like a referral service or a field guide to the community, especially to specific needs of your youth, and lets talk about those English language learners a little more. Where our library programs are cultural groups, or tutoring programs with the same, first or native language that can help. Very often there are groups like that. I know that we have in Portland 80 different spoken languages in the public schools and many cultural groups are operating support in tutoring programs for the students of their language.

The connections work best always, again, for a teen, if the youth shows an interest in getting involved and agrees it's a good idea, and if that happens what a mentor can do is help to get them there. Organize a visit together. Introduce them to the people that are there, so the youth is comfortable and they would be willing to go back and they know how to find the place is a main thing.

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So, let's talk about libraries. That's a first example. There are tremendous community resources. They tend to be located in neighborhoods ideally.

The neighborhood branches in Portland have special rooms just for teens. The rooms have big comfy chairs and computers and they feel like a kind of private MySpace, so to speak. They're open evenings and weekends and they're safe places and they have all kinds of literacy resources now – DVDs, CDs and sometimes schedules for homework help in tutoring. But, a youth has to have a card. They need a guided tour and sometimes there's a lot of good things available online, so the guided tour can be both on site and online. We really encourage mentoring programs to suggest a trip to the library, if a student doesn't go there regularly as a mentoring activity, and apply for a card, take a tour and get to see what's there that they could use.

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Community events – we've listed on the slide here where the sources of the events are. I'm just going to give you a few activities. In our community, there have been service-learning projects, where kids work in homeless shelters. They write up project plans and they share written reflections at the end, all literacy stuff. There's a religious youth group I've heard of that started a Web site that was really focused on interpreting scriptures of the week, and the Web site contained their own ideas about what certain passages meant in their everyday lives. And, a parks-and-recreation program nearby that has media production – very popular with kids – doing photo documentaries and sometimes even video documentaries about their community, their lives and their issues that matter to them.

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And then, finally, where are the tutors? Suppose, in the ideal world, you get a youth that knows they need to do some really focused work with somebody over time, and they say they really want to improve. At this point, they really are going to be able to benefit from a one-on-one tutor, which the mentor may or may not be, and have regular sessions. So, you can be the friend that knows where to go for these tutors. We've listed some places where free tutoring service sometimes exists, but what you have to know is in every community the landscape is going to be different for these services, so common places to begin a search are listed here and you can develop a referral list that really works for where you live.

I think that the Chevy fixer – we're kind of coming to the end here – the Chevy fixer, we mentioned at the beginning, I like to see him connected up with a club of car repair enthusiasts, and looking into community college programs in mechanics maybe, and maybe even writing a car column for the student newspaper, extending that interest and building literacy skills, so that there's a broader future available for that student.

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STIEFVATER: Yes. And, with that, I'd like to see if – or invite people to suggest any additional resources that a mentoring program could take advantage of to support the literacy development of their mentees. Again, raise your hand if you have some ideas. OK, Becky .

BECKY : I'm part of the adult literacy program at (INAUDIBLE) here in Coleville , and we address tutoring young people, like from 16 to 21 age group, in the adult literacy program. These would be young people that have dropped out of school kind of situation, so this is in addition to what's offered at the community college. We're a relatively small town, so some of the things that you've mentioned are not available here. We do have a library, though, and it is awesome.

STIEFVATER: Good. So, how about, Becky , if a mentoring – or how would you like to see mentoring programs accessing the services you offer through the Literacy Council ? Any suggestions for people listening in?

BECKY : I'm not sure exactly what you're asking. We do – this is a free program that we offer and it's one-on-one tutoring.

STIEFVATER: OK.

BECKY : I think the difficulty for us is that there's such a difference in approach for an adolescent versus an adult.

STIEFVATER: OK.

DOUGLAS: Yes, definitely. I would be interested in asking if you have done – made some efforts to collect books that would ...

BECKY : Oh, yes.

DOUGLAS: ... be really appealing to teens.

BECKY : Yes, we do.

DOUGLAS: Yes that's great. I really encourage working through any bookstores for donations, but also combing book sales and secondhand stores and garage sales, to see

what you can pickup, so you have a really rich choice for kids to look at when you're working with them.

BECKY : I think the most challenging thing is the youths that we're working with here have fallen through the cracks, in some instances, and they're already experiencing many of the things that were talked about at the beginning, so some of the approaches might or might not work with them, because they're almost trying to be an adult in a child's body.

DOUGLAS: Yes. Well, with all teens, I think what you say is you just keep trying till you hit the magic button, and the magic button so often has to do with what the kids own passions are. If you can find something written that will engage them, because it's about something they want to do, something they've spoken about, something they care about.

BECKY : Thank you.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

[Slide 40 Displayed]

STIEFVATER: OK. Well, we couldn't let you leave a LEARNS session without mentioning the resources that are available from us, so on slide 40 we've provided a little blurb about products and services that we offer. We have been in the business of supporting national service and other education and mentoring programs for many years and over time we've developed a lot of great products that are available to you, free of charge, if you're a national service program or other nonprofit program. We have information and materials on communicating with youths. We have lots of activities and resources on tutoring, as well as engaging adolescent readers. We have support for homework help programs, including a relatively new video that's available, and we also have some ideas on finding books for teens. You can find all of this and more at our Web site online, at the National Service Resource Center. The link should be on your screen, on slide 40.

And, also, you might be interested in our LEARN Institute, which is coming up on May first and second in Tampa, Florida. I provided the link to the event on slide 40, as well. This is a great opportunity to spend time in a warm climate, which I know those of you in colder climates would appreciate, working with the LEARN staff, as well as your peers, and have a good couple of days of training and focusing and collaborating around the issues of mentoring and tutoring, so we'd love to see you there for that.

DOUGLAS: And, as part of the resources you will get when you receive your survey, a list of some very specific resources for adolescents, and that will include information about how to find this stuff on our Web site.

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STIEFVATER: And, also, you can consider Rändi and myself resources. The very last slide should show our e-mail addresses. You also probably have the 1-800 number, as well as my phone number here at LEARNS. Feel free to give me a call if there is something you'd like to discuss or a resource you'd like to have access to. We'll do our best to answer your questions or concerns and/or put in touch with people that can. And, basically, that winds down the official content for this Webinar. We'd like to thank all of you for participating and also for doing the good and important work that you do. Please let us know if we can ever be of any assistance to you as you do that good work. And, thanks again.

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