

April 23, 2014

Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 10, Session 8

Topics: Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of April 23, 2014

Educational Disparities and Common Core Standards

Innovative Approaches to Instruction—Paula Paris, JFY Networks

Opportunities

Additional questions regarding the use of tablets in EWDJT programs

### **Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of April 23, 2014**

Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC)—Grant opportunities with 40 grants totaling \$20 million.

Submit your good work and receive national recognition for your EWDJT program. Our EWDJT programs qualify for recognition. See details on these and other grant opportunities in the *Opportunities* section of these post-session notes.

Status of the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants—EPA review of the EWDJT proposals is on track. The announcement of those selected for award is anticipated to take place in May. Unsuccessful proposals will also be notified at that time. Successful programs will receive funds later this summer.

### **Educational Disparities and Common Core Standards**

This week, Paula Paris with JFY Networks in Boston shared her perspective on educational disparities, Common Core Standards, and using individually paced approaches to improve math and reading skills.

Many thanks to Paula for sharing JFY Networks' experience both as an early adopter of the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program and as an advocate for reducing educational disparities among students entering post-secondary education and workforce training such as our EWDJT program. JFY Networks has received multiple EPA and NIEHS environmental workforce development grants and can be considered one of the pioneers in implementing the EPA Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program.

As JFY Networks developed their EWDJT program, they realized that many students entering workforce programs and post-secondary education programs struggled with their lack of basic math and verbal skills. Educational disparities resulted in some students easily able to complete required coursework while others were left in the dust, only to drop out in mid training. Remedial training discouraged and earmarked students, and often proved ineffective.

At the same time, JFY observed a trend shifting federal and state financial assistance toward post-secondary institutions rather than community nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations appeared to be favored for community support activities rather than workforce training which trended towards community colleges. As a result, JFY Networks redirected their efforts toward preparing community residents for workforce training by reducing educational disparities in math and reading.

Students unprepared, especially in math and reading, are set up for failure as they enter workforce training. To bring students to a standard level of competence, the Department of Education instituted Common Core Standards. The objective of this national program is to standardize education on a national level and reduce educational disparities in grades K-12. Currently 45 states are in the process of

implementing Federal Common Core Standards. Some of states have chosen to adopt their own statewide standards.

In the future if all goes well, students moving into the workforce, workforce training programs, community colleges, or universities will have a similar level of competence in math and reading which will improve their chance of success after high school graduation.

To bring a diverse student population up to a common level of competency, JFY is implementing instructional design allowing students to improve math and reading skills at their own rate. Self-paced instruction leans heavily on digital learning programs allowing students to master basic skills before moving to the next level.

### **Innovative Approaches to Instruction**

Digital learning programs traditionally use desktop and laptop computers with associated computer labs to provide students with individualized, self-directed instruction. Instruction remains in the classroom or lab restricting other approaches to instruction such as flipped classrooms where students learn at home and bring problems to class.

Tablets are beginning to appear (mostly as demonstration projects) both as a way of distributing content and as a way of improving the educational process. As discussed in the last PLC session, tablets have clear advantages in certain settings but also come with issues. When replacing printed text material with curriculum in PDF format, tablets can be a cost effective way to provide students with massive amounts of content, email, and web access at minimal cost. Refurbished Nooks, Asus, or similar tablets range from \$80-\$125, and can be far less expensive when replacing as many as 16 textbooks.

Beyond content delivery, as instruction moves into “self-paced” and interactive, tablets can dramatically increase in costs and complexity. Apple tablets and its associated iTunes University ecosystem has, perhaps, the most comprehensive learning and teaching materials available. Apple is working with several school districts across the country to demonstrate paperless education systems with assessment and self-paced K-12 instruction. Yet to be resolved at these demonstration sites are issues of cost, replacement rates, and student misuse.

Discussion with users of tablets and an Apple demonstration project appear to be communicating several approaches.

1. Basic delivery of content, email, and web access: Inexpensive tablets range from \$80–\$100. No insurance is required, and students keep the tablets on completion of program. (This is the model used by Florida State College at Jacksonville.) This works well for EWDJT programs, is well received by the students, and is cost effective. (See additional material below from our last PLC session.)
2. Complex learning software with student self-directed applications, assessment instruments, and instructor support: Apple tablets range from \$400-\$600 with more complex assessment and self-directed learning features. Programs are still in demonstration with cost, security, insurance, and misuse issues being resolved. iTunes University is the most developed of these ecosystems.
3. Limited content: Delivery has been demonstrated on cell phones, but more for communication and informational purposes. Students already have phones resulting in minimal costs. They can be used as a supplement to other instructional and content delivery approaches.

4. Traditional learning labs combined with simple tablets: This combination offers another potentially effective approach to self-directed instruction and content delivery.

Thanks to Paula Paris with JFY Networks for bringing to our attention the issue of educational disparities and their impact on our EWDJT programs. Paula would be happy to discuss their program including Common Core Standards and addressing educational disparities.

Paula Paris  
JFY Networks  
125 Tremont Street  
Boston, MA 02108  
617.338.0815, ext. 229  
[Pparis@JFYnet.org](mailto:Pparis@JFYnet.org)

### **Opportunities**

#### Networking Opportunities

The Georgia Brownfield Association  
9th Annual Georgia Environmental Conference  
August 20-22, 2014  
Location: Jekyll Island Convention Center  
Jekyll Island, GA  
Cost: \$350 Early Bird / \$425 Regular

The Georgia Brownfield Association is a premium sponsor of the 9th Annual Georgia Environmental Conference and is hosting the conference's Breakfast Keynote Panel, *Driving Economic Growth & Stewarding Environmental Resources*, on Thursday, August 21, 2014.

The conference is the state's largest and most comprehensive educational opportunity and will be attended by an estimated 600+ state, local, and federal government officials, business and industry leaders, attorneys, consultants, engineers, developers, land owners, architects, agribusiness leaders, energy experts, water planning districts, universities, public health officials, solid waste and recycling experts, and many others with a strong interest in Georgia's and the Southeast region's environmental programs.

Over the three-day period, this conference will host an elite group of environmental professionals seeking to exchange knowledge and share ideas around environmental concerns in Georgia and the Southeast region. The curriculum, designed and developed by the 56-member steering committee, offers over 50 unique courses, allowing attendees to design their own personalized curriculum by selecting nine educational courses while receiving approved continuing education credits. With the combined efforts of the state's leading environmental organizations, the Georgia Environmental Conference is a valued educational experience focused on Sustaining the Future for the People of Georgia™.

To learn more, please visit the Georgia Environmental Conference Website.

#### Grant Opportunities

Below are a few available federal funding opportunities. While these grants are not directly involved in environmental training, those interested in youth, veterans' programs, community education, and public

health can find involvement a synergistic addition to ongoing environmental training activities. For details and RFPs go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

#### *Employment and Training Administration*

##### Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations

Four grant awards of \$400,000 to \$650,000

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Women's Bureau (WB) and Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Office of Apprenticeship (OA), announced the availability of approximately \$1.8 million in grant funds authorized by the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations.

Awards made under this announcement are subject to the availability of federal funds. The DOL plans to disburse Program Year (PY) 2013 and PY 14 WANTO grant funds to up to four (4) community-based organizations (CBO) within the range of \$400,000 to \$650,000 for a two-year grant period to develop and operate innovative ETA projects to improve outreach, recruitment, hiring, training, employment, and retention of women, women of color, and women with disabilities in apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations.

For more information and the RFP, go to <http://www.grants.gov>.

#### *National Park Service (NPS)*

40 grants with a total of \$40 million

Training, education, and employment opportunities for young people and veterans.

NPS Youth Development Programs represent the future of the Service and encompasses a full range of youth-oriented developmental programs and projects conducted in and around national park units, NPS support offices, as well as in local communities and with partner organizations. The NPS Youth Development Program is committed to evolving and advancing vibrant and relevant youth programming that emphasizes the mission of the NPS.

The Youth Development Program is designed to provide employment, education, recreational, and public service opportunities to U.S. citizens and legal residents who are between the ages of 15 and 25 years of age.

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) is a collaborative effort to put America's youth and veterans to work protecting, restoring and enhancing America's great outdoors. Through the 21CSC, young people and veterans will accomplish meaningful work, and gain important personal and professional skills while building a lifelong connection to the outdoors. The 21CSC strives to achieve the following goals:

1. Put Americans to work: The 21CSC will provide service, training, education, and employment opportunities for thousands of young Americans and veterans, including low income and disadvantaged youth.
2. Preserve, protect, and promote America's greatest gifts: The 21CSC will protect, restore, and enhance public and tribal lands and waters as well as natural, cultural, and historical resources and treasures. By producing high-quality, cost-effective project work the 21CSC will also increase public access and use while spurring economic development and outdoor recreation.
3. Build America's future: Through service to America, the 21CSC will help develop a generation of skilled workers, educated and active citizens, future leaders, and stewards of natural and cultural resources, communities, and the nation.

### *Keep an eye on the Promise Zone Initiative*

The Promise Zone Initiative is part of President Obama's plan to partner with and invest in communities to create jobs; increase economic security; expand educational opportunities; increase access to quality, affordable housing; and improve public safety.

On January 8, 2014, the President announced the first five Promise Zones. They are located in San Antonio, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Los Angeles, California; Southeastern Kentucky; and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. These five Promise Zones include urban, rural, and tribal designees that will benefit from grant preferences, assistance in accessing resources, and access to on-the-ground federal partners to help them implement their economic and community development goals. A second round of Promise Zone designations is planned to open for solicitation in 2014. A minimum of five and up to fifteen designations will be made in this round. By the end of 2016, twenty Promise Zone designations are expected.

To learn more about the Promise Zone Initiative, please go to <https://www.onecpd.info/promise-zones>. To provide written comments on the proposed selection process and criteria, please go to <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-04-17/pdf/2014-08772.pdf>.

### *100 Outstanding Projects for the 21CSC in 2014*

Submit your good work and receive national recognition for your EWDJT program. Our EWDJT programs qualify for recognition. For each of the 10 weeks between April and early June, the Partnership for the 21CSC (P-21CSC) will feature an outstanding 21CSC project. In early June, the P-21CSC will announce the full list of *100 Outstanding Projects for the 21CSC in 2014*. Projects can occur anytime in 2014, and can be with any type of land/water agency partners—federal, tribal, state, local, non-profit, etc.

To add your program to the list, click to this URL, fill out the short form, and submit.  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1P2dFGYTB8tAH>.

### **Additional questions regarding the use of tablets in EWDJT programs**

For those who missed the April 9 PLC, Sarah Ashbrook and Pamela Scherer with Florida State College at Jacksonville shared with the PLC their experience using Nook tablets to cost effectively deliver curriculum to program participants.

Here is how the program works:

1. Each participant is issued a refurbished Nook (approx. \$89) upon signing an agreement of responsibility.
2. Each Nook has been preloaded with curriculum and reference materials. This requires a tablet that, when plugged into a USB port, will show up as an external hard drive such that curriculum can be dragged and dropped into the memory from a master computer. USB splitters allow this process to be done quickly (4 or 8 at a time).
3. Students must register their Nooks with Barnes & Noble, but are not required to provide a credit card (extremely important).
4. Each student sets up an email account.
5. Supplements and revisions can be emailed to students as required.
6. Upon graduation, students keep their Nooks.
7. Emails, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter can be used for:
  - a. Job placement and advancement opportunities.
  - b. Graduate tracking, applicant referrals, and potential job openings.

- c. Alumni events, graduations, and recertification training.
  - d. Certification updates and new curriculum useful to graduates.
  - e. Networking among graduates.
  - f. Program announcements and information.
8. Devices are not insured. The program keeps about five extra Nooks (used by staff). Loss rates have not been excessive to justify insurance. (Two-year service agreements are available for around \$28.)

#### Issues in selecting a tablet for curriculum delivery

In the case of Florida State at Jacksonville, Barnes and Nobel stores are easily accessible for WiFi, additional apps, and technical assistance. The refurbished Nooks have proven an excellent choice.

Other brands may also work such as Hisense, Dragon Touch Venturer, RCA, or Nextbook. Most of these use 1.2 ghz processors with Android operating systems and can be purchased refurbished for under \$100. (Check out Amazon.com tablets for options.) Service contracts are available at SquareTrade.

Keep the following issues in mind:

1. Curriculum must be in PDF format and "copyright-cleared."
2. Memory: 8 gig with the option to expand with extra flash memory cards.
3. USB port with the ability to connect to a host computer for initial curriculum download.
4. WiFi and email enabled with compatible formats and available curriculum.
5. Android-compatible (to download additional apps).
6. Protective case (preferably with charger pocket).
7. Students must be willing to sign a "responsibility" contract.
8. Limited training is required for proper care and use of the tablets.

On completion of the program, students keep their Nook for future reference, networking, and updates.

Thanks, Pam and Sarah, for your progressive approach, research, and justification to EPA for replacing printed curriculum with tablets. Pam and Sarah would be happy to discuss their program including use of Nooks for training delivery.

Florida State College at Jacksonville  
601 W. State Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Pam Scherer  
904.633.5933  
[pscherer@fscj.edu](mailto:pscherer@fscj.edu)

Sarah Ashbrook  
904.633.5976  
[sarah.ashbrook@fscj.edu](mailto:sarah.ashbrook@fscj.edu)

#### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Next PLC Session:        May 7, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. EDT

Feel free to invite a guest! Send your contact information to Mike Senew at [msenew@aol.com](mailto:msenew@aol.com).

Visit our *Brownfields Toolbox* Web site at <http://www.brownfields-toolbox.org> for more information on Brownfields Job Training programs. All PLC session notes and recordings are also located on the *Brownfields Toolbox* Web site at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/>.

**NOTE:** The PLC brings together ideas and opinions of individuals interested in environmental workforce development and training. Ideas and opinions are not those of EPA, its policy or opinions and should not be taken as official guidance.