



# GLOBAL OUTLOOK

## FOCUS ON LITERACY

### THE CLE SOLUTION

How a method developed by Rotarians has taught hundreds of thousands to read and write

### FACES IN THE FIELD

Thai CLE expert came to Rotary through her passion for literacy

### LITERACY PROJECTS IN EGYPT, SOUTH AFRICA, AND NORTH AMERICA

# An education in illiteracy

Understanding the problem lays groundwork for effective projects

If illiteracy were such a simple problem, Rotarians would have solved it by now. The reasons that so many people can't read or write are myriad: a scarcity of schools and learning materials, insufficient government spending on education, cultural stigmas that limit education for women and girls, and more. The problem goes far beyond the inability to decipher words on a page. In an increasingly complex world, poor reading comprehension condemns adults to the lowest rungs of society.

The magnitude of the problem is daunting. UNICEF estimates that one billion children and adults, approximately 15 percent of the world's population, lack basic literacy skills. According to the International Reading Association, which cooperates with many Rotary clubs worldwide on literacy projects, 113 million children in developing countries alone are not in school and not learning to read. And worldwide, approximately 500 million women are illiterate, making up two-thirds of the adult population that cannot read.



**Rotary literacy projects have given a needed boost to Sri Lanka schools.**

Literacy rates vary widely, according to a 2007 UNESCO report, ranging from 23.6 percent in Burkina Faso in West Africa to more than 99 percent in North

America, Europe, and a majority of former Soviet republics and allies. But even those high literacy rates are deceiving. In the developed world, people who can only recognize words on paper cannot compete in an environment that requires high-level comprehension skills to get even basic jobs. Rich Long, director of government relations for the International Reading Association, offers the U.S. military as an example. Just two generations ago, an airplane mechanic, even one who was a school dropout, needed only a 36-page manual to service a fighter plane. Today, the manual for a modern jet fighter runs more than 70,000 pages.

"Unless you have the ability to read complex sentences, you cannot function in society," Long says. "The goal shouldn't be to have basic literacy; it should be to be proficient with reading."

And yet there is reason for hope. Rotary clubs world-

wide have been pursuing thousands of literacy projects for decades. In 1992, RI established its first Literacy Task Force to assist clubs and districts in creating literacy projects. The RI Literacy Resource Group now helps clubs and districts share information and success stories.

How does a club with no experience in literacy put together an effective project? First, club members need to identify literacy problems in their community or the larger world, says Richard Hattwick, general coordinator of the resource group and past governor of District 6460 (Illinois, USA). Hattwick recommends that clubs conduct a needs assessment to determine which literacy efforts would be most effective in the community. For assistance with conducting and analyzing a needs assessment and setting up literacy projects, Rotarians can contact area and zone literacy coordinators (listed in the *Official Directory*) and local councils of the International Reading Association ([www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)). Club

members with teaching experience are another excellent resource for assessing the most pressing community needs and developing ways to meet them.

Those needs vary from one part of the world to another. For example, in the South Pacific, says area literacy coordinator Lina Aurelio, “illiteracy is a big problem due to poverty, and a lack of schools and teachers,” so building and furnishing schools and providing teacher training may be the most effective response. A Matching Grant project in South Africa focuses on basic literacy for women and the incarcerated population. In the United States, Canada, and parts of the UK and Ireland, many clubs are actively involved in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which encourages lower-income parents to read to their kids by sending them books on a regular basis. Some localities around the world concentrate on providing computers and various kinds of computer-assisted learning, while others prefer one-on-one

tutoring or book donation. And, in one of the biggest success stories, Rotary’s CLE (concentrated language encounter) projects, which are highly flexible and adaptable to local cultures around the world, have transformed the lives of thousands who were once illiterate.

Because of all the assistance available through Rotary International, it’s fairly easy for clubs to start literacy projects, says David Fowler, vice president of RIBI and adviser to the RI Literacy Resource Group. “Reading is a hand up from the ‘poverty trap’, which breeds crime, disease and, ultimately, hate and terrorism. Rotarians are promoting world peace by helping people to read.”

*Nancy Shepherdson*

### **More online**

Read a Web extra on developing Rotary literacy projects and find links to *Community Assessment Tools* (605C) and a fact sheet on Rotary and literacy.



**With support from Rotarians and The Rotary Foundation, more than 2,000 Brazilian teachers learned CLE.**

## The CLE solution

A revolutionary method developed by Rotarians has taught hundreds of thousands to read

For a child, knowing how to read can be the difference between healthy self-esteem and none at all. For a teenager, it can mean staying in school rather than dropping out. And for an adult, it often means a steady income, versus a lifetime of struggling to feed a family.

Because illiteracy is inextricably tied to poverty, it is a massive development issue – and it requires a massive solution. Since its introduction over 20 years ago, Rotary’s response, the concentrated lan-

guage encounter method, has been embraced by classrooms around the world. Today, CLE programs are thriving in more than 30 countries.

CLE instructors use one of two approaches: activity-based or text-based. The text-based learning process begins with the class reading together. Teachers then lead activities that help students unravel the meaning of what they’ve read. After that, students write their own text as a group. Throughout the process, teachers add exercises designed to

develop broader skills such as word recognition and sentence construction. Activity-based programs start with a demonstration of a structured activity, such as planting a garden. Teachers and students then work together to write a text that explains how to complete the activity. Both approaches emphasize group work, so students end up teaching one another and no one falls behind.

The CLE program in Mandaluyong, Philippines, is just one example of the method's success. The four-year effort, funded in part by two Matching Grants from The Rotary Foundation of RI, was introduced in all of the city's 16 elementary schools. Florencia C. Domingo, superintendent of the Mandaluyong Division of City Schools, says that before CLE, only a few students were participating. "The rest lost their interest and got bored. But in CLE, what you will notice when you observe classes is that everybody is interested [and wants to] get involved."

## The learning atmosphere has really changed because of CLE.

— Florencia Domingo

Creating a book from scratch rather than relying on existing textbooks helps students feel a sense of ownership and also allows teachers to tailor programs to local cultures. Margarete Sachs-Israel, head of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) Coordination Unit, cites a need for literacy methods to suit the context in which they're used.

"You might have a wonderful method which works in one country, and then you try to transfer it to another region, and it doesn't function," she says. "The needs are different, the cultural dimensions are different, the language is different,

gender relations are different – all of these kinds of factors need to be taken into consideration."

The flexible, portable nature of CLE also keeps recurring costs low – the only supplies needed are paper, cardboard, colored pencils or crayons, scissors, and binding material such as yarn or twine. But because materials are de-emphasized, teacher training is essential. That's where Rotarians often make the difference.

James Neil Adamson, a past governor of District 9650 (New South Wales, Australia) and a former general coordinator of RI's Literacy Task Force, has trained teachers in CLE for more than a decade. A former school principal with a doctorate in educational administration, Adamson recognized CLE's potential early. He traveled to Thailand to learn the method in 1996 and now trains others in places like South Africa and the Philippines.

"It's a simple training, and it's readily accepted by the teachers,"

Adamson says. "And it has been highly successful."

Adamson estimates that the cost of starting and sustaining a program is between US\$18,000 and \$20,000. That includes teacher training, ongoing instructor education, and materials for two years. Although support comes from governments, the World Bank, and UN agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF, Rotarians provide the financial backbone. Rotarians support at least two-thirds of all CLE programs worldwide.

The UNLD, a 2003-12 effort focusing on mobilizing the resources and political will to combat illiteracy,



**Shaianna Barbosa is one of 70,000 Brazilians who learned to read and write through the CLE method.**

found in its most recent review of the illiteracy problem that financing is lagging behind need. "The international community, [with] the private sector and civil society organizations, is needed to support this effort financially," says Sachs-Israel.

By supporting literacy programs and fostering cooperation, Rotarians can play a part in the final five years of the initiative. Sachs-Israel advises clubs to think about solving the illiteracy puzzle in an integrated way. "It's very important that organizations like Rotary, while they have good methodologies, also provide financial assistance to actually apply them – to actually help countries to offer literacy programs that are very badly needed."

As of June 2008, the Foundation had awarded more than 140 grants for CLE programs totaling over \$3.3 million, including six Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) Grants backing multiyear projects in Bangladesh, Brazil, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey. The 3-H grants alone amount to nearly \$2.4 million.

One of the largest 3-H projects, a nearly \$400,000 effort, began in 1997 with a pilot project in Contagem, a city near Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The Foundation awarded a \$233,752 grant in 2001, with Brazilian districts and international sponsors providing the rest. The effort grew to reach more than 70,000 students throughout Brazil, many from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"The lives of these children outside of school are very problematic and sometimes involve crime and drugs," says project coordinator Eduardo Krafetuski, a past governor of District 4760. "But when they come to school, they find friends and they are part of a team."

Domingo, who observes sessions in the Philippines, says the approach benefits the whole classroom. "The teachers have more confidence now because they've learned the skills to master teaching reading," she says. "The pupils enjoy it. They are given a chance to interact with others, and whatever suggestions they have are welcome. The learning atmosphere has really changed because of CLE."

At the schools Domingo oversees, the Rotary Club of Mandaluyong is

the primary CLE sponsor. About 200 Rotarians from seven other local clubs assist with administration.

"They are very supportive," says Domingo. "During the training, most of them are here and they try to establish a working relationship with the teachers. They also observe classes. They are here to monitor and follow up."

In 2007, the Foundation approved a \$270,000 3-H grant to expand CLE in the Philippines and the region. Funds will help develop a Philippines-specific teaching manual and back a proposal to the government to accept CLE into the national curriculum.

While children in traditional classrooms flourish in CLE programs, the method is also easy to adapt to nontraditional settings and

underserved populations. Projects in India and Mexico have educated street children, and efforts in Egypt and Thailand benefit the blind. In Turkey, a \$258,000 3-H grant-funded effort has reached about 58,000 adults, many of them women. The project, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Izmir-Karsiyaka, established 450 teaching centers, including 150 in Turkey's lesser-developed eastern and southeastern provinces, where decades of unrest in majority Kurdish areas has deprived adults – particularly women – of an education.

Because many CLE programs for adults are activity-based, they go hand in hand with Vocational Service. Classes designed for taxi drivers, for example, might focus on the practical language of maps and directions, while cooks might learn to read recipes.

Some activity-based projects create new income opportunities. Adamson recalls one project in Nepal that took adult students through the steps of making wool hats, which they then sold on roadsides and at markets. When local Rotary clubs saw the project was building students' income and self-esteem, they loaned them money for wool and materials to make more hats. As sales grew, students learned to keep records and report back to their Rotarian lenders – all reinforcing the literacy skills at the core of the experience.

"When we teach people to read and write, then they are able to get jobs, and they are able to earn an income and feed their families," explains Adamson. "Being able to read and write miraculously improves their self-image."

*M. Kathleen Pratt*

## How CLE began

Concentrated language encounter (CLE) is now an internationally accepted literacy education method, but it traces its humble beginnings to Australia more than three decades ago.

Richard Walker, an education specialist and a Rotarian, and Brian Gray, a researcher at Brisbane College of Advanced Education, developed the method to educate Aboriginal Australians, whose varied languages and unique culture made traditional approaches to reading nearly impossible. In the early 1980s, CLE was implemented at a school in Alice Springs with unprecedented positive results.

About the same time, educators in rural Thailand were grappling with similar issues that the Australians faced. Walker (see Q+A) began working with curriculum developers in Bangkok on a Thai-language CLE program.

The effort started small, with a pilot project focusing on elementary schools in the northeastern province of Surin. Building on the pilot's success, organizers spread CLE to nearby provinces. By 1987, The Rotary Foundation had approved a 3-H grant backing a five-year project that eventually led all government schools in Thailand to adopt CLE.

The Thai pilot project became a model for other large-scale programs and helped formalize teacher training guidelines that could be applied worldwide. The practice now is known as the Literacy Lighthouse technique, with "lighthouse" locations providing support for new locations as CLE expands within a country or region.

Since the early 1990s, Rotarians have introduced CLE wherever there is demand. Early programs took root in Laos and Nepal. In Bangladesh, the ministry of education adopted CLE with backing from a 3-H grant.

### More online

View a photo gallery on CLE at [www.rotary.org/go](http://www.rotary.org/go).

# Q+A with Richard Walker

Richard Walker, a past governor of District 9630 (Queensland, Australia), is widely acknowledged as the father of concentrated language encounter (CLE), Rotary International's most successful literacy program. Walker spent many years as a primary and secondary teacher and principal before getting involved in teacher education. In 1992, he received an honorary PhD from the King of Thailand in recognition of his outstanding contribution to education in Thailand through the CLE program. Bob Aitken, managing editor of *Rotary Down Under*, interviewed Walker for Global Outlook.

**Global Outlook:** What is your general approach to literacy?

**Richard Walker:** Helping someone to learn to read and write is more like teaching swimming than teaching mathematics or geography – the central objective is to develop skills that will be of greater use later in life. It is not learning a body of facts that may be needed on occasion.

**GO:** How did CLE come to be associated with Rotary?

**RW:** In 1984, I responded to a request to develop courses in literacy teaching at Srinakharinwirot

University in Thailand, and after I retired in 1985, I went there in a private capacity to set up exploratory work in CLE literacy teaching – first in English and then in Thai. That led to a Rotary Foundation Matching Grant project in 1986, and the link between Rotary and CLE projects began. Then in 1997-98, Past RI President Glen Kinross made a call to replicate in other countries what Rotary had accomplished in Thailand.

**GO:** What should all Rotarians know about CLE and its potential?

**RW:** CLE literacy programs are now operating across the developing world, and some have been adopted for use as national programs. Advice on establishing and maintaining projects is available to Rotary clubs and districts. Rotary has already made a substantial contribution to alleviating mass illiteracy worldwide.



## More online

Read the entire interview with Walker at [www.rotary.org/go](http://www.rotary.org/go).

## Faces in the field

# Saowalak Rattanavich

Thai Rotarian has taught the CLE literacy method to thousands



"Language is life for me," says Saowalak Rattanavich. She is filled with energy and enthusiasm, as every teacher should be. It's an enthusiasm she has passed on to the thousands of other teachers who have learned the concentrated language encounter (CLE) method from her.

Rattanavich, a member of the Rotary Club of Bangrak, was born in Bangkok, Thailand. In 1972, she graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, where she majored in English and French. Di-

ploma in hand, she was selected to become an English teacher at a Srinakharinwirot University demonstration school. Her approach was intuitive and eclectic. "I was always looking for a better way to teach. I tried this technique and that technique. Basically, I followed whatever techniques the students responded to," Rattanavich says.

She soon felt the need to broaden her understanding of language instruction through further education and research. In 1975, Rattanavich moved to the United States

to attend graduate school, and in 1980, she earned her PhD in curriculum and instruction at the University of Kansas.

Witnessing the U.S. teaching culture for the first time, Rattanavich experienced a bit of culture shock. "In my country, teachers dominate the classroom. In the United States, the classroom is largely dominated by the students," she explains.

Rattanavich also found some commonalities in teaching styles. Through her research, she discovered that teachers around the





**Rattana Nattavich has been a passionate advocate of CLE since 1982.**

world seem to approach language learning in the same way, emphasizing rote memorization and theory. “They think they have to teach grammar before they teach people how to communicate. It takes a long time to change this way of thinking,” she says.

In 1982, shortly after she returned to Thailand, Rattana Nattavich met Richard Walker, an encounter that changed her life: It was through him that she learned about the CLE method. Walker, who pioneered this technique, had been invited to develop literacy courses for Thai universities. In Walker, Rattana Nattavich had found a new ally, someone who

shared her belief that teaching had to be a dynamic activity rather than a passive one.

Rattana Nattavich explains: “The most effective way to learn is by doing. The CLE techniques produce concrete results in two or three hours. Recently, I was in India. They dared me to prove how effective CLE is. I took up the challenge, and in three hours I taught a group of Indian children to speak rudimentary Thai. They didn’t have a big vocabulary, just enough to communicate their needs.”

Walker brought more into Rattana Nattavich’s life than the CLE method; he also introduced her to Rotary. “When I went to Australia to learn more about CLE, I stayed in Richard Walker’s home,” she says. “He went to regular Wednesday night Rotary meetings. He talked about Rotary all the time and explained the concept of Service Above Self. I was very impressed by this idea and continue to be committed to its principles. At the time, I couldn’t join Rotary because I was a woman, but I’m proud to say that in 1990 I became the first female Rotarian in my club.”

Rattana Nattavich continues to promote and conduct training sessions

on CLE, which she feels is limitless in its application because it can work for anyone. Recently, Rotarians in Cairo invited her to train some local blind students. “They brought together the group and some of the teachers,” she recalls. “I spent about five hours with them, and we had wonderful results. Of course, you have to adapt your teaching techniques. We used Braille texts, but we also had them learn by touching objects. The trick is to find the most stimulating way for them to learn the new language.”

Rattana Nattavich’s newest project is perhaps her most ambitious and easily her most profound: using CLE techniques to help reduce child mortality. “Many babies die because of their mothers’ ignorance,” she says. “I am working with some doctors in my Rotary club to design a simple book on child care that illiterate mothers could understand.”

Her passion for this work, she says, has shown her that “literacy is an ongoing, lifelong struggle. We live in a world full of conflict. But if people could understand each other, they would get along.”

*Lawrence Jeffery*

## Global Digest

# Literacy projects Make Dreams Real

*For years, literacy has been on the forefront of Rotary service, with ongoing projects in thousands of communities worldwide. These literacy projects all demonstrate a commitment to working closely with local communities after assessing their needs.*

### Literacy part of bigger package in Egyptian project

Members of the Rotary Club of New Cairo, Egypt, are working to improve the lives of women and children in their city through an educational project focused on literacy, reproductive health, and vocational training.

The program is the result of a

partnership between the Rotary clubs of New Cairo and Geldern, Germany, and has received additional support from a Rotary Foundation Matching Grant.

The literacy classes use the concentrated language encounter (CLE) method, and a national Rotarian committee trains teachers in the technique. Nearly 5,000 students

have benefited from the CLE method over the past four years through CLE projects, according to Kotb Soliman, a past Zone 10 literacy coordinator.

In the New Cairo effort, 15 to 20 women enroll in each class, with a total of 240 people ages 16 to 45 expected to participate during the 1 ½ years of the project, which started in January 2008. The women come from poor families who were relocated to New Cairo after the 1992 earthquake in Giza Governorate.

Aside from literacy skills, the students learn about reproductive health in the classes. “The same person should have knowledge in both,” says Ahmend Sami Saad, a member of the New Cairo club. Doctors and other health care specialists provide education on child spacing and other women’s health topics, with the goal of reducing the mortality rate for mothers and infants.

Surveys in developing countries have found that even small amounts of education for women – one to three years – can decrease child mortality. A study in Bangladesh found that the child of a woman with primary education is about 20 percent more likely to survive than a child of a woman with no education, according to UNESCO’s *State of the World’s Children* 2008.



**A Rotary-sponsored CLE program in Turkey focuses on teaching adult women basic literacy skills.**

For the vocational training aspect of the project, students receive four months of sewing instruction. The club provides the materials and recruits trained professionals from within the community, and the students receive the proceeds from product sales.

## Spreading literacy in South Africa

Victor Bredenkamp learned what it’s like to be illiterate while he was in China as a visiting professor.

“If you can’t read street signs and newspapers, it’s almost a form of blindness. It was to me in China,” says Bredenkamp, past governor of District 9270 (South Africa) and a member of the Rotary Club of Pietermaritzburg.

The experience made him realize how difficult life is for illiterate people in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal. When he retired as dean of the University of Natal, Bredenkamp launched an adult literacy project through his club. Since its inception in 1993, the effort has reached 13,000 people.

# Global Resources

The following RI resources can help Rotary clubs create a successful literacy project.

To order RVM, visit [shop.rotary.org](http://shop.rotary.org). To find the literacy resource group or tool kit, search [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

## RVM 3.2

Working under a Health, Hunger and Humanity Grant from The Rotary Foundation, Rotarians in Brazil, Canada, and the United States set up a center to teach the concentrated language encounter literacy method in Contagem, Brazil. More than 1,900 teachers and education experts have learned the CLE technique, which has been used to



teach over 72,600 beneficiaries nationwide how to read and write. In volume 3, issue 2, of *RVM: The Rotarian Video Magazine*, watch how the program is giving students in a crime-ridden area a chance for a better future. The DVD is available in English with voice-overs in French, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish. English subtitles are included for the hearing impaired. **506-07; US\$15**

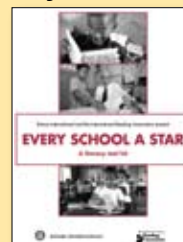
## Literacy Resource Group

The Literacy Resource Group connects Rotarians with the tools they need to promote literacy at home and abroad. Coordinators’ contact information and resources for developing club and district projects are available at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). The RI Web site also features the ProjectLINK database, a tool for finding model literacy projects as well as those in need of support worldwide. Other materials available online include *A Menu of Service Opportunities*, *Community Assessment Tools*, and a computer-based literacy program fact sheet. [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)



## Every School a Star: A Literacy Tool Kit

Developed by Rotary International and the International Reading Association, this downloadable kit is designed to help Rotary clubs and reading councils select and implement projects that meet the literacy needs of schools in their communities and around the world. Find examples of successful efforts along with contact information, resources, and service opportunities. Use tools including questionnaires and a teachers’ wish list to help determine the right project for your area. Available in English only.



[www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)

The club, which has partnered with the South African literacy organization Operation Upgrade and the local department of education, has received more than US\$134,000 in grants from The Rotary Foundation. Thirty clubs in District 9270 and 16 clubs from around the world have also contributed substantially.

The project targets disadvantaged women who learn reading, writing, and math through the project, which offers classes in schools, churches, and huts throughout KwaZulu-Natal. The program also operates in eight correctional institutions, where illiteracy rates are particularly high.

Literacy classes provide a springboard for teaching other skills, including sewing, knitting, and baking. In KwaNibela, a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, participants in one program are learning how to garden through a project that provides them with both food and income, along with education on HIV/AIDS and human rights issues. The effort received a 2008 UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy in September.

Bredenkamp, 80, has gained many rewarding memories from his literacy work, such as watching a student learn how to write for the first time. "Seeing someone's eyes when the squiggles they see begin to make sense – to me that has been the most awesome thing," he says.

## Literacy projects for developed countries

Most literacy projects target developing countries, but the developed world isn't immune to problems related to reading and writing. Rotarians in developed countries are advancing education in many ways within their own communities.

Difficulties with literacy can begin in early childhood. To help parents understand the importance of reading to their children from birth, the Rotary Club of Auburn, Alabama, USA, developed Babies Love Books. Through this project, the club works with a medical center that serves a low-income segment of the community to give children's books to parents of newborns.



**In South Africa, Rotary literacy programs touch people of all ages in rural and urban areas.**

Another way to keep children from being left behind is participating in a dictionary distribution project, a cost-effective method of placing a key language tool into students' hands. Many North American Rotary clubs have teamed up with the Dictionary Project, a nonprofit based in South Carolina, USA. Similar organizations serve other parts of the world, including Australia and the United Kingdom.

Older children often need specialized instruction to advance their reading and writing abilities. The Rotary Club of Belleville, Ontario, Canada, partnered with their local library to create a curriculum based on the Computer-Assisted Literacy Solution, which complemented the library's summer reading program for grades 2-8. Students improved their literacy skills through self-directed, electronic learning tools with help from a Rotarian facilitator.

Financial literacy is necessary for thriving in a market-driven economy. The Rotary Club of Denver Mile High, Colorado, USA, recently added a fiscal component to its BrainWise literacy program, which serves Spanish-speaking immigrant families. The bilingual course for adults and adolescents gives students the skills they need to make sound financial decisions.

# What's next

The May edition of **Global Outlook** will focus on RI President Dong Kurn Lee's aim to reduce child mortality worldwide, highlighting how Rotary clubs and districts are working to make a difference.

## Send us your stories

What stories would you like to see featured in **Global Outlook**? Do you have an idea for a theme? Send your ideas to [global.outlook@rotary.org](mailto:global.outlook@rotary.org).

## Contributors to this issue

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