

Florida Library Literacy Tip Sheet

State Library and Archives of Florida

Student Participation

Introduction

Adult literacy students need to feel that they are capable of significantly shaping their own lives by contributing to the activities they are engaged in. Participatory literacy programs offer the chance for students to not only “give something back” to the program, but also to develop a wide variety of skills outside of their tutoring sessions. Although it is not a new idea, participatory literacy education may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable for those accustomed to traditional tutoring arrangements. Library staff should view increased student participation as a key element of the historical evolution of a program. It can also help students become more comfortable in their library, resulting in new library advocates. Each program is different, and the specific level and type of student participation needs to be decided locally, based on the history, constraints, and opportunities available.

In this Issue

This Tip Sheet provides an overview of Craig Riecke’s (1994) publication on student participation in literacy programs. It first summarizes the benefits of student participation, then identifies 16 activities that have proved successful in literacy programs throughout the country. A list of steps are included that will help you get started in adding these activities to promote student participation.

Benefits

Student participation benefits the adult literacy students, as well as the library literacy program. Most students are responsible, capable, and willing to invest their time and talent in program development. Benefits of student participation include:

- Higher morale among learners and staff
- Improved academic skills
- Improved non-academic skills
- Support from funding sources
- Input for planning library programs and services

Activities

The goal of a library literacy program should be a stronger program through more student participation. How your library achieves this is part of each literacy program’s unique character. You can plan enough variety to allow students to choose what they want to do. A student advisory group should be established to help guide the library staff responsible for the literacy program. All of the following activities require a student participation advisor, as well as ongoing training and support for the students.

- Advisory Group
- Advocacy
- Literacy Group Board Member
- Conferences
- Discussion Groups
- Fund-Raising
- Intake and Orientation
- Membership
- Office Volunteers
- Pen Pals
- Publications
- Public Relations
- Student Recruitment
- Support Group
- Training Workshops
- Tutoring

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Getting Started

It is essential to get the support of library administration, the library literacy coordinator, and the literacy program's board from the beginning. Once you get their support, you will need to appoint a student participation advisor, who could be paid or a volunteer. This student participation advisor will need preparation and support throughout this process. The best way to get started is to start slowly, offer a wide variety of program options, and build gradually so that each activity can be sustained as a permanent feature of your library program.

The student participation advisor should begin planning student participation activities by:

- Reading books on student involvement such as Riecke's *Growing Together*
- Contacting other literacy programs—especially those in libraries—that already have student participation activities
- Identifying potential student leaders in your program who may have already spoken to the media, served as administrative volunteers, or have expressed an interest in meeting with other students
- Providing student leadership training and taking advantage of existing statewide and national leadership opportunities provided by the Florida Literacy Coalition, VALUE, and others
- Forming a student advisory group
- Identifying areas of student interest
- Beginning one or more of the activities listed in this Tip Sheet.

The following groups will support your efforts. Your program should become a member of ProLiteracy America (www.proliteracy.org), Literacy Florida! (www.literacyflorida.org), and Florida Literacy Coalition (www.floridaliteracy.org). The State of Florida also provides training, technical assistance, and grants for library sponsored programs.

For more information about library literacy services and programs in Florida, contact

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You may also visit http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/Literacy/BLD_literacy_index.html.

Resources

Fingeret, Arlene and Paul Jurmo (Eds.). *Participatory Literacy Education. (New Directions for Continuing Education, 42)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.

Riecke, Craig. *Growing Together: Improving Your Literacy Program through Student Participation*. Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., 1994.

Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE). www.valueusa.org.

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