

literacy chronicle

SPRING 2009

NEWS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE LITERACY COOPERATIVE OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Are skilled immigrants an untapped resource? Creating career pathways for foreign-born workers in our community

Louise Mugongo knows something about barriers.

As a Congolese refugee living in Zambia, she had to learn a new language, endure discrimination, and make a new life for herself, separate from her family.

When she was 15, Mugongo secured a scholarship to attend high school in Zambia, where she graduated at the top of her class. After high school, she won another highly competitive scholarship to attend college for clinical medicine. She went on to work as a nurse practitioner in the field for three years before she and her husband were accepted for resettlement in Cleveland.

But even with an ability to speak English, a post-secondary degree, and previous work experience, Mugongo did not get the chance she was hoping for after her arrival. Instead of securing a comparable job, she learned that her Zambian credentials were not equal to a degree from a university in the United States. To work in her profession here, she would need more schooling.

Mugongo would have to start over.

Unfortunately, Mugongo's situation is all too common among college-educated and skilled immigrants. According to a 2008 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) study, more than 1.3 million college-educated immigrants are either unemployed or working in unskilled jobs, such as a dishwasher or taxi driver.

According to a U.S Chamber of Commerce report, 34 percent of Ohio employers reported having a hard time finding qualified workers, during a time of population decline. Cuyahoga County's population decreased by more than 97,000 between 2000 and 2007, according to the U.S. Census. If a clearer career pathway existed for resident immigrants, they could contribute in more significant ways, along with other community members, to invigorate the economy, housing stock, and the urban center.

COMMON ROADBLOCKS

Several barriers often limit skilled immigrants' opportunities to apply their innovative ideas and talents. Some of those barriers include:

- inconsistencies evaluating foreign degrees
- limited job-specific, technical English classes
- a lack of awareness and availability of information and services for job seeking immigrants
- unfamiliarity with work culture and professional networks in the United States
- poor interviewing skills
- discrimination from employers

Continued inside



A trained nurse practitioner in Africa, Louise Mugongo resettled in Cleveland, where she learned that her credentials weren't equivalent to a degree from a U.S. college or university. She is currently in Cleveland State University's nursing program, with hopes to resume her former career.

More than 1.3 million college-educated immigrants are either unemployed or working in unskilled jobs, such as a dishwasher or taxi driver.

In this issue, learn more about:

Early childhood education • Why students succeed • Upcoming events

Director's message

We hope as you read this issue of the Literacy Chronicle the chill of winter is a distant memory. Spring brings new growth and change.

Change is something we are experiencing daily as our economy struggles to rebound. Traditional funding streams are disappearing, forcing many to re-examine their role and impact. While this is a time of crisis it is also a time of opportunity.

There is a renewed interest in collaborations that make sense and lead to efficiencies and effectiveness. We also look for opportunities to make improvements in systems to prepare the youngest of our citizens and those who are newcomers to our country bringing skills and an interest in applying those skills.

In this issue we look at those two distinct groups: young learners (and the programs that serve them) and immigrants. These two groups each have their challenges that we as literacy professionals must be aware of and address.

Early childhood education programs, along with parents, are at least partly responsible for building a solid foundation for today's youth. The work of early learning professionals is critically important in preparing students for success in kindergarten and beyond. Children who excel in high-quality programs are more likely to go on to lead more productive lives. Read our article on Ohio's Step Up to Quality program, designed to increase the effectiveness of teachers and programs statewide.

With regard to our immigrant population, it is reported that they will serve as a significant source of growth in the United States in the coming years. Many immigrants come to our country highly skilled yet cannot use those skills due to language barriers and difficulties in translating their skills to U.S. standards. Many are not highly skilled but are looking for opportunities to work hard and contribute. After you read the article on skilled immigrants, brainstorm how we might be able to help the immigrants who are struggling in our own communities.

Visit our website to get more resources and tips and we hope to see you at one of our upcoming workshops.

Robert Paponetti

Executive Director
The Literacy Cooperative

Early childhood education

Delma Roman will quickly tell you she loves working with children. She began her career as a parent volunteer when her own child entered preschool and soon afterward became a classroom teacher.

Until recently, Roman relied solely on her high school education, 15 years of classroom experience, and advice from other teachers to inform her efforts with the young children in her care.

However, two years ago, Roman began online studies at the University of Cincinnati. Later this year she will graduate with an associate degree in early childhood education.

She was encouraged to attain her degree when her employer, the Spanish American Committee Daycare, began the process of being rated by Step Up to Quality, a voluntary three-star quality rating system for early care and education programs licensed by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services.

The Step Up to Quality system exceeds state requirements and aims to increase the educational levels and professional development opportunities of preschool teachers. The goal is to have better trained teachers to develop the cognitive, social, and emotional abilities of preschool children.

"I manage the kids in my classroom better," Roman said. "I'm happy because I am developing a foundation for life-long learning."

In 2004 the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation released findings from the Perry Preschool Study. The research showed that access to high-quality early care programs meant lower high school drop out rates, fewer teen pregnancies, lower crime rates, and higher employment and earnings. The study estimated a return of \$16 to society for every dollar invested in early care programs.

In order to garner these positive outcomes, more investment in teachers is needed. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, average salaries for preschool teachers are around \$21,000, demonstrating the difficulty preschool teachers face to take on the expense of higher education. In addition to monetary support, many preschool teachers attending college for the first time need help balancing the demands of work, school, and home. They also need academic assistance in the form of tutoring and counseling as they are challenged with college-level work and navigating the higher education system.

Roman was eligible to receive a Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) scholarship that paid 80 percent of her tuition, books, and fees. The scholarship, available in 22 states, was created to address the low education, poor compensation, and high turnover rates of early care teachers. It requires that the remaining 20 percent of tuition is split between the teacher and their employer.

Childhood centers aim for excellence

While this assistance can remove a substantial barrier, *Catalyst Ohio* reported in their February/March 2008 issue that relatively few teachers have participated in the scholarship program. Only 32 TEACH recipients have completed their studies since the program began in Ohio in 2003. In addition, of 3,500 state-licensed childcare centers, only 455, or 13 percent, are participating in the Step Up to Quality system.

It is possible that centers find the standards high and the incentives low. In order to achieve the first star in the Step Up to Quality system, one lead teacher must have an associate degree in early childhood education or a certificate in child development and four hours of specialized training. However, the second and third star ratings increase the education requirements significantly with 50 percent of lead teachers needing advanced credentials and up to 12 hours of specialized training. A medium sized center with 60-99 children, who has 10 to 40 percent of the childcare subsidized, can receive an achievement award between \$6,000 and \$18,000, depending on which star they attain.

In the 2007 Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment of Literacy discovered that 40,000 5-year-olds began school needing literacy intervention, indicating an increased need of high-quality early education.

However, the childcare centers might not experience far-reaching improvements that Step Up to Quality is seeking until increased quality standards become mandatory, or teacher support becomes more comprehensive, or advocates increase awareness, especially with parents, on the benefits of a high-quality preschool education.

Roman realizes the important role she has in preparing children for school and is glad she had an opportunity to increase her knowledge and skills.

"My knowledge is increasing and now I can show them step by step everything they need to know," she said. "I want the best for my kids and for them to be in the best position when they go to kindergarten."

*Last year at our graduation
we had one of the kids read a book.
All of the parents couldn't believe it.
I said, "Yes, our kids learn how to read!"*

— Delma Roman, preschool teacher



Delma Roman, who has been a childcare teacher for more than 15 years, feels empowered by her recent efforts to obtain an associate degree in early childhood education.

*For every dollar invested in
early care programs, an estimated
\$16 returns to society*

For more information:

Step Up to Quality, 2008 Study, Benchmarks and Indicators:
<http://www.occrra.org/stepup.htm>

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation,
Perry Preschool Study:
<http://www.highscope.org/Content>

Catalyst Ohio February/March 2008:
<http://www.catalyst-ohio.org>

2005 Workforce Study: Ohio Early Childhood Centers
General Analysis:
<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/workforcestudy.html>

Teacher Education and Compensation Helps:
<http://www.occrra.org/TEACH.htm>

Are skilled immigrants an untapped resource?

The United States does not have a federal agency that evaluates all foreign credentials with uniform standards. Instead, evaluation standards are left to individual states, private groups, and professional associations, which all use different criteria for evaluating credentials. To go even further, the MPI study states these evaluating entities generally assume the educational and professional training of other countries is inferior.

"I was so surprised," Mugongo said. "Because I am from Africa, not too many people think that you know something, which makes me feel so bad...But I think people should respect us for the education we got from home."

Despite the obstacles, Mugongo started over. She took a class and exam to get her STNA license, allowing her to work in a nursing home while she attended school. For two years she caught the bus at 6 a.m. from her home in Lakewood to get to her 9 a.m. class at Lorain County Community College. She packed her lunch and dinner so she would be ready to go straight to work after class. Most days she would get home after 11 p.m. for homework and preparation for the next day.

Reflecting on this time, Mugongo said, "At first I was disappointed that I had to go back to school, but then I said OK, school is school. I can always learn something new."

EMERGING SOLUTIONS

Because Mugongo already spoke English, her path was somewhat easier. Other immigrants with little or no English proficiency would have to spend extra time getting up to speed. The Migration Policy Institute found that highly skilled immigrants who were limited English speakers were twice as likely to work in unskilled jobs as those who were proficient. Adult education programs that integrate a vocational focus into their English for Speakers of Other Languages classes provide a double service to their learners. A vocational focus teaches both English and language skills necessary for workplace communication, culture, and even industry-specific terminology, allowing immigrants to enter the workplace more quickly and successfully.

Since Mugongo came as a refugee she received case management and support from Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services, (MRS) during her initial months of resettlement. MRS along with International Services Center and US Together, Inc. are the three refugee resettlement agencies in Cleveland. In addition to these resettlement agencies, the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services and the non-profit agency Steps Toward Advancing in Resettlement Skills

(STAIRS) provide assistance to refugees. Like refugees, other resident immigrants in the city could benefit from similar centers that welcome them and provide all the information they need.

Mugongo said she feels indebted to MRS.

"I thank God for the office," she said. "They told me everything I needed to know."

Neighbors to the east and west are already ahead of us in servicing skilled immigrants. Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia all have welcome centers, where they provide thorough information, referrals, programs and services centered on employment and vocational English skills. They also advocate for immigrants, giving them a clearer path to social and economic opportunities.

This activity has a definite return. Immigrants pay taxes, open businesses, buy homes, and are consumers of goods and services. The 2007 White House Council of Economic Advisers concluded that immigrants increased the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by \$37 billion each year. According to the 2002 U.S. Census, Hispanic and Asian-owned firms provided jobs to 2.6 million employees and Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies identified more than 5.7 million foreign-born homeowners in 2001, representing \$876 billion in home equity.

In the few years Mugongo has lived in Cleveland, she passed the entrance exam for nursing school and is currently enrolled in the program at Cleveland State University. Mugongo is grateful to the people who helped her navigate the system and she is ready to become a nurse practitioner again.

"I'm so grateful I passed through Zambia because I know what it is to start at the beginning," she said. "I know what it is to accept whatever happens, to be optimistic all the time, to know that one day I can achieve something."

For more information:

Migration Policy Institute:
<http://www.migrationpolicy.org>

An Occupational Language Analysis: Canadian Language Benchmarks/Essential Skills in the Workplace:
<http://www.itsessential.ca>

Immigration Policy Center, Economic Impact of Immigration:
<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/>

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, Resources for Immigrant Professionals:
<http://www.welcomingcenter.org/immigrants/professionals.php>

Why some students succeed and others don't

Instructors explore factors contributing to student persistence

The Instructors Learning Network (ILN) gathered for a learning circle on the subject of student persistence.

What was discussed:

While many adults enter GED programs, few graduate. What influences adult students to attend classes regularly until they realize their goal – a GED certificate, a better job, or assisting their child with their homework without challenges? What procedures and approaches positively impact persistence?

Solutions:

Instead of only counting hours in the classroom as the measure of a student's effort toward their goal, time spent studying at home and at the library, or even activity from an additional program the student is enrolled in, are all valid methods of persisting in their studies. If programs can introduce self-study as part of their program and can communicate with their students regularly, they can have an increased and more thorough measurement of actual time-on-task.

In addition to the expanded definition of persistence, the research emphasized:

- the importance of having an intensive orientation
- developing a student's self-efficacy and ability to manage negative forces and barriers to learning
- creating a system for students to track their own progress
- assigning learners to cohorts
- providing a syllabus of coursework for each week
- managing enrollment so the teacher student ratio is controlled
- hiring former students as staff
- using student mentors

The next meeting:

Friday, May 8.

Check the Literacy Cooperative
website calendar at
www.literacycooperative.org
for more information.



TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Join the Literacy Cooperative as we explore strategies for helping your learners succeed.

Programs are free, but registration is required.

Log on to www.literacycooperative.org and click on our online calendar for full descriptions of these classes and for late additions to the workshop schedule.

To register, please contact Tova Weinberg at tweinberg@literacycooperative.org or 216.393.4549.

April

Teacher Talk and Literacy Rich Classrooms using Low-Cost Strategies

Saturday, April 18

9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

(Lunch provided)

Location: Trinity Cathedral and Commons

Presenter: Annie Lopez, Ph.D, principal consultant, Limitless Learning

Participants are eligible to receive six Ohio Department of Education and "Step Up to Quality" professional development credits for these sessions.

Money Math: Financial Literacy as Math Instruction

Friday, April 24

9:30 a.m. – noon.

(Lunch provided)

Location: Trinity Cathedral and Commons

Presenter: Carmine Stewart-Burkette, associate director of RS Hart and Partners, Assessment and Evaluation Consulting

May

Engage Learners with Culturally-Relevant Literature

Friday, May 1

9:30 a.m.– 2:30 p.m.

(Lunch provided)

Location: A Cultural Exchange

Presenter: Deborah McHamm, president and CEO, A Cultural Exchange

Classrooms without Conflict:

Using discipline to help students succeed

Friday, May 15

9:00 a.m. – noon

(Lunch provided)

Trinity Cathedral and Commons, 2230 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115

Presenter: Annie Lopez

Participants are eligible to receive six Ohio Department of Education and "Step Up to Quality" professional development credits for these sessions.

TRAINING LOCATIONS

Trinity Cathedral and Commons

2230 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44115

Free parking is available from the entrance on Prospect Avenue at East 22nd Street.

A Cultural Exchange

12624 Larchmere Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44120

Parking is available on E. 127th Street, as well as across the street and one block west in Mo & Son's parking lot across the street from Big Al's Diner.