



literacy chronicle

FALL 2009

NEWS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Literacy instructors benefit from professional development workshops

Adult education instructors are oftentimes faced with a daunting task. In their classrooms, they have to deal with a wide variety of skill levels and many of their students might be discouraged from previous education efforts.

Professional development programs can equip instructors with the skills they need to confront these hurdles, but several factors influence participation in the programs. These factors include the motivation of the instructor, the quality of the professional development, and the environment of the instructor's program.

"How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education," a 2003 report of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), explored these factors to see how they interact to create varying levels of participation.

Read on to find out what influences adult education instructors to take part in professional development programs:

Newest to the Field: Biggest Appetite

NCSALL found that new instructors were most interested in professional development. New teachers were those who had fewer years of experience teaching adults, had lower levels of formal education, and were not settled in their own beliefs and practices. They found professional development activities the place to receive reassurance, to associate with colleagues, and to work through questions.

The new-to-the-field segment of the instructor population is fairly significant. The National Center on Adult Literacy's report, "Teacher Perspectives on the Adult Education Profession," found that 80 percent of surveyed instructors had worked outside of adult education at some point in their careers, nearly 40 percent had worked five years or less in the field, and 70 percent expected professional development to improve their instructional skills and add to their knowledge of teaching adults.

Given these statistics one would think that workshops would always be at capacity, but since that is not the case, what other factors must strongly influence participation?

Trainer, Time and Type: Important Ingredients

In the study, the quality of the session was directly tied to the trainer and how participants viewed their abilities.

Instructors defined offerings as high quality if they experienced skillful facilitation, good group dynamics, and a flexible agenda that incorporated training goals and pressing needs of participants. They also described a program as high quality when the trainer had a clear idea of how instructors work. When this occurred, instructors were apt to return for subsequent offerings and share their enthusiasm with colleagues in their program.

The study confirmed that adult education instructors are adult learners too, with differing learning styles, schedules and interests. Providing choices to select from that best suit their availability, goals, and preferred mode of instruction is optimal.



Trainer Annie Lopez shares with literacy instructors how they can reach parents during a family literacy workshop.

Continued inside

In this issue, learn more about:

Lifelong learning gives seniors a boost • New funders network creates national focus on literacy

Director's Message

We've all heard of the proverbial "800 pound gorilla" in the room, meaning the one thing that has a huge impact on everything else in the room. A friend of mine once said that the issue of literacy is the "invisible 800 pound gorilla," meaning that literacy affects everything people are able to do.

Yet we often don't think about literacy when we are discussing our community's challenges. Someone's literacy level affects all aspects of life, whether it keeps him or her from reading the directions on a bottle of medicine, enrolling in a training program that could lead to a job, or reading to a child.

Literacy affects our education system, workforce, economy, and each individual's ability to fully experience all that our community has to offer.

In this issue we explore a variety of topics. Our cover article discusses how professional development programs can be beneficial to adult education instructors. Since its inception, the Literacy Cooperative has sponsored professional development workshops for literacy practitioners. Each year, attendance has grown. So far this year more than 450 people have attended our workshops, representing 166 organizations. We are following up with attendees to learn how the knowledge learned translates into changes in their program.

We are also taking a look at a novel idea in community health centers in our region. A collaboration between the Cleveland Public Library and the Cleveland Department of Public Health, among others, brings seniors a book club program that gives them a chance to socialize and be engaged. This partnership presents a great example of continuous learning at work in our community.

A group of foundations from across the country have come together to create the Literacy Funders Network (LFN). The LFN will provide a strong voice for literacy at the local, state, and national levels.

As always, we welcome feedback from our readers. If you'd like to let us know how you felt about this fall issue, please contact Christine Lee at clee@literacycooperative.org.

Robert Paponetti

Executive Director
The Literacy Cooperative

COMING SOON

E-newsletter to debut this winter



In an effort to make our newsletter even more current and informative, we are moving to an electronic format. All Literacy Cooperative supporters with e-mail addresses on file will now receive the newsletter in their inbox.

By moving to an e-mail version, it will be more user-friendly, by incorporating links to articles of interest and calendar dates. In addition to being more current, we will be able to bring you the latest in literacy in a more environmentally friendly way. A copy will also be posted at www.literacycooperative.org/news. We hope you share our excitement about this change.

If you would like to be included on our mailing list, please send a message to Sarah Upperman at supperman@literacycooperative.org with the subject line, "I would like to receive the e-newsletter." If you would like to have a paper copy mailed to you or if you have any questions, please contact Sarah as well.

New funders network creates national focus on literacy

With millions of people worldwide and thousands in local communities lacking basic literacy skills, there is an urgent need to identify the best strategies and bring those best practices to the widest possible audience.

To reach that goal, September 8 is designated International Literacy Day by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization. The UN states, "Lessons learnt over recent decades show that meeting the goal of universal literacy calls not only for more effective efforts, but also for renewed political will and for doing things differently at all levels – locally, nationally, and internationally."

Doing things differently may be what several communities can expect in the future. Literacy funders from across the country have come together to launch the Literacy Funders Network (LFN), an affinity group of the Council on Foundations. The network, composed of over 23 foundations, representing private, corporate, family, and community foundations.

All have invested in literacy initiatives and recognize literacy as critical to the growth, empowerment, and prosperity of communities and their citizens.

Jointly, the network has more than \$5 billion in assets. With such an impressive set of resources they are positioned to greatly influence the national dialogue and local movements.

Members of the network are excited to learn from each other, explore best learning techniques, and give their grantees strategies that show promise. Some areas of interest for the LFN have already emerged. Two goals of the network include promoting accountability and impact measurement, as well as coordination in key literacy fields, such as health, finance, and workforce literacy.

The LFN sees itself having a role in advocacy and awareness building, especially within the philanthropic community. They see an opportunity to increase other grantmakers' understanding of literacy as a wide-reaching issue.

Through conference calls, gatherings at conferences, and meetings at the Council on Foundations, the network will benefit from the collective wisdom and strategies can be taken back to their cities.

Reflections from LFN Members



"The goal is very clear. We want to raise the level of literacy across America...and we can really make much more meaningful change together than any one of us alone."

**Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker,
Community Foundation
for Greater Buffalo**



"Funders are walking the talk of collaboration. This network is modeling a kind of cooperation they want to see in their communities."

**Margaret Doughty,
Literacy Powerline**



"By uniting as a group, we give weight to the issue of literacy. With the Literacy Funders Network, we now have a platform which will allow us to share best practices much more easily. What works in Oklahoma might work in Ohio."

**Robert Paponetti
The Literacy Cooperative**

Founding Members

Baton Rouge Area Foundation
Central New York Community Foundation
The Cleveland Foundation
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
Community Foundation for Southern Arizona
Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties
Community Foundation of Kalamazoo
Community Foundation of South Alabama
Dollar General Foundation
First Literacy
Houston Endowment
IBM Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs
Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
Margaret L. Wendt Foundation
Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
McNair Foundation
Oklahoma City Community Foundation
Sarkeys Foundation
Simmons Foundation
Tapestry Foundation
Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation
Trull Foundation
Verizon Foundation



Literacy instructors benefit from professional development workshops

Workplace Not Always a Learning Environment

Perhaps the factor that gets virtually overlooked is the environment in which instructors work. Adult education teachers generally work in isolation, using borrowed spaces, like high schools or churches, where they cannot establish their own presence in a classroom or display useful information and student work. They have limited time with the director and other instructors due to the lean structure of programs, and salaries with benefits are rare. While many instructors are dedicated to their work, these environmental issues are barriers because they do not encourage an exchange of ideas, staff development, or a career track that rewards new skill attainment.

Likewise, the culture of the workplace is influential. If instructors do not have a voice in decision-making and curriculum creation then they would be likely to view professional development as a waste of time.

The NCSALL study placed access to preparation time, benefits, and positive program culture as three of the 10 most important factors that promoted change in an instructor.

Having Knowledge versus Using Knowledge

To add to the complexity, transferring knowledge from a training room to a classroom is tricky business which requires reflection, feedback and time.

Given this, the study recommends that professional development programs help instructors understand how and why to use a technique. Connecting the how and the why integrates thinking and action, and it develops a teacher's own framework about good teaching practices.

The Literacy Cooperative is striving to provide relevant trainings that are presented by skillful trainers who can supply practitioners with information, techniques, and experiences they can take back to their programs.

For further reading:

How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education:

<http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report25.pdf>

Teacher Perspectives on the Adult Education Profession: National Survey Findings on an Emerging Profession:

<http://www.literacy.org/PDFs/TR0002.pdf>

Was your professional development training helpful?

Six weeks after every training we contact participants to learn if they have integrated a new thought or practice in their work. Here are a few responses we have received over the past year.

**"I am using real-life situations to teach problem-solving math."
Van Williams, Tri-C ABE**

Participated in the Money Math: Financial Literacy as Math Instruction program

**"I have shared the ideas of the workshop with co-workers."
Anne Gannon, Positive Education Program**

Participated in the Reach More Families: Practical Ways to Promote Family Literacy program

**"I used scrapbooking materials for parents while doing a workshop [for them]. This helped with sidebar conversations during the workshop."
Joan Gamble, Cleveland Municipal School District**

Participated in the Reach More Families: Practical Ways to Promote Family Literacy program

**"When a child threw blocks on the floor during a tantrum, the child was redirected away from the source of the problem and was told that in order to go to the next activity that the child needed to pick up the blocks he threw around the room. The child complied and picked up the blocks after he wiped away his tears and moved on to the next activity."
Christopher Gilbert, Community United Head Start**

Participated in the Classrooms Without Conflict program

**"I have used the readability strategy when designing materials."
Megan Meister, Stockyard Redevelopment CDC**

Participated in Plain Language Institute

**"I have been able to advise tutors of issues, techniques, and ideas regarding learning disabilities and learning differences. Also, I customized it for volunteers and was able to present it twice for 24 participants with great feedback, so the passage of knowledge continues."
Jennifer Frigolette, Cleveland Reads**

Participated in the F.A.T. City Learning Disability Workshop

Lifelong learning gives seniors a boost

At the J. Glen Smith Health Center on Cleveland's East side, a group of senior women are seated in a circle chatting casually as they wait.

Soon the room is full. It is not a doctor's appointment or a test result that bring these women to the health center on this day, but the meeting of their monthly book club.

With books in hand, a lively discussion, complete with rolling laughter and personal stories, begins under the guidance of Merce Robinson, Cleveland Public Library's literacy coordinator.

The book club seeks to improve the health and wellness of participants through discussion of the book's characters and themes, the support and camaraderie of the group, and from an increased presence in the public health center. The program is co-sponsored by the Cleveland Department of Public Health (CDPH), MetroHealth Hospital, the Cleveland Public Library, and the Sisters of Charity Foundation.

Kathy Rothenberg-James, director of the J. Glen Smith Health Center, initiated the collaboration and participates in the club each month. She often observes how the books spark personal sharing and new insights.

When the book club read "The Soloist," about a mentally ill and musically gifted homeless man, Rothenberg-James witnessed thoughtful discussion and sincere support as some revealed how their families had been touched by mental illness. Later she saw a "breakthrough" when she invited a health care professional to present on schizophrenia.

"At the end of each book, I'm hoping the reader will have something to add to their life that they didn't know before," she said. "My big hope for the future is that lives will be changed."

Book club members recognize the benefits of being part of the group too and the group has grown from six to 20 members. Members cite an increased interest in reading and hearing different viewpoints, gaining new friendships, and the usefulness of being exposed to new information. This concurs with an AARP Survey on Lifelong Learning, published in July 2000 which found that older adults highly value engagement and enrichment.

With increased life expectancies and extended time in the workforce, seniors are most interested in subjects that will improve their quality of life, build on current skills, and help them safeguard their health. AARP also discovered that older learners favor methods that are easy to access, require a small investment of time and money, and let learning begin immediately.



Discussion of the book, *Bring on the Blessings* has Minnie Farmer, Luberta Gilmore, and Sherby Searles (Left to right) sharing a laugh.

The Cleveland Public Library and the CDPH recognized that being a lifelong learner is a key element to successful aging for seniors. Together they have created a program that furthers their individual purposes and goals, but also increases their particular reach and influence, and maximizes their ability to meet a need in the community.

In addition to being the literacy coordinator for the Cleveland Public Library, Robinson also facilitates books clubs for the homeless and veterans. Robinson sees partnerships as opportunities to enhance the mission of the library and serve the community.

"Outreach is one of the duties of the public library," she said. "We must reach people where they are and have something for them. All partnerships increase our network and enhance this mission."

At the end of the meeting, the women pack their bags, tuck away their next book along with a flyer on free immunizations for their grandchildren, and leave in high spirits.

Today's discussion of "Bring on the Blessings" had the seniors reflecting on the benefits of investing in your community, the frailties and possibilities of the human condition, and the importance of sharing your personal history and knowledge with others. One book club member, Barbara Ward, summed up the discussion: "We need to leave a legacy. Knowledge isn't worth anything if you don't pass it along."

For more information:

AARP Survey on Lifelong Learning:
<http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/general/lifelong.pdf>

Cleveland Public Library Literacy Services:
<http://www.cpl.org/?q=node/9172>

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Join the Literacy Cooperative as we explore strategies for helping your learners succeed.

Programs are free, but registration is required.

Log on to www.literacycooperative.org and click on our online calendar for full descriptions of these classes and for late additions to the workshop schedule.

To register, please contact Sarah Upperman at supperman@literacycooperative.org or 216.393.4549.

September

Friday, September 11

Applications of a "Framework for Understanding Poverty"

9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

(Refreshments provided)

Presenter: Dennis Kowalski, Ed.D, Greater Cleveland Educational Development Center

Friday, September 25

Valuing Diversity – Becoming More Culturally Competent in the Adult Education Classroom

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

(Lunch provided)

Presenter: Patricia Davis, Davis Management Group

October

Friday, October 2

Teacher Talk

9 a.m. – noon

(Refreshments provided)

Presenter: Annie Lopez, Ph.D.,
Limitless Learning Educational Services

Thursday, October 8

Contextualize Your GED Instruction Using Workplace Materials

5 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

(Dinner provided)

Presenter: Lynne Perry-Poulton, Towards Employment

Friday, October 23

Literacy Rich Classrooms Using Low-Cost Strategies

9 a.m. –noon

(Refreshments provided)

Presenter: Annie Lopez, Ph.D, Limitless Learning Educational Services

November

Friday, November 6

Beyond the GED and into the Workplace

9:30 a.m. – noon

(Refreshments provided)

Presenter: Lynne Perry-Poulton, Towards Employment

Training Location:

Trinity Cathedral and Commons

2230 Euclid Avenue

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

Free parking is available from the entrance on Prospect Avenue at East 22nd Street.