The SPARK

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LITERACY PITTSBURGH
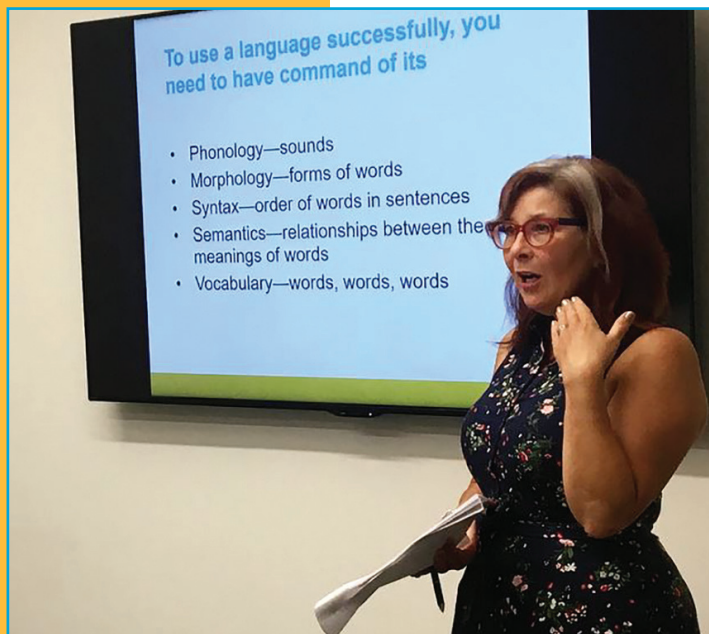
Instructor Nancy Krygowski talks to staff members of the Alliance for Refugee Youth Support and Education (ARYSE) about strategies for clear communication.

TUNING IN TO LANGUAGE

Clear communication benefits students, workplaces, organizations

Literacy Pittsburgh instructor Nancy Krygowski loves words and language. She also recognizes how critical it is to choose your words carefully, especially when speaking to individuals with limited literacy or English language skills. This awareness is something our instructors have honed over time, but it does not come naturally to most people.

This knowledge led Nancy to develop Tuning In to Language, a presentation that has been offered at Paragon Foods, Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Catholic Charities, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and to Literacy Pittsburgh's own staff.

Using jargon, idioms or complex instructions

BEHIND THE SCENES: MAKING MATH REAL

Creative lessons give test takers an edge

Do you remember learning about probability in high school math class? Literacy Pittsburgh teacher Katie Murphy created a memorable lesson for her students by asking, "Is the lottery rigged?"

The high school equivalency exams consist of tests that evaluate math, reading, writing, science and social studies skills. All tests evaluate a student's ability to reason and think critically.

Math is often the toughest subject. Students don't have a lot of confidence with math, and might be used to the rote learning they experienced in a traditional school setting. Instead of asking students to do a worksheet of 20 math problems, Katie strives to introduce games, puzzles and tactile learning. These methods help to engage students while encouraging them to learn problem-solving strategies.

"Getting students to explain their thinking can be a struggle," Katie explains. "However, this is a key way to master new skills."

Katie's lesson about the lottery combined math,

BETTER LIVES THROUGH LEARNING

NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Literacy Pittsburgh expands its reach in the community

Your support has allowed Literacy Pittsburgh to grow into a regional leader. This year our reputation in the community created an exciting opportunity to expand our footprint.

Approximately two-thirds of our operating budget comes from state and federal funds. This year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reconfigured the grant process and chose Literacy Pittsburgh as the lead agency in Allegheny and Beaver Counties.

Due to this grant, we forged a collaboration with Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania, whose adult literacy program is now a subgrantee of Literacy Pittsburgh. This creates an excellent opportunity to build upon each other's strengths. Goodwill offers classes in many neighborhoods where we don't currently have them, helping us to fill gaps in our own service offerings.

As of July 1, we expanded our footprint into Beaver County, filling a void left by the closure of Adult Literacy Action. An office will be maintained in Beaver with no interruption of service. Instruction in the county includes adult basic education, preparation for the high school equivalency diploma, and workplace skills. We will be expanding our tutor-based program to Beaver County and evaluating community demand for English as a Second Language classes.

These exciting changes are tempered by the fact that two Allegheny County adult literacy programs ceased or reduced operation, thus shrinking the pool of available classes. This means more individuals will turn to Literacy Pittsburgh for services. With your help, Literacy Pittsburgh will continue to work diligently toward ensuring that all area adults in need have the chance to create better lives through learning.

Don Block
Executive Director

MAKING MATH REAL

reading, writing and critical thinking. This integrated approach gives students an edge when taking the high school equivalency tests.

Students were instructed to roll a die twenty times. Statistically, there is a one in six chance of rolling any given number. They used tally marks to indicate which

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"The ability to simplify fractions is a foundation of higher level math. We want it to be automatic for students."

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number they rolled each time. They then converted the data to fractions, decimals and percentages.

"Students are expected to know algebra and geometry on the exam," Katie explains. "The ability to simplify fractions is a foundation of higher level math. We want it to be easy and automatic for them."

In their language arts class, students read articles about frequent lottery winners. For example, one winner in Pennsylvania claimed 209 prizes over twelve years, winning $348,000, according to an article in *PennLive*. An auditor general report found no wrongdoing and expressed confidence in the integrity of the Pennsylvania Lottery system. However, statisticians consulted by *PennLive* felt that such frequent prize claims were "clearly suspicious."

Students were challenged to analyze the odds, find evidence for and against the claim presented, and discuss their findings with the class. (Their verdict? Although students acknowledged the investigations, the consensus was that the lottery is indeed rigged!)

Katie's lesson is a winner because it focused on an everyday topic students could relate to. It used hands-on learning and applied multiple math concepts to the same data. Finally, it tied together math, reading, and writing. This multifaceted approach is a powerful way to prepare students to think critically, which will serve them well for the high school equivalency exam and for life. ●

LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

Employer partnerships increase worker productivity and job satisfaction

The Westin Convention Center Hotel is committed to the success and growth of its employees. So, when managers experienced communication challenges with non-native English speakers in its housekeeping department, the hotel turned to Literacy Pittsburgh. Director of Instruction Allegra Elson visited the hotel and talked with managers to understand the challenges they were facing. She then designed a custom curriculum as part of our fee-based Workplace Literacy program.

"Classes reduce staff turnover, support advancement, and promote job safety," explains Allegra.

The six-week class was offered the past two summers. Students met on-site twice a week for 75-minutes each time. The Westin offered them the flexibility to come during their shift, and many come in early, stay late or come on their day off.

The class focuses

We recently celebrated graduates of the Westin Convention Center Hotel's 2018 English as a Second Language class, which focused on workplace vocabulary and dialogues.

on contextualized English. This means that students practice dialogues and vocabulary that they use during their workday. For example:

- *Guest:* I need more towels, please.
- *Associate:* How many do you need?
- *Guest:* I need four.
- *Associate:* OK, I'll bring them to you in a few minutes.

Improvements in communication create a better work environment for all and impact not only productivity and employee satisfaction, but teamwork and morale.

"We would like

to thank Literacy Pittsburgh for our continuous partnership to provide this incredible opportunity and truly make a difference in the lives of our associates," says Dustin Redmond, Human Resources Coordinator for the Westin Convention Center Hotel.

A similar class has been offered

at Paragon Foods. Classes focused on soft skills, workplace vocabulary, and commands.

The Workplace Literacy program includes programs on English, math, writing, workplace communication, and cultural awareness. If your workplace would benefit from a similar partnership, contact us at 412-393-7640. ●

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

September 15   Search and Sip
October 26   Leaders for Literacy Luncheon

Proceeds benefit our student programs. Visit www.literacypittsburgh.org/events for details.

can lead to misunderstandings. Individuals might say they understand when they are really just being polite. Unclear communication hampers workplaces, organizations and everyday conversation.

In Tuning In to Language presenters introduce attendees to the broad range of skills English language learners possess using actual classroom recordings. They talk about the elements of learning language and how they build upon one another to create fluency. A highlight of the presentation is an opportunity to boil down a real-life example to simple, concise language that promotes understanding.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh was a pilot site for Tuning In to Language. We often take students to the library and realized at one visit that there was a disconnect. Students were not absorbing the information because the vocabulary was unfamiliar to them.

Literacy Pittsburgh has a longstanding relationship with the library system and we approached them with an idea.

"As a learning organization, we are always looking for ways to improve," explains Mary Monaghan,

Assistant Director of Neighborhood Libraries at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. "Literacy Pittsburgh presented Tuning In to Language to 60 librarians and support staff. This session led to changes in how we communicate with patrons."

Although geared toward English language learners, Tuning In to Language offers good advice for any context.

"Many times we choose complex vocabulary and sentence structure to demonstrate our knowledge," Nancy explains. "However, in reality this can impact understanding." ●

Make your message understood in any setting.

1. Speak slowly. Speak clearly.
2. Stop and think. Focus your message.
3. Eliminate extra words.
4. Avoid idioms and slang.
5. Use simple vocabulary.
6. Use short sentences.
7. Use visual clues.

ICYMI: AS SEEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Literacy Pittsburgh helped me accomplish things I never thought were possible. My experience was more than education, they helped me to find my true self...

Christina

LITERACY PITTSBURGH

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