

DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY UPDATE

Spring 2003
California Library Literacy Services Diversity Committee

Feedback from the Field: Two Adult Learners Discuss The Challenges of Language, Culture

Fluent In Four Languages, Jamie Khalil Decided It Was Time to Learn to Read

Interview with Jamie Khalil by Lynne Price, Benicia Public Library



When it comes to school and learning, it can be seen as a pleasurable experience – or a painful one! For some of us, learning comes fairly easily – it doesn't seem too difficult navigating the school system, or enrolling in classes. For many adult learners, the obstacles to education are just as numerous – and complex. Jamie Khalil has been one that had a hard road initially, but has found the tools that are making learning easier and fun!

A learner with Project Read, the adult literacy program of the San Francisco Public Library, Jamie has worked with a tutor for the past several years. Married and the father of four, Jamie works in a local business, finds time to workout, works consistently with his tutor, and also works hard to support his children and their education.

As a child, learner Jamie Khalil lived a life full of culture, travel, and fun – but what was constantly missing was the opportunity for learning. Born in Venezuela to a Palestinian father and Venezuelan mother, Jamie became familiar with several different cultures: that of South America, Palestine, Israel and America. By age 14, he went to live with a brother in the United States. Even though he was well traveled and fluent in four languages, Jamie had only spent 3 years in a formal educational setting prior to his (continued on page 2)

Overcoming a Traumatic Classroom Experience, Hiroko Describes Her Journey to English

By Hiroko
Contributed by Beatriz Sarmiento, Commerce Public Library

It was November 1st of 1997 when I first came to Los Angeles as an ESL student. I was planning to go to graduate school after mastering English even though I promised my parents I would go home after four months of English learning. My goal as an ESL student was, and still is, becoming a fluent English speaker. I knew that I could have gone to graduate school after a required class on TOEFL, which is a test an international student has to take before going to college. However, I didn't have enough confidence to go to graduate school without fluency in English. I wanted to speak up as much as other students would in college, and I didn't want people to think that I didn't have my own opinions. It took me 3 years to gain some confidence in my speaking ability. Now I am a graduate student majoring in English to become an English teacher. (Continued on page 2.)

Jamie, continued...

arrival in the United States. We talked about his rich background, particularly his mastery of languages. “I didn’t do much reading or writing; I was a good listener, and could listen and mimic what I heard. On my first trip from South America to Palestine, I learned everything. I learned Arabic. When I lived in Palestine, I hung on the Israeli side – I learned Hebrew and that was easier than Arabic. My Hebrew became stronger than Arabic at one point. In language order, I learned Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew and English.”

“There’s a lot I didn’t know. And I never put it out there: that I couldn’t read.”

“From age 9 to 13 was the only school I had [in Palestine.] In English, you write backward, at least from an Arabic perspective... In English it makes sense, in Arabic it doesn’t.” One of the challenges Jamie continues to work through is language direction. While he can read some Hebrew and Arabic, both languages are written in the opposite direction of English! Jamie adds, “English to Arabic is hard; because Arabic is spoken differently – some of the sentence structure is really different. Culture-wise, it’s pretty different too. At least Spanish and Arabic [languages] have some of the same structure.”

“At 13 or 14, I was with my brother in New York, and English was his primary language. Going out, hanging out, I learned English quick. We wanted to fit in. So I dropped the Arabic, Hebrew and Spanish. When I moved in with my uncle in San Francisco, it was also more English.” As a teenager, Jamie made his own choices. Through he lived with his uncle, they didn’t enroll him in school. “I chose to hang out – I didn’t choose school. I was a free spirit.”

By the time he reached his late teens, Jamie knew he wanted – and needed – education. “Well, I knew I needed it when I was about 17 or 18. I went to an Adult Learning Center. I liked it, but I wanted more. The classroom didn’t work for me. I was smart enough to maneuver through life, but when I got there, it still didn’t feel right. So I went to City College, and they placed me in an ESL class. And that didn’t work. I *spoke* other languages, but I didn’t read or write much in them. Besides, English for the most part was my first language. The school mistook my learning need as one for conversational ESL. They looked at my name, didn’t say much to me, and put me in the ESL class. Then someone came to speak to me, and realized I was a fluent English speaker!” (Continued on page 6.)

Hiroko, continued...

At the early stages of my English learning, and still now, I was full of anxiety. No matter how short the sentence I said was, I was always afraid of making mistakes in front of people. Then one of my American friends in Japan told me that I shouldn’t be ashamed of making mistakes because it is better than not saying anything at all. So I tried to speak to people in English with a lot of mistakes, which made my English better.

But one day I had a really bad experience in an ESL class. Because of my bad pronunciation, the word I attempted to say was another word. What I wanted to say was burglary, but what I pronounced was buggery. My teacher found some amusement and laughed. I now understand why it was so funny and she did not mean to embarrass me, but at the time I did not get why it was so funny. Without any explanation I had to wait until she finally stopped laughing. She pointed out that what I said meant being homosexual in British English. When she told me the meaning, I know right away what it meant.

It took almost one year for me to overcome the anxiety and to regain the confidence to speak English in front of native speakers. I still remember how horrible I felt at the time.

My classmates did not know and so they didn’t understand. The teacher then made me explain the meaning to them and *why* what I said was so funny. I was the one who made the mistake, and I had to explain my mistake to others. It really hurt my feelings and I lost every bit of confidence (continued on page 6)

TOLERANCE.ORG – A Great Resource for Teaching Understanding

Tolerance.org is a website that seeks to create a national community committed to human rights. Its goal is to awaken people of all ages to the problem of hate and intolerance, to equip them with the best tolerance ideas and to prompt them to act in their homes, schools, businesses and communities. Wonderful links and articles include:

- 101 Ways to Fight Hate
- 101 Tools for Tolerance
- Exploring Your Hidden Biases
- Exploring Hidden History
- Deconstructing Biased Language and more.



What are these people running from?

Check out “Images In Action” http://www.tolerance.org/images_action/index.jsp for historical and modern day images that contain subtle and not-so-subtle messages about us, about others and about our world. (Three of those images are pictured here. For answers to the questions posed in the caption, go to the link.) States the site,

“These lessons lie just beneath the surface. In order to see them, we must replace passive consumption of images with critical analysis. We can no longer accept a sculpture or a logo at face value. We must dig deeper. We must ask questions about why we perceive things the way we do.”



When is a Saturday afternoon game demeaning?

You can even sign up for the tolerance.org newsletter at the site. [Thanks to Carla Lehn for recommending this website!]



Why did this woman get a makeover?

The *Dimensions of Diversity UPDATE* is now archived on the web! Check out this and our earlier editions at: www.literacynet.org/clc/news.html

Bridging The Culture Gap

Recommendations from Chris McFadden,
San Diego Public and County Libraries

Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands: How to Do Business in 60 Countries

By Terri Morrison, ISBN 1-55850-444-3

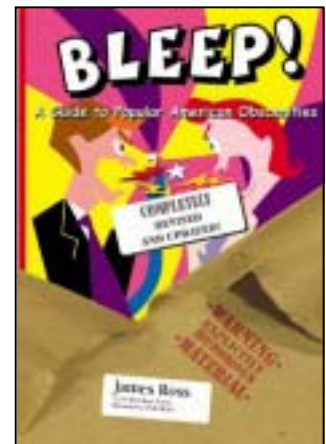
What's So Funny ? : A Foreign Student's Introduction to American Humor

By Elizabeth Claire, ISBN 0-937630-01-2

English a la Cartoon Dr. Albert H. Small (Editor), ISBN 0-8442-0683-0

Cultural Encounters in the USA By Andrew F. Murphy, ISBN 0-8442-0715-2

Bleep! A Guide to Popular American Obscenities By James Ross, ISBN: 1879440334



Both series by David Burke: **The Slangman Guide to Street Speak** and **The Slangman Guide to Biz Speak**

Talkin' American: A Dictionary of Informal Words & Expressions By Ron Harmon, ISBN 0-8384-5804-1

The ESL Miscellany: A Treasury of Cultural and Linguistic Information By Patrick Moran et al., ISBN 0-86647-095-6

Dear Listserv...

[The following give-and-take was extracted from the CLLS listserv – in fact, you may remember the exchange. At the risk of being repetitive, we thought we would include that discussion here. It was so compelling and the answers were so thoughtful, that it seemed appropriate to “archive” the whole conversation in this newsletter.]

Hello CLLS Friends,

Just wondering if any of you have worked with a visually impaired volunteer tutor? We have someone who really wants to tutor one-on-one and has completed the training (all training materials were recorded for her). She is unable to see words on the page, or someone's written work. Obviously, our first responsibility is to serve our learners to the best of our ability; will this be possible given this volunteer's very limited sight?

Thanks for your help.

Randall Weaver
Director, Project Read, San Francisco Public Library

Dear Randy and the Listserv,

The Adult Literacy Program of San Benito County is always up for a good challenge and this is one of them. We have come up with a few suggestions that may be helpful to you and anyone else that may run across the same situation some day.

First of all, it sounds as if your tutor has some sight (although limited) so one suggestion would be printing material on black paper with white lettering. It is easier for someone that is visually impaired to differentiate white from black than black from white.

What about team tutoring?

Another suggestion would be the series of computerized learning tools by V-Tech (I think that is the name); you can find them at any of the larger toy stores. They have so many different types of spelling, talking and writing toys for learning.

There is always the magnifier that is found on any PC or Mac. If you do not have it you can download it for free from the web at download.com. There is another screen reader called "Jaws" but it is very expensive.

As far as Assistive Technology goes, you can obtain a Catalog for the Disabled from Toys-R-Us. It has lots of tools that would be helpful to your tutor. Perhaps the best tool for your need would be CCTV (Closed Circuit Television). It is basically a television on a stand that will magnify what you put on a projection screen. It's kind of an overhead projector that magnifies what is placed on the screen onto a television. Of course something this good will run you anywhere from \$1500.00 - \$2500.00. There is also a Computer setup that's called Omni Page. It's a Computer with a scanner that will copy any written or typed material onto a computer screen and magnify it up to ten times. Great for your needs but also very expensive. If you would like more information on Assistive Technology you can contact the Center for Independence of the Disabled. They are at 355 Gellert Blvd. Ste 256, Daly City, 94015. Tel: (415) 991-5125.

We hope that we were able to help out in some way and maybe give you some good leads. We would like to hear back from you to find out what the outcome was. If we come across anything else we will certainly send it your way.

Barbara Scott & Grace Nutter
Adult Literacy Program, San Benito County

Hi Randy and all,

Thought I would throw my two cents worth in about using a tutor with very limited vision. Besides magnification or modified print, which does not work with some kinds of vision loss, there are text-to-speech devices. Several people have already mentioned the computer software text-to-speech programs. There is also one called the ScannaR that looks like a scanner and printed material like a book or magazine can be scanned in and converted to speech. Like a lot of this technology, it is not cheap. These products and others can be found at Humanware, their website is www.humanware.com. There are some reading software that already has speech built in such as the Discover Intensive Phonics program and Ultimate Phonics.

The tutor could use materials that are already on tape like the True Stories in the News that has two of its books on tape. There are many other books on tape available as well such as the Smart Reader's series that records books at two speeds, slow and normal. Having the learner read aloud to the tutor and spell out any unfamiliar words is another option. If you do ESL they could help a learner with pronunciation and vocabulary.

Your biggest obstacle might be in matching the tutor with an appropriate learner. Some learners may be less than enthusiastic about working with a tutor with limited vision.

Good luck and let us know how things work out if you can. Some of us may face similar challenges in the future.

Becky Wade, Literacy Coordinator
Fresno County Library

Hello Literacy folks!

Many of you know that the State Library is working on quite a big project on Library Services to People with Disabilities -- some of our literacy colleagues were successful in applying for this project and are currently participating. I took the liberty of asking our consultant on this project, Rhea Rubin, for her thoughts, and this is what she sent me (below) -- hope it's helpful!

Carla Lehn
Library Programs Consultant, California State Library

Carla and everyone,

The obvious questions are first "Have you asked the potential tutor how s/he uses print?" The expert on any disability situation is the person with the disability.

The second is "Have you tried magnifiers?" Many visually impaired people can read with magnifiers, either traditional hand held or illuminating magnifiers or the much more powerful electronic magnifiers (also called CCTVs for closed circuit television enlargement devices). A lot of public libraries and most community college libraries own these so the literacy person could go see them.

Rhea Rubin
Consultant, Public Library Services for People with Disabilities Project
California State Library

More from Jamie...

“Some time later, I decided I had to do something again... I came to Project Read. People were very nice, very helpful. I met Heather – she was helpful and nice. You know, let me tell you something...you say to yourself you’re smart but you have a problem. There’s a lot I didn’t know. And I never put it out there: that I couldn’t read.”

“After I started with the program, I got a tutor. He was very helpful. We were together about 1 year for 2 sessions a week. He was knowledgeable, understanding. He always took the time to see about me. At that time I was really heavy and we were working on my ABC’s. So he said, ‘were gonna walk around the block, and you’re gonna sing your ABC’s. I thought, I’m too heavy for this!’ But we did it. And he was the one that got me in the gym, and connecting things I learn with what I liked to do. I’m still learning today, I still meet regularly with a tutor, and I still go to the gym.”

As he continues working with a tutor, Jamie is excelling in ways he thought were closed to him. He’s learning computers. He’s reading short stories. He has written this author at least one ‘Thank You’ note for supporting his efforts! Jamie works and sits with his children regularly to ensure they are doing their homework, working with computers, and simply reading for pleasure.

More from Hiroko...

I had built up. After that, I couldn’t speak up in front of people, and if I had to speak, I was nervous and my body was literally shaking. It took almost one year for me to overcome the anxiety and to regain the confidence to speak English in front of native speakers. I still remember how horrible I felt at that time.

I would like to tell people who work with ESL learners that our feelings and confidence are really fragile and we can easily become anxious, even though it is really a tiny thing and may be funny to native speakers. This is true when a student is just beginning to learn English. Remember that the classroom will be our dominant, and in some cases, our only learning environment we are exposed to. If students don’t feel comfortable to speak English in class, how can they speak English outside of class?

We, ESL students, do not need sympathy, but it can be a great relief for us to know that there are people who at least try to understand what ESL students are going through.

However, I was lucky enough to have many great ESL teachers who have encouraged me to continue learning English. Without them, I would not be here studying English in graduate school. These teachers were eager to teach English and were very knowledgeable. Moreover, these teachers had a good understanding of different customs among ESL students and the difficulty of learning a different language in a foreign country. We, ESL students, do not need sympathy, but it can be a great relief for us to know that there are people who at least try to understand what ESL students are going through. Most of my teachers have been supportive even if I asked a question that is not related to classroom activities or English. (Continued on page 7.)

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

– Mahatma Gandhi

Diversity Committee Members:

- Lynne Price (Chair) – San Francisco Public Library
- Tracy Block – San Diego Public & San Diego County Libraries
- Valerie Hardie – San Diego Public & San Diego County Libraries
- Chris McFadden – San Diego Public & San Diego County Libraries
- Valerie Reinke – California State Library
- Beatriz Sarmiento – Commerce Public Library
- Joan Sykes-Miessi – San Mateo County Library

New members always welcome! Call or e-mail Lynne for more information on our quarterly meetings: 707-746-4341 or Lynne.Price@ci.benicia.ca.us

Hiroko, continued...

For me, learning English at an ESL school was the first and biggest step I took to adapt to this country. I have been an ESL student longer than I expected; however, it helped me to become a better speaker of English and to understand America. If I did not practice and spend the time to overcome my fear of speaking English, I would not be in front of native speakers in graduate school giving presentations today. I am glad that I have met many good ESL teachers to help me to learn English, and I hope other ESL students will not encounter negative situations like I did.

Hiroko is an international student attending Cal State Dominguez Hills. She will soon receive her Master's degree in TESOL.

Diversity Calendar 2003

- 1 **April** (United States)
- 6 - [Daylight saving time begins](#)
- 6 - [Organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints](#)
- 13 - [Palm Sunday](#) (Protestant, Roman Catholic)
- 13 - Sinhala and Tamil New Year (Sri Lanka)
- 16 - [Passover](#) (Jewish)
- 17 - Holy Thursday (Christian)
- 18 - [Good Friday](#) (Protestant, Roman Catholic)
- 20 - [Easter](#) (Protestant, Roman Catholic)
- 22 - [Earth Day](#)
- 24 - [Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day](#) (United States)
- 25 - Arbor Day
- 27 - Easter (Orthodox)
- 29 - Yom Hashoah/Holocaust Memorial Day (Jewish)
- 30 - [Beltane](#) (Celtic)

May

[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)

- 1 - [May Day](#)
- 1 - National Day of Prayer (United States)
- 5 - [Cinco de Mayo](#) (Mexico)



- 5 - May Day Bank Holiday (United Kingdom)
- 7 - Independence Day (Israel)
- 9 - Victory Day (Russia)
- 10 - Mother's Day (Mexico)
- 11 - [Mother's Day](#) (United States)
- 17 - Armed Forces Day
- 19 - [Malcolm X's birthday](#) (African-American, United States)
- 23 - Declaration of the Bab (Baha'i)
- 26 - [Memorial Day](#) (observed)
- 29 - Ascension Day (Christian)
- 29 - Ascension of Baha'u'llah (Baha'i)

June

[Gay and Lesbian Pride Month](#) (United States)

- 5 - [Shavuot](#) (Jewish)
- 5 - World Environment Day
- 6 - [D Day](#) (United States)
- 14 - [Flag Day](#) (United States)
- 15 - [Father's Day](#) (United States)
- 19 - Corpus Christi (Christian)
- 19 - [Juneteenth](#) (United States)
- 21 - Summer Solstice
- 27 - Martyrdom of Joseph & Hyrum Smith (Mormon)
- 28 - Stonewall Rebellion Day (United States)

Calendar items from:

<http://www3.kumc.edu/diversity/>