



THE FAMILY LITERACY CONNECTION

Summer Issue 2002

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Volunteer Tutors

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, ABLE, last year approximately 7,000 volunteer tutors worked in Pennsylvania's Adult Literacy Education Programs.

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Using Parents as Volunteers

Fulton County Even Start has found a good source of volunteers for their early childhood classroom – their Even Start parents. A lot of their parents have been through the Parents as Teachers curriculum and have learned quite a bit about child development and how to help children learn. Their parents also recently participated in the Volunteers in the Early Childhood Classroom training that is provided by Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth. Through this training, the parents learned more about child development stages, helping children get ready to read and write, phonemic awareness, volunteer responsibilities, the role of the volunteer, preventing discipline problems, and effective communication.

The parents help out in the early childhood classroom where needed, as determined by the teacher. They often provide one-on-one attention for the children, which is beneficial for the classroom as it decreases the student/teacher ratio. As for volunteer requirements, the Even Start is rather relaxed. They typically have one parent volunteer in the children's classroom once a week for about an hour. Any more time than that and they felt volunteering could compete with the parents meeting their own learning goals.

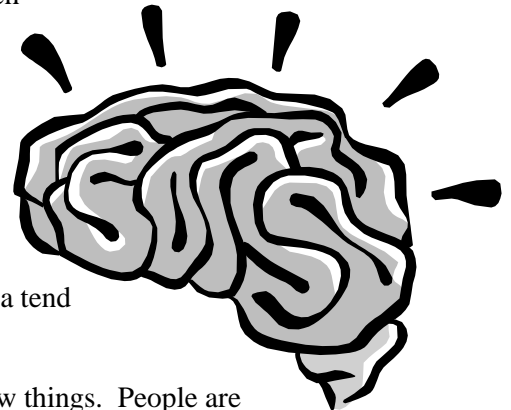
Having the parents volunteer in the same classroom as their own children has the potential to create some interesting situations. The Fulton County Even Start has found that the children really enjoy having the parents in the classroom and have noticed that there seems to be less separation anxiety. The parents have also been very fair, working with all the children in the classroom, not just their own. So far, the Fulton County Even Start has found that using their parents as volunteers in the early childhood classroom has been beneficial for both the parents and the children. It might just work in your program as well.

Multiple Intelligence Theory

The theory of multiple intelligences was developed by Howard Gardner in his book “Frame of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.” Most people in the education field have heard of this concept but think how valuable this information could be for your parents. A lot of parents involved with family literacy programs don’t realize that even if their children don’t do well in school, they could still be very intelligent in different ways.

Due to research and work related to multiple intelligences, the traditional view of intelligence has been changing. According to Howard Gardner, intelligence is a set of skills that enables a person to resolve problems encountered in life, which includes more than the typical language and math based intelligence that is so highly valued in a school setting. Researchers agree that there are a number of different types of intelligences but most agree that there are at least eight categories, although more research could alter this number in the future. The eight categories are described as follows according to the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales, which can be found at: www.angelfire.com/oh/themidas/index.html.

- **Linguistic Intelligence:** This intelligence is about words and how we communicate, using words to express and understand complex meanings. People use linguistic gifts every time they speak, read, write, and listen. Students who are not strong in this area may struggle with schoolwork which typically is very language based.
- **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence:** People who are talented in the logical-mathematical area look for patterns when solving problems. They can make cause and effect connections and can understand relationships among actions, objects, and ideas. They can calculate, quantify, consider propositions and perform complex mathematical or logical operations. This intelligence involves inductive and deductive reasoning skills as well as critical and creative problem-solving. Students who are gifted in this area tend to do well on standardized tests.
- **Spatial Intelligence:** This intelligence is about pictures and how people view things. People are able to think in pictures and to perceive the visual world accurately. They are able to think in 3 dimensions and transform one’s perceptions and recreate aspects of one’s visual experience via imagination (mental manipulation of objects). Research shows that there may be a link between a person’s ability to form mental images and reading comprehension.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence:** Bodily-kinesthetically gifted people use their bodies to solve problems. They need to be actively involved, actually “doing” something. These are the students who can’t sit still for a long time and tend to fidget. They have a good sense of timing and coordination for whole body movements as well as the use of their hands for manipulating objects.
- **Musical Intelligence:** Musical intelligence includes the ability to think in sounds, rhythms, melodies, and rhymes. People with this talent can recognize, create, and reproduce music with instruments or their voice. The musical intelligence is the earliest intelligence to emerge. Even babies can sing and match rhythmic structures. Exposure to music can help children increase their coordination, understand their culture, relax, and even improve math scores.
- **Interpersonal Intelligence:** People with interpersonal intelligence can understand other people. They can see both sides of an issue, have empathy for others, recognize distinctions among people and appreciate their perspectives with sensitivity to their motives, moods, and intentions.



- **Intrapersonal Intelligence:** An intrapersonally intelligent person has a good sense of self. They are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and can plan effectively to achieve personal goals. They tend to reflect upon and monitor their thoughts and feelings and can regulate them effectively.
- **Naturalistic Intelligence:** People with talents in the naturalist area can understand things in the natural world such as plants, animals, and scientific studies. They can interact effectively with living creatures and understand patterns of life and natural forces.

The theory of multiple intelligences changes the way people think about intelligence in more ways than just adding different categories. Intelligence used to be viewed as something static; you were born with a certain IQ and aptitude. With multiple intelligences, people are starting to think that intelligence can be dynamic and that the environment, culture, and a person’s genetic makeup helps to determine how the types of intelligences work together and which become more prominent.

There are things that parents can do to help enhance the areas where their children are gifted. First though, they need to decide what areas are their children’s strengths. A checklist to help determine this information can be found at: <http://familyeducation.com/topic/front/0,1156,1-12410,00.html>. Once their strengths are determined, this site also provides tips and suggestions for building those areas of strengths. There also are computer-based downloadable activities, activities and games by grade level, and suggested toys and games that can help your child grow. There are also sections for ideas and suggestions from other parents, celebrity profiles that match with your child’s area of strength, possible careers, resources, and an “Ask the Teachers” link if more information or help is needed.

Multiple intelligence information could be valuable for parents involved in family literacy programs as they could learn to recognize ways that their children are smart even if their grades don’t reflect this. Parents can then help their children further develop their skills and strengths and better appreciate their children for the unique individuals that they are.

Dangers of Noise

According to a health article entitled Sounds Dangerous in the July 2002 issue of National Geographic, loud noise can interfere with children’s learning. Not only does noise keep children from hearing what the teacher is saying, it can promote a feeling of what’s known as “learned helplessness.” This is where children feel that they have no control over their environment and give up trying, which can eventually affect their learning.

Studies have shown that schools near loud noises, such as airports, have students who perform

worse on problem-solving tests than children in quieter locations. Noises from inside the school can also interfere with children’s learning. Most schools have high ceilings and blackboards that can cause noises such as fire alarms, bells, and loud voices to reverberate within the room. Fortunately, tests have also shown that children’s skills improve after the schools incorporate noise-reducing practices. Such practices may include installing noise buffers that absorb sounds including carpet and acoustic tiles.

To schedule any of TLC’s trainings, please call Amy Wilson or Jessica Zimmerman at 814-867-0203 or contact us by email at literacy@penn.com.

Best Practices for Incorporating Volunteers Identified by Family Literacy Practitioners

Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth has compiled a list of best practice suggestions that were provided in response to a volunteer survey sent to family literacy practitioners. Most of the suggestions were supplied by programs that have a history of working with volunteers successfully. The information will not only be helpful for programs just starting to incorporate the use of volunteers, but for experienced volunteer-using programs as well. Following is a list of some of the best practice suggestions for incorporating volunteers into family literacy programs.

- Allow volunteers to choose some of their own activities and allow for flexibility in scheduling.
- Provide an orientation to the family literacy program and the participating families in order for the volunteer to understand the program framework.
- Have volunteers record what they do – write up what the activity was and how it went.
- Identify volunteer interests and strengths and place accordingly.
- Treat all volunteers as individuals. They each have their own special needs and talents.
- Take the time to train the volunteers well.
- Give volunteers, if working with students, the freedom to use their own teaching styles.
- Provide a tutor tune-up – an annual in-service for tutors to get together and network and get updated on new ideas and techniques.
- Be sure to show your appreciation for their time and effort.
- Provide plenty of training, support, and direction.
- Provide technical support.

National Issue Forums

If you are looking for a more structured way to lead group discussions with your parents, you may want to consider hosting a National Issue Forum.

National Issue Forums are structured discussions based on important national topics. Materials are available to provide participants with the background knowledge and information needed to intelligently discuss the topic. These materials include a moderator's guide, a participant booklet (also available in an abridged version for lower-level readers), and a video. The materials are relatively inexpensive, with the Issues books costing \$3.60 each and the video priced at \$12.00. Several of the Issues books have been translated into Spanish and are available for the same price.

Some of the topics are very relevant for parent group discussions and would provide an excellent opportunity for learning and interaction. Participants learn how to use critical thinking skills as they weigh the pros and cons of various solution

options. They learn how to handle situations where they are faced with people of differing opinions and also how to distinguish fact from opinion.

National Issue Forums provide the opportunity to participate in discussions ranging from Drug and Alcohol topics to Children and Family issues. Civil rights, economic issues, education, energy and the environment, health care, and international/foreign policy (this includes new materials on terrorism) are the other subject areas available.



To learn more about National Issue Forums, you can visit their website at www.nifi.org/index.html. You may also feel free to contact TLC at 814-867-0203 for more information about conducting a forum and getting trained as a moderator.

Successful Student Group

The Susquehanna Valley Adult Literacy Cooperative in Lewisburg has successfully started a student group. Their group currently consists of about 10 student and tutor members.

In September, Jackie Willis, CSIU coordinator, sent out a student survey to find out if anyone would be interested in starting and/or attending a student group. Forty-two percent of the 72 surveys were returned. Six students responded favorably to helping start a group and eleven people said they would like to attend a student meeting. Next, students from their program attended the Statewide Student Involvement Regional Meeting in Montandon and the 5th Annual Adult Learner Conference of Pennsylvania sponsored by Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth.

From there, 2 students, Pat Evina and John Pickin, met with Jackie Willis over lunch to discuss expectations of the student group. Some topics discussed were who will attend, what they will do, when will they meet, and how often will they meet. It was decided that the group will be initially open to both students and tutors. This would allow students to feel more at ease with joining a new group. As the group becomes more established, the tutors will eventually be phased out. The group was named the Susquehanna Student Involvement Group. They decided to meet on the first Thursday of every month for one hour beginning at 7:00PM. Students would bring in snacks, soda, and coffee and the Literacy Cooperative would cover the costs. John Pickin was appointed President and Pat Evina was appointed Secretary. At the group's third meeting, they also appointed Becky Enterline as Historian. Becky's job is to keep a scrapbook of the group's activities.

The group had a covered dish for its first meeting in February. John Pickin presented a workshop on how to use a day planner. Each student was given a day planner to take home thanks to a generous donation from Wal-Mart. They discussed moving the meeting location around to make the meeting more accessible to students in the 5 counties that the Literacy Cooperative serves. It was ultimately decided to hold the meetings in one centralized area. This would give the students stability. They would know exactly when and where the meetings will be held and it would make it easier for the group to work on projects and form committees. They also decided to send out red meeting announcement postcards so they will be clearly visible in the mail.

For the second meeting the student group went to see Death of a Salesman at the Alvina Krauss Theater in Bloomsburg. Student tickets were bought by the



Literacy Cooperative and a reduced fee was offered to tutors and guests. Twenty-one people signed up to attend the event which went over very well. The students discussed the play in depth at their last meeting on June 4th. They also discussed possibly bringing in guest speakers at future meetings.

The Press Enterprise held their annual 5K run on May 4th. Students and tutors from the student group assisted by passing water to the runners at the half way mark. For this service a \$1000 donation was given to the Literacy Cooperative. The student group passed out literacy flyers at the event to recruit new volunteer tutors for the Cooperative.

A cookbook fundraiser is in the works. The cookbook will be completely produced by the student group. All materials will be donated by group members and a call for recipes has been sent out. Trainers will aid in the physical construction of the cookbooks. They plan to have the cookbooks ready by the 3rd Sunday in August just in time for the annual Literacy Picnic. The cookbooks will sell for \$3 or \$4 a piece. They plan to sell the cookbooks at a display table at the local mall in October. All profits from the sale will go to support the Susquehanna Student Involvement Group.

One problem that the student group has found is in the lack of student transportation. They are currently dealing with this problem by carpooling. Group members with cars offer to drive students who are interested in attending a meeting. It is also hard to include students who work long hours. They are currently trying to resolve this matter.

The group's current structure is very informal. It has been suggested to move towards a more formal meeting. Jackie eventually plans on teaching the group how to run a formal meeting. However, the group would like to keep the meeting light and fun. They want to be able to get together and have a good time while sharing their experiences and ideas.

If you are thinking of starting a student group in your area and would like to talk to someone with some experience, please contact Jackie Willis at 570-523-1155 Ext. 2319.

Small Group Tutoring

To accommodate the growing waiting list of students and the shrinking list of potential tutors, The Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon has implemented small group tutoring.

Martha Herr, tutor coordinator, began this process by asking experienced tutors if they would be interested in tutoring more than one student. Some tutors were eager to take on as many students as they could handle and others preferred to still work one-to-one. The tutors who wanted to work with small groups were asked to meet with their student groups twice a week for 1 to 1 ½ hours per session, the same commitment as a one-to-one tutoring session. They also reviewed the student profiles for the each member of their group, which typically averages between 3 to 5 students.



Next, students were asked if they wanted to be tutored in a small group or by one-to-one. When given a choice, all students choose one-to-one. Martha then started phoning students with similar time and ability levels. She would explain that she was setting up a small tutoring group with people at their ability level and with similar goals to their own. Then, she asked them if they would like to join. Martha found that very few people turned down the offer when it was presented in a less intimidating way. A few students said that they would “do the group thing” until a personal tutor could be found for them but when she explained that there is a shortage of tutors, they quickly agree to use the group tutoring and they seem to enjoy it.

It was found that their low-level students preferred working in small groups. The students found it easier to learn by listening and observing. Students also like to interact with each other. They are able to develop new skills by simply talking to each other. Some tutors also prefer working with more than one student. The group dynamic becomes more interesting for teaching. A small group brings a variety of views and information to the learning experience.

One challenge that the literacy council is facing with small group tutoring is the differing paces at which students in the group will learn. One or two students may take off and some may be left behind. When this occurs, students are moved to groups that will be better suited to their pace of learning.

Attendance is also a challenge. Students may feel that it is easier to skip a session when there are other people in a group. There is less accountability in a group and some students think that their absence may go unnoticed. On the other hand, some students bring friends to their small group tutoring sessions. When this occurs, assessments need to be quickly done for the new students and the waiting list is disrupted.

With some challenges, the Literacy Council of Lancaster-Lebanon was able to increase the number of students served by approximately 9% from last year. This is in spite of the fact that the training of new tutors decreased by nearly 25% over the program year. Although several groups have dissolved, the established groups are doing well and are enjoying their experience.

Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth offers training for small group tutors. To schedule a Small Group Tutoring Workshop, contact Amy Wilson at 814-867-0203.

TLC Listserv

You are invited to join the TLC listserv. This new group that is currently being set up is directed for tutors, but practitioners and staff are also welcome to join. For those who are not familiar with the technical terminology, a listserv is a group of people who communicate via e-mail. Everyone who is a member of the listserv receives the same messages and has the opportunity to respond. The

TLC listserv will provide an opportunity for tutors to correspond with one another about tutoring issues, suggestions for improvement, and new ideas and techniques. If you are interested in joining the TLC listserv, please contact TLC at 814-867-0203 or by e-mail at literacy@penn.com and we will add you to the list.

Staff and Volunteer Safety

In these days of heightened security, we must remember that our program staff and volunteers may have some security concerns of their own, especially if they must travel to an unfamiliar location or into a family's home. An article titled "Keeping Volunteers Safe from Harm: Street Smarts for Unfamiliar Turf" in the May issue of *Community Risk Management and Insurance* (Volume 11, No. 2) offers valuable pointers to share with volunteers and staff to help them learn how to be safe and confident in an unfamiliar situation.

It is suggested that an orientation be conducted so that volunteer and staff concerns can be addressed and discussed. First of all, it is helpful to find out what their actual concerns are, not what they are assumed to be. An example in "Keeping Volunteers Safe from Harm" is "you may think they're anxious about being hurt in a client's home, but they're worried about being accused of theft or contracting a disease." Take the time to identify the concerns and provide an opportunity for people to brainstorm possible solutions. For example, a volunteer may be afraid of being attacked and injured by an angry family member and the solution could be for the program to provide a cell phone for volunteers to carry or to offer a personal defense course. The following list of safety suggestions to share with staff and volunteers comes from the "Keeping Volunteers Safe from Harm" article and are very useful pointers.



- Map your route before leaving if traveling into a new area.
- Make sure your cell phone is charged.
- Leave valuables at home or locked in your car's trunk and don't leave packages on the seats.
- Be sure that your car is properly maintained and has at least a ½ tank of gas.
- Keep the doors locked.
- Keep windows rolled up whenever possible.
- Park as close to the entrance as possible and in a well-lit area if after dark.
- Don't leave a spare key hidden in or on the car.
- When returning to your vehicle, carry your key in your hand and lock the doors as soon as you enter.
- If walking, don't fill your arms with packages; try to keep one hand and arm free.
- Be alert to your surroundings and pay attention to the people around you.

These are all helpful suggestions although they may be more relevant for an urban population. Take the time to find out the concerns in your particular area and try to address and solve them for the staff and volunteers in your agency.

Announcing the September TLC Meeting

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend the TLC meeting for the 1st quarter to catch up on new information, ideas, and projects that are going on in the state. Everyone is invited to the morning TLC Focus Group and encouraged to stay for the afternoon session which will be an informative workshop on teaching ESL (presenter to be announced).

Date: September 24, 2002

Times: Morning Meeting 10:00AM – 12:00PM

Afternoon ESL Workshop: 1:00PM – 3:00PM

Location: Damon's Restaurant, State College, PA

A postcard with more information will follow.

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!