

Research Up-To-Date

The Newsletter of the Urban Appalachian Council Research Committee

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The Research Committee was created at the founding of the Urban Appalachian Council thirty years ago and has always informed the council through active research. To be notified of future research committee meetings, which are open to all, please contact msullivan@uacvoice.org or phone 251-0202.

CONTRIBUTORS WELCOME!

Please send your article, announcement, or website link to Roberta Campbell at campbere@ucmail.uc.edu.

Wikipedia Entry on Urban Appalachians

Michael Maloney and Phillip Obermiller, assisted by members of the UAC Research Committee, have developed a Wikipedia entry for Urban Appalachians. The entry, which they hope to have posted by late September includes the following subject categories: 1) The Great Migration, 2) Forming Communities, 3) Facing Social Problems and Stereotypes, 4) Creating a Neighborhood Culture, 5) Notes and References, 6) Further Reading, and 7) External Links.

Northern Kentucky Graduate Student Demonstrates Expertise in Cultural Literacy

Ryan Shadle summarizes his experience in implementing a project in cultural and community literacy at the East Price Hill Community School. Additionally, his book review of Victoria Purcell-Gates' Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy will be published in the fall in the Journal of Cultural Literacy. Purcell-Gates conducted her research in the early 1990s and included an urban Appalachian family living in Cincinnati. Following is an excerpt from Shadle's review of Purcell-Gates' book:

They ain't gonna do my kid like they done me and his dad! she protested. *They know he can't read, but they're just gonna pass him on. That don't do no good; I know!*

These are the words of Jenny, mother of Donny who, despite being able only to read and write his name, had just been promoted to the 2nd grade. Jenny and husband "Big" Donny possess what Victoria Purcell-Gates calls "low literate ability" and are effectively unable to communicate with the school through print. When Jenny tries to communicate orally with Donny's teachers, they react harshly, as the author recalls a particular interaction in which the instructor exclaims, "I knew she [Jenny] was ignorant as soon as she opened her mouth!"(37). Thus, Jenny turns to the local university literacy center for help, which at the time was run by Purcell-Gates. This scenario reflects a familiar situation in which literacy workers are often faced with assisting community members in adapting to the literacies of mainstream institutions.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria. *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. ISBN-10: 0674645111. Reviewed by Ryan Shadle.

Cultural Literacy Curriculum Spreads Knowledge of Community Heritage

Ryan Shadle

As previously reported in the March-April Newsletter, I began, what I called at the time, a *cultural literacy* curriculum with the students of the East Price Hill Adult Literacy/GED office. I had two goals in mind before the project began. The first was to improve the literacy skills of the participants. The second, was to help carry out the UAC's mission of "utilizing its strong cultural heritage to Empower Individuals, Strengthen Families, Develop Communities, and Reform Systems."

To accomplish the UAC's goals, I introduced students to an array of literature/poetry written by Appalachian writers. In turn, I initiated "round-table" discussions about how the materials relate to our lives and to our communities. It was through these discussions, and the subsequent student writing, that the success of the project emerged. But before I expound upon this success, I think it is important to discuss how this endeavor evolved from what I originally termed a *cultural literacy* curriculum into what I later decided more closely resembled *community literacy*.

Like the term literacy itself, *community literacy* can take on various meanings. I chose to follow the definition offered by the Community Literacy

Center (CLC) at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. Their educational vision discusses community literacy as follows:

We see writers as problem solvers-people who are thinking their way through a cognitive and social process of making meaning. This means not only thinking critically about an issue, exploring your knowledge, and communicating your ideas, but knowing why you are writing, what others expect and think, and what you need to do to really communicate to an audience. It also means becoming reflectively aware of you own thinking, your strategies, and the social context of writing (<http://english.cmu.edu/research/clc/default.html>).

You might be asking yourself why I'm making the distinction between calling our project cultural and community in terms of literacy? *Cultural literacy* is the ability to converse fluently in the idioms, allusions and informal content which creates and constitutes a dominant culture (wikipedia.org). My reaction upon discovering this definition was somewhere between shock and embarrassment! The very least of my intentions was to further promote the hegemony that exists in our country! In essence, my heart was in the right place but my terminology certainly wasn't! Now, onto the story of our success . . .

Before the project commenced, I selected 12 volunteers who would participate. All participants took the Writing Skills and Language Arts GED pre-tests to see what their scores were at the time we began our class. I was granted one and a half hours every Tuesday to conduct our class session. My plan was to divide the course into two sections, the first three sessions would consist of reading and discussion, and the final weeks would be spent on writing. However, things didn't go quite as planned. (Usually when the phrase "things didn't go quite as planned" is uttered, the reader expects the worst. I am happy to report that this was not the case.)

By the end of our first day, we had nearly completed Chris Offut's short story, *Sawdust*, about a young man struggling with his identity in a rural Eastern Kentucky town. Coincidentally, the main character, who had dropped out of middle school after his father's death, ponders the idea of obtaining his GED. The story stirred up an enormous amount of conversation and emotion among the group as we talked about the barriers to achieving the GED certificate. Before I knew it, time ran out and I had to go for the day. When I collected the story from each student, a near uprising occurred! The class would not wait until the following Tuesday to learn what became of the young man in *Sawdust*. Therefore, with the permission of UAC instructors, I was granted an extra day per week to conduct our class! With our class time doubling we were able read additional materials and concentrate more thoroughly on the writing process.

Initially I had no agenda for the writing portion of the curriculum. I felt that it was up to the students to decide what they felt necessary to write about.

However, by the end of the first day I knew we were on to something. Much of our discussion turned to our communities and certain negative aspects that are common in lower socioeconomic areas, such as crime, poverty, and poor environmental conditions. Thus, we focused on creating narratives that personalized these common conditions. The narratives were addressed to various power-wielding constituents from around the city like the mayor, city council members, district police captains, the *Enquirer*, and so on. The class opted not to send their pieces to any of these constituents. Yet, the true success that I mentioned earlier was not lost.

The students in the EPH Adult Literacy/GED, which began with twelve volunteers, quickly grew to more than twenty in number. I could simply cite the qualitative findings that suggested student reading and writing ability increased, on average, 1.4 grade equivalency in under just one month. Yet, I'm not sure that these numbers reflect the success of the program. The true achievement of the *community literacy* project is that students learned that writing can be a way to both analyze their life situation and effect social change in their communities. In fact, I continued to work with several students who wanted to revise their drafts to perfection.

What is clear is that members of all UAC programs need a forum where they can talk about the issues affecting their daily lives. The UAC, as an organization, will benefit immensely, if those that they serve through the various programs become active members of their respective communities. Through the practice of writing, community members can engage with those that make the decisions affecting their daily lives. They can begin to see the benefits of actively participating in the political process. They can begin to hold city leaders accountable for the negligence perpetrated upon their neighborhoods.

I want to thank everyone at the UAC for allowing me to be a part of their organization. I have made some great relationships that I hope will continue for quite some time. I am especially indebted to the students and staff of the East Price Hill office for making me feel like a part of the community. I look forward to continuing my work with all of you!

Recommendations for Advancing the Quality of Life for Urban Appalachians: Recommendations from the Research into Action Mini-Conference

The Research Committee of the Urban Appalachian Council

A Research into Action mini-conference was held on April 16, 2007 to identify and discuss the issues affecting urban Appalachians in the areas of education, employment, and health. Further discussion by three working groups within the Research Committee resulted in the following recommendations for

addressing the issues and enhancing the quality of life of urban Appalachians served by the Urban Appalachian Council (UAC). Within each of the three areas, the recommendations focus on (1) further research needed for improving understanding of the issues and/or potential problem solutions; (2) potential services provided or facilitated by the UAC to address specific needs; and, (3) advocacy efforts required for issue resolution.

Recommendations

The UAC Research Committee recommends the formation of three task forces, one each for health, education, employment, with a UAC Board liaison to each. Each task force will be charged with moving forward the action agenda suggested below and reporting progress to the UAC Board.

Health

The proposal for health consists of a coordinated multi-faceted agenda that focuses on the creation of a pilot program for cardiovascular health improvement. (See Appendix B for the full proposal from this working group.)

Research:

- *Recruit and convene interested university and community stakeholders to plan a pilot program that would begin with assessment of community readiness and identification of points of intervention for health improvement. Solicit and review proposals for components of the pilot program.*
- *Once the pilot program has been launched, monitor and evaluate implementation, outcomes, and potential for expansion and replication.*

Services:

- *Serve as convener of the principal stakeholders and interface with community members for pilot health improvement program.*
- *Develop materials to enhance cultural sensitivity in implementing the pilot program.*

Advocacy:

- *As participants in the pilot program experience institutional and community barriers such as access to services, advocate for changes in policy.*
- *Promote modifications of lifestyle to affect cardiovascular health.*

Education

The recommendations for education focus, first, on more fully establishing the issues facing retention of urban Appalachian students through research. This would be followed by seeking support for the creation of a position within the UAC to develop programs and provide important linkages and advocacy with institutions and organizations key to supporting urban education.

Research:

- *Build on the research into patterns of high school enrollment and dropping out begun by John Bryant and seek to expand this line of research with additional funding and support, with the possibility of extending the research to other urban areas in Ohio by assembling a statewide network of researchers to address the issue. Consider extending the research to include Northern Kentucky.*

Services:

- *Seek support for an Education Advocate on the UAC staff who could help to expand existing education services, provide important linkages to groups such as STRIVE and Parents for Public Schools, seek funding for, and help to coordinate ongoing research, as well as attend to the significant advocacy agenda suggested by the Education group.*

Advocacy:

- *Utilize the Education Advocate position to leverage connections with community groups to advocate for the service and policy changes needed to better serve the education needs of urban Appalachian students at all levels.*

Employment

Action steps recommended for employment attempt to establish models for on-the-job training coupled with education, particularly for urban Appalachian males; develop greater awareness of the unique needs of urban Appalachians in job training and job placement; and provide advocacy for support services for workers participating in apprenticeship programs.

Research:

- See overarching research goals at the end of the recommendations.

Services:

- *Develop one or more pilot programs that combine GED education with employment. Programs should make strong efforts to employ positive urban Appalachian male role models/support personnel.*
- *Develop systematic outreach to service providers accessed by urban Appalachians for job training and job placement. Outreach needs to build awareness of 1) the urban Appalachian population and its needs and 2) how to design programs, services and outreach that will be accepted by urban Appalachians.*

Advocacy:

- *Advocate for the development of support systems for workers in apprenticeship programs with employers and unions typically accessed by underserved urban Appalachians.*

*Additionally, the UAC Research Committee recommends the adoption of the following **overarching research goals**:*

- *Determine migration/relocation patterns of urban Appalachians within the Greater Cincinnati area, including patterns of educational attainment, employment, health, and economic status.*
- *Determine educational and career or apprenticeship paths that have tended to work for broadening opportunities and empowering urban Appalachians.*

Editor’s Note: To read the entire *Research Into Action* Report go to UAC’s website: www.uacvoice.org. The report has been approved by the Board of the Urban Appalachian Council and forwarded to all the participants in the April 16 mini-conference.

Research Notes



(From the Research Committee: Debbie Zorn, Chair)

Introductions, Announcements, and Research Updates:

John Bryant has been exploring the differences in enrolment in schools among the urban white population and rural white population in Ohio using Ohio Department of Education data. Michael Maloney and Phillip Obermiller have drafted a Wikipedia article on urban Appalachians. Bonnie Kroeger reported that Cincinnati State is going after several grants to look at dropout rates and there may be research opportunities from them. Ann McCracken brought up the Robert Moses project that combines learning math with advocacy and suggested bringing him to Cincinnati. Maureen Sullivan will talk to the Freedom Center

about this possibility. Robert Ludke's article on Health Literacy has been published in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. He is working on another article about the use of hospice services and developing another proposal to look at health literacy on the end of life care. Roberta and Maureen have submitted an article to *Ohio Valley History* about environmental justice and grassroots women leaders based on oral history interviews of women who were involved in some way with the Women's Health Survey. Kay Russ and Mei Tang have written an article that will be published in the September issue of *National Career Development Quarterly*. She also has submitted an article to the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. John Besl is working on the data from Kentucky and Ohio birth certificate files from 2004. So far he has found that the rate of smoking among pregnant women is higher in Kentucky. Ann McCracken Ann is working on an article with Kelly Firesheets for the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*.

Items Discussed:

Debbie Zorn presented the draft report based on the *Urban Appalachian Conference: Research into Action*. The report is extensive and includes several appendices. The committee made several suggestions. Next steps are to bring the report to the board and to send it to the participants at the conference. We will ask participants to consider reconvening and to make suggestions about additional participants.

Next meeting:

The next meeting of the Research Committee will be at 10 am at UAC on September 21, 2007.

Additional Links:

Center for the Study of Gender and Ethnicity in Appalachia
<http://www.marshall.edu/csega/index.asp>

The Appalachian Connection (newspaper)
<http://www.uacvoice.org/AppalachianConnection/apdec06.pdf>

East Tennessee State University Center for Appalachian Studies and Services
<http://www.etsu.edu/cass>

The University of Kentucky Appalachian Center
<http://www.research.uky.edu/Appalcenter/index.html>

Berea College Appalachian Center
<http://www.berea.edu/appalachiancenter/>

The Center for Appalachian Studies, Appalachian State University
<http://www1.appstate.edu/dept/appstudies/>

Appalachian Studies Association
<http://AppalachianStudies.org/>

Social Areas Report of Cincinnati
<http://www.socialareasofcincinnati.org/>

Appalachian Women's Alliance
<http://www.appalachianwomen.org>