

COMPONENT 3:



**National
Urban League**



**Youth/Adolescent
Growth in Literacy**

Youth/Adolescent Growth in Literacy

“Just as communities have a strong vested interest in the quality of their schools, they have a similar desire to ensure that their children are engaged in worthwhile and safe activities during out-of-school time. Individuals who staff after-school programs share this desire, and many of these programs have an academic focus. But all types of programs – recreation, arts, technology, community service, and social—can incorporate activities to support literacy by building on the literacies of the program’s activities.”

– Excerpt from NUL Mobilizing Communities to Support the Literacy Development of Urban Youth (p. 27)

Youth/Ado

A crucial part of any effort to mobilize a community for adolescent literacy is to empower youth to take ownership of their own literacy development. Research indicates that the level of motivation a young person experiences can determine whether they engage with, or disengage from, literacy activities. In fact, if the young person does not experience any intrinsic motivation, some self-efficacy to develop literacy skills, then their engagement with learning will decline over time. Therefore, it is important that a young person sees the connections and value of literacy to real life experiences.

Adolescents and “Multiple Literacies”

Adolescents possess multiple literacies. Multiple literacies are the various ways young people read, write and speak as well as the myriad types of information to which they are exposed. Adolescents are reading popular magazines while talking on cell phones; surfing the Internet and engaging in social networking sites and chat rooms; watching educational videos in a history class and then transitioning to solving quadratic equations from a textbook in math class; doing homework and texting a friend at the same time. These are just a number of ways that young people are utilizing various literacies.

Out-of-School Time Programs and Adolescent Literacy

Youth-serving programs focused on a positive youth development approach in the out-of-school time must take the lead in helping students understand the multiple literacies they possess, and how best to bridge the multiple worlds they inhabit. Research highlights that high academic achievement is linked to rich community-based experiences and learning-based approaches in the out-of-school time. Given the flexibility in curriculum and program design in out-of-school time programs, and the boundless creativity adolescents bring to the activities after the school day ends, there are a number of useful ways that the adolescent literacy crisis can be addressed.

“Out-of-School Time” Programs: Strategies for Fostering Growth in Literacy

Programs must enable young people to take ownership of literacy activities. Research highlights that book selection options for adolescents increase dramatically. If they can’t identify pleasurable

Adolescent Growth in Literacy

books, adolescents often lose interest in reading. Therefore, young people should have a choice in the types of books they want to read, and programs should provide multiple options.

Programs should also allow adolescents choice in writing tasks. However, writing choice must also be balanced with the literacy skills and practices that will support academic success. For instance, an English workshop in the out-of-school time program may require students to produce several pieces of writing; both creative and expository essays. A student could start a portfolio of their writings, demonstrating their growth in literacy throughout the program.

Programs must provide reading materials that are developmentally appropriate and should speak to adolescents' diverse interests and varying abilities.

Programs should develop a cultural awareness program that incorporates reading, writing and presentations about influential events and figures in history, and that engages youth in examining their own backgrounds.

Programs should develop caring, engaging and text-rich after school environments that would foster an interest in literacy development. There should be an abundance of books, periodicals, poetry, and other language based visual aids to encourage literacy learning in the program.

Programs must tailor instruction around learners. The most valuable teaching and learning approaches foster critical thinking, student decision-making and independent learning. Therefore the literacy activities should be inquiry based, task-oriented and linked to real world challenges. Activities, for instance, that encourage young people to research and solve a particular problem in their community are always a hit in the out-of-school time.

Programs should integrate literacy into existing activities and events to foster a seamless focus on literacy. For instance, a coach of an after school program may use a word wall to teach youth vocabulary on the sport or require young people to keep a writing journal.

Programs should integrate technology for learner-centered, relevant activities. Young people tend to have more developed skills with technology, such as computers, smart phones, text messaging devices, computer gaming systems and the Internet. Therefore, activities must acknowledge and integrate that skill set. For instance, a program could allow students to create a "Text Messaging Dictionary" that includes all the latest text messaging jargon, emoticons, and other symbols and characters that are used to communicate with a corresponding, "English" translation.

Program staff/facilitators should possess the personal characteristics and collaborative spirit to develop creative activities that will encourage literacy among young people. For instance, if staff/facilitators are reading, are collaborating with each other, and bringing energy to literacy activities, this provides a model for youth being served. Therefore, there must be continuous support and professional development that assists staff/facilitators in their efforts.

Below is a check list of steps that a lead organization should take to support adolescent growth in literacy.

Check List of Instructional Strategies

- *Help young people become aware of the “multiple literacies” they possess.*
- *Create a learning environment that is text rich and allows young people to engage in critical examinations of diverse texts.*
- *Facilitate young people-led conversations on specific texts that are relevant to real life experiences.*
- *Be aware when students are not making connections with text and provide appropriate, strategic assistance to develop their literacy skills (use the Project Ready College Access Program as a resource).*
- *Creatively integrate literacy learning into all programmatic activities.*

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