



literacy chronicle

SPRING 2008

NEWS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Since joining The Literacy Cooperative in December, I have been fortunate to have had and continue to have the opportunity to speak with and meet so many of you who are passionate about education and concerned about the future of our workforce and economy. I believe those three things — education, workforce development and economic development — are inextricably linked. We must have a skilled workforce to drive economic development, and we must have people with the appropriate education levels to take advantage of workforce development education and training opportunities. Strong literacy skills are the fundamental building blocks from which success is derived. The infusion of literacy education beginning at birth and continuing through adulthood is critical to the growth of our community. The level of commitment and passion from people I have met who are involved in literacy leads me to believe that we will be successful in our mission to include literacy in all of our community's initiatives and conversations.

This issue of the *Literacy Chronicle* features University Hospital's unique partnership with the Cleveland Scholarship Program to help the hospital's employees develop plans to reach the next level in their careers. We are looking for more companies and organizations that are doing similar things, and we hope this initiative continues to grow.

We also highlight the value in using everyday materials to teach literacy; these "authentic" materials and examples help make lessons more relevant to students.

In addition to the use of everyday materials, use of "plain" language — straightforward, clear and precise language in written documents — also assists learners; in this issue of *Literacy Chronicle*, we'll explain why. From time to time we all may have experienced frustration over material that is unnecessarily long, wordy and difficult to understand. This movement toward plain language continues to gain momentum. See inside for ways to gauge the readability of your own written material.

Finally, we have our calendar of upcoming events and training. As always, we hope you will be able to participate and contribute to the Cooperative's goal of promoting literacy at all levels of learning.

Robert Paponetti
Executive Director
The Literacy Cooperative



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the **literacy**
cooperative

University Hospitals creates career paths for workers

Program includes career counseling

University Hospitals has teamed up with Cleveland Scholarship Programs to offer its employees the opportunity to create an individualized plan to help them reach the next levels in their careers.

The University Hospitals/Cleveland Scholarship Satellite Program is designed to manage workplace shortage issues, said Ron Dziejzicki, senior vice president and senior manager of operations for University Hospitals. It was launched 15 months ago.

“We had a bit of trouble finding skilled workers for some of our positions,” Dziejzicki said.

“It’s a bridge to a better career. It has been well-received by employees.”

The goal of the program is three-fold: to help with career progression of UH employees; to assist families of those employees; and to help with recruitment and retention among staff. Employees can receive one-on-one career counseling and attend hospital-sponsored education fairs, workshops and presentations.

Stacy Watts, Cleveland Scholarship Program’s adult learner advisor, said interest picked up after the first education fair.

Watts spends about two days per week at her satellite office on the UH campus. She has individually counseled more than 100 employees.



Beth Smith, a medical technologist at University Hospitals, consults with Mitchell Wasserman of Cleveland Scholarship Programs at a recent education fair on the UH campus downtown.



At a recent education fair, University Hospitals food service employee Dana Baker (center) talks with Alison Arkin (left), a consultant with the Unified Technologies Center at Cuyahoga Community College, about resuming training in the college’s Patient Access Specialist program. PAS, as it is known, is a 14-week admitting and insurance verification training course. Medical Assistant Zilphia Washington (right) also stopped at the booth to gather information.

“I help personalize a plan for them,” Watts said. “I help with college applications, financial aid, making the correct calls to people, getting tutors.”

To notify and promote the new program, UH’s weekly employee newsletter includes a list of services available.

“Now I have about two to six people a day coming to my office for career counseling,” Watts said.

Still, some employees are a little apprehensive before embarking on career counseling.

“I’ve noticed that a lot of the custodial and cafeteria staff want more; they want to do better,” Watts said. “They’re very hesitant, though. They think they’ll be the only adult in the class. That’s not the case at all.”

If an employee is looking to gain some additional education, Watts recommends they attend Cuyahoga Community College first and take advanced placement tests for English and math.

If scores indicate they need to brush up on some skills, she’ll recommend them to a local adult basic education program for a refresher course. Many times, Watts says, that’s all they need.

“There are always openings at UH,” she said, “and [the hospital] loves to have people come up the ranks.”

Movement seeks spread of “plain” language

Goals are comprehension, usability of frequently used forms

Many of us, no matter our level of education, often struggle to understand forms for taxes, financial aid, insurance or mortgages. Often in sectors where information is most critical, paperwork is laden with complicated sentence structures, unfamiliar words and obscure directions.

This disconnect is the focus of the Plain Language Movement, which seeks to eliminate overly complex written texts from government, law, business and academics.

A movement born in the 1970s and present in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and many other English-speaking countries, “plain” language is communication that allows someone to find what they need; understand what they find; and use what they find to meet their needs. The goal is to make all written material reader friendly with straightforward, clear and precise language.

Such language is organized logically and uses “you” and “we” pronouns, common words, active voice and short sentences. Advocates for plain language say the aim is not to dumb-down language, but to present it in the most direct, effective manner.

For example, consider these two sentences from www.plainlanguage.gov, a web site operated by Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN), a group of federal employees from different agencies and specialties.

Before

When the process of freeing a vehicle that has been stuck results in ruts or holes, the operator will fill the rut or hole created by such activity before removing the vehicle from the immediate area.

After

If you make a hole while freeing a stuck vehicle, you must fill the hole before you drive away.

According to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) that tested adults’ ability to comprehend documents and text drawn from real-life materials, 93 million Americans — 43 percent of our population — read at the two lowest literacy levels. While literacy educators work diligently to improve those numbers, many people still find themselves struggling with the complicated materials needed to navigate life.

Plain language slowly is gaining traction in the medical community, where patients can struggle to understand their illnesses, treatment options and financial paperwork.

Kathleen Canda, a nurse and coordinator of chronic care for Neighborhood Family Practice (NFP) in Cleveland, has used plain language principles with her patients for more than 10 years. As one of just three health centers in Cleveland that receives federal allowances to treat some of the city’s poorest residents, NFP often sees patients with low literacy skills. Canda used plain language and her own experience to create patient instruction and education materials.

Since not every written text a patient will encounter in a doctor’s office is medical related, NFP has taken advantage of a service the St. Luke’s Foundation granted to Project: LEARN to assist health groups making materials more plainly understood. This allows patients to understand documents ranging from consent forms and confidentiality policies to pamphlets explaining the causes and treatment of their illnesses.

“Patients have better clinical outcomes when they are engaged in their treatment by understanding their disease,” Canda explained.

For Canda’s patients, that may mean fewer visits to the emergency room, better collaboration with their doctors and more productive lives.

Though certain sectors are more culpable when it comes to complex communication, no organization is immune. A readability assessment of brochures, proposals, reports or even email quickly reveals that we all are guilty. With effort, organizations can save time, money and reduce the burden placed on their audiences.

The Literacy Cooperative is embracing the challenge of communicating plainly. Hopefully, others will embrace it as well.

Speaking plain English

To learn more about the Plain Language Movement and health literacy — efforts to make health information more understandable — check out these web sites.

Plain Language

www.plainlanguage.gov or www.plainlanguage.org

Harvard School of Public Health, Health Literacy Studies

www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration

www.hrsa.gov/healthliteracy

The 24 Languages Project

library.med.utah.edu/24languages

Readability tool available on Microsoft Word

Aiming to speak and write plainly? Microsoft Word's software readability tool can help.

Built into the “tools” area, this feature measures the length of words and the length of sentences to provide an academic grade level, or level of difficulty. While useful, this tool is not a definitive measure of readability because it does not include the meaning of words and sentences. Instead, consider it an approximation of ability.

How it works:

1. To enable the readability function, click on TOOLS at the top of the toolbar
2. Click on OPTIONS at the bottom of the menu
3. Click on the SPELLING & GRAMMAR tab at the top of the window
4. Under the grammar heading, check the box next to SHOW READABILITY STATISTICS

A “Readability Statistics Box” will appear after you spell check any document, including a Flesch Reading Ease Test score and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score.

In the Flesch Reading Ease test, higher scores indicate material that is easier to read. The highest (easiest) readability score possible is 121 (every sentence consisting of a one-syllable word; see chart at right).

Flesch Reading Ease*

0-30	Very Difficult	College
30-40	Difficult	High School/Some College
40-60	Fairly Difficult	Some High School
60-70	Standard	Grades 8 and 9
70-80	Fairly Easy	Grade 6
80-90	Easy	Grade 5
90-100	Very Easy	Grade 4

Source: Plain Language Ad Hoc Committee of the Productivity and Quality Commission

*The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula translates the 0–100 score to U.S. grade levels, making it easier to judge readability levels. It also indicates the number of years of education generally required to understand text, relevant when the formula results in a number greater than 12. (Source: Wikipedia)

Use of everyday materials aids learners

Instructors network discusses use of “authentic” materials in literacy instruction

By **Christine Lee**

Literacy Cooperative training coordinator/consultant

A bank deposit slip, a classified advertisement and a grocery receipt are items learners may use every day.

Known as “authentic” materials, these objects can be used to teach literacy in real, understandable ways. Such materials were the focus of the Feb. 1 meeting of the Instructors Learning Network (ILN), a community of literacy instructors dedicated to identifying and implementing best practices.

Dianna Baycich of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center guided attendees through an authentic materials lesson. Baycich demonstrated how reading standards are achieved by fact finding, identifying new information, isolating key phrases, questioning assumptions and by asking students to write and reflect on what they learned.

ILN participants worked in groups to design their own lesson plans using authentic materials. Grocery store sales inserts, bank slips, an RTA bus route and newspapers and magazines were used as text for lessons on budgeting, nutrition, map reading, detecting bias and interpreting graphs. Groups discovered that these materials held endless learning possibilities and were adaptable for any literacy level. Lesson plans created by ILN members at this session are available to share on the Literacy Cooperative’s web site, www.literacycooperative.org.

Advocates of authentic materials maintain that lessons are most authentic when using real-life materials in the same ways that objects are used outside the classroom. Materials also should match the lives, needs and interests of students; in order to truly place these objects in context for learners, teachers must gather information about their students. Intake interviews, hallway conversations and journal entries can provide insight about students’ lives, revealing which materials could be best used for instruction.

After an instructor has identified the best topics for particular students, lessons must mirror real life. For example, a checkbook lesson works for a student who

has or wants to use checks, and a map reading lesson must include destinations to which students wish to travel. While this individualized approach to teaching can prove challenging for an instructor trying to meet the needs of a full classroom, such lessons are meaningful because students can use new skills in their daily lives. In a 2003 study, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) found that students taught with authentic materials were “more likely to say they had started new literacy practices or had increased time engaging in literacy activities outside the classroom.”

ILN will meet again on May 9, when members will discuss teaching writing by writing. Contact the Literacy Cooperative at 216-393-4549 for more information.



At the Feb. 1 meeting of the Instructors Learning Network, participants worked in groups to design lesson plans using authentic materials.

Using real-world objects with readers

To learn more about use of authentic materials in literacy instruction, check out these web sites.

Creating authentic materials and activities for the adult literacy classroom

www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/jacoboson.pdf

The Key Front Page: A Newspaper for New Readers

www.keynews.org

Easy Voter Guide

www.easylvoter.org

California Distance Learning Project

www.cdllponline.org

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

To register for these programs, contact Erika Mason at 216-393-4549 or emason@literacycooperative.org.

Adding Workforce Skills to GED Instruction

Friday, August 15, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Trinity Cathedral and Commons, 2230 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115

Presenter: Lynne Perry, Towards Employment

Getting a better job is what motivates most adult students to work toward attaining their GED certificate. But how prepared are they for this better job after they have completed their studies and taken the test? GED classes can be an ideal vehicle for imparting necessary workforce skills to adult students. This two-hour training will demonstrate how to incorporate various job readiness tools and strategies into current literacy materials and curriculum to make learning more relevant to participants' goals and build their job readiness skills. Instructors will also be given information to increase their awareness of employer expectations.

Workforce Resources - Information Sharing & Networking Opportunity

Friday, September 12, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Trinity Cathedral and Commons, 2230 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115

Presenter: Lynne Perry, Towards Employment

Come network and learn about available services from some of the best workforce agencies in Cleveland. Presentations from Towards Employment, Vocational Guidance Services, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited will provide insights and information on:

- Connecting students to workforce development agencies and resources.
- Developing stronger ties and working relationships between workforce and literacy providers.
- Providing skills needed for a career pathway and moving students out of poverty.
- Learning from success stories.

Numeric Literacy: Practical Ways to Instruct Mathematics for Adult Learners

Friday, October 17, 2008, 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

The Hanna Building, Steven A. Minter Conference Center, 1422 Euclid Avenue, 12th Floor, Cleveland, OH 44115

Presenter: Carmine Burkette, Coordinator, ABE Program at Cuyahoga Community College

Often talking about math is a challenge for both student and instructor. While many of us can arrive at the correct answer, we frequently can't explain how or why. Instead of only focusing on the mechanics of mathematics, we should also be familiar with mathematical concepts. This two-hour interactive workshop will provide experiential learning techniques to help adults learn and retain numeric concepts. The workshop will review current adult learning theory, and participants will acquire new methods to teach numerics in the classroom. Attendees will leave the workshop with sample lessons plans and activities which can be immediately implemented with students.