

DEVELOPING A EDUCATION CHARACTRIZATION PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

The instruction of our children in all aspects of fire and life safety was an imperative function of the fire prevention bureau of the Flower Mound Fire Department (FMFD). The problem was that the FMFD did not have an effective fire prevention education program. The purpose of this research paper was to identify the criteria needed to develop a fire and life safety education program utilizing characterization, clowns and/or puppets.. Evaluative research was used in preparing and answering the following questions:

1. Why utilize characterization, clowns or puppets in fire and life safety education?
2. To what level were the FMFD personnel trained in educational methodology?
3. What training programs were available to train personnel in characterization, clowning and/or puppetry?
4. What subject matter was being taught in other fire and life safety programs?

The procedures used to complete this research project utilized a review of literature pertaining to why clowns were utilized in fire and life safety programs and what training programs were available in characterization, clowning and/or puppetry; evaluation of personnel FMFD personnel records to determine courses taken in educational methodology; and, a feedback instrument given to fire departments throughout north Texas. Finally, an analysis of the data gathered in the feedback instrument was conducted.

The results of the research demonstrated that clown programs were effective. That FMFD personnel had adequate training in the basic educational methodology and that there were several programs that offered specialized training. Finally, it identified general subject matter that should be included in training programs.

The recommendations of this research paper were that the FMFD should start a clown program; establish a safety team that would present the programs; provide every effort to provide specialized training and include identified subject matter identified in the research in the programs.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ABSTRACT.....2**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS.....4**

**INTRODUCTION.....5**

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE..... 5**

**LITERATURE REVIEW.....7**

**PROCEDURES..... 11**

**RESULTS.....13**

**DISCUSSION.....16**

**RECOMMENDATIONS.....18**

**REFERENCE LIST.....20**

**APPENDIX A (FEEDBACK INSTRUMENT).....22**

**APPENDIX B (STATISTICAL RESULTS).....23**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The problem is that the Flower Mound Fire Department (FMFD) does not have an effective fire and life safety education program. The purpose of this research paper is to identify the criteria needed to develop a fire and life safety education program utilizing characterization, clowns and/or puppets. This is an evaluative research project. The research questions are:

1. Why utilize characterization, clowns or puppets in fire and life safety education?
2. To what level are the FMFD personnel trained in educational methodology?
3. What training programs are available to train personnel in characterization, clowning and/or puppetry?
4. What subject matter is being taught in other fire and life safety programs?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

At the present time, the FMFD does not have an effective fire prevention education program. In the past 5 years, FMFD fire prevention education programs in the elementary schools have become mundane and ineffective. The programs are have become predictable and the students are bored. When asked after a presentation, one student stated, "I knew everything the fireman was going to do before he did it." Currently, FMFD utilizes on-duty firefighters to present the fire prevention education programs at the schools and other events. The officer, on the assigned piece of equipment assigned to do the program, assigns which firefighter would conduct the program that day, often the rookie. This policy has lead to inconsistencies in program content and unprepared presenters. The primary focus of the program is allowing the children see the firefighters dress in turnouts and view the fire engine. In the future, FMFD educators must posses the knowledge, skills, and ability to present effective and memorable programs. This study is important to the department for four reasons. First, it identifies why a

program utilizing characters, clowns and/or puppets should be considered. Second, it identifies to what level department personnel are trained in education methodology. Then it will identify what types and where training is available to prepare our educators to conduct quality fire and life safety education programs. Finally, it identifies what subjects are being taught in other fire and life safety programs.

This Applied Research Project (ARP) relates to the organizational culture section being taught in the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy (NFA). There is a quote by Charles Burkell that simply states, “The climate or culture of an organization is analogous to the mortar in a brick wall. It can be so incredibly strong and supportive to the reason for the wall, or near a state of failure in need of change or repair...the effective leader is one who can assess, shape, and manage this mortar—to be a social architect. (NFA, 2001a).” This quote is very similar to the situation the fire and life safety programs are in within the FMFD. Our presentations are near the state of failure and are in need of immediate repair if the program is going to survive. This project will help the FMFD establish criteria to prepare and present quality fire and life safety education programs. The project will allow the department to identify personnel that have the necessary basic skills to be effective as educators and identify sources of training that are available to increase their skill as educators. The development of such a program will significantly change the educational content of fire and life safety programs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this paper evaluates why utilize characterization, clowns and/or puppets in presenting the fire and life safety programs; what type of training is needed and where that training is available; and what subjects matter is being taught at other fire departments.

On a national level, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is regarded as the “industry standard” for public fire and life safety educators. A review of the standard for fire and life safety educators was conducted to establish a basic list of necessary courses to insure our personnel are meeting the standards. The review revealed that no specific courses were identified in the standard; however there were a list of competencies was included for each level of certification (Association, 2000).

A standard for fire and life safety educators does not exist in the State of Texas. The Texas Commission on Fire Protection establishes a standard for fire service instructors. That standard does not consider fire and life safety educators as a separate group. The Commission does require a course in methods of teaching to become a certified instructor in the state. Other courses are recommended for advancement including several from the NFA (Protection, 2001).

We must educate the children and other citizens of our communities in the value of smoke detectors, home fire drills and other fire prevention tactics. In short, we must be able to overcome the complacent attitude that exists in our fire departments and in our society (Loud, 1989). The goal of all fire and life safety programs in the future should be creative so young minds keep expanding without becoming bored. The more adventurous and interesting a program is the better participation can be expected all parties involved. Clowning is a good, inexpensive, fun, entertaining way to educate the public in fire safety. All you need is to find someone who is a clown in your department. Purchase make-up and costumes and provide

training and you can get started. The development of a character is easier because you don't have to learn how to apply the make-up (Howell, 1995).

Many successful groups have utilized clowns, puppets, and characters to provide quality fire and life safety programs. Tiller and Friends, a clown/music/magic act based in Phoenix, travels the country amusing, delighting and educating schoolchildren about fire and life safety. For almost 20 years, firefighter Larry Neilson (a.k.a. Tiller), along with his buddies Sparks Ranger, Mr. Handy, Hector the Detector and Haz Mat Man, have demonstrated how to "stop, drop and roll" and what to do when a fire alarm sounds. Interaction plays an important role in Tiller and Friends, with children and teachers helping on stage by drawing maps of rooms and dropping and rolling when "on fire" (Hays, 1992).

A program developed at Children's Hospital National Medical Center utilizes puppets for teaching children at various levels of growth and development. Puppets increase the importance of the information by allowing them to dramatize and therefore ensure the children's attention. In a sense the puppet is a child and safely allows the other children to explore the burn experience (Chase, 1988).

The Oak Ridge Fire Department developed a public fire education program that utilizes comic strips. The comic strip is painted on the wall at the mall. The comic strip stars "Sootie, the Fire Smart Clown," and "Flash, His Faithful Assistant." Immolating the fire department clowns developed the stars of the strip. The comic strip started by asking a question in the newspaper, "Do You Know E.D.I.T.H.?" and then telling people to come to the mall for the answer (Davis, 1993).

The Arizona Fire and Burn Educator's Association have developed a program that assists communities in the state promote fire and life safety education efforts by providing training. The AFBEA sponsors a nationally know seminar every year in Bullhead City, Arizona. The seminar teaches educators how to develop and design clown and puppet programs. These programs allow educators to enhance presentations in their home communities (<http://www.afbea.org>). In conjunction with the AFBEA, a group of dedicated individuals started, Just for L.A.F.S., Inc., to provide similar training on a national level. This group is an international educational characterization society. The members of Just for L.A.F.S. (Life And Fire Safety) have dedicated themselves to reduce through educational puppetry, clowning and characterization, the loss of life, property and injuries caused by fir and/or other emergency situations. This is just part of their mission, they also provide a network for the exchange of ideas, publish articles, conduct seminars and workshops (<http://www.justforlafs.org>).

The Texas A & M Extension Service sponsors the annual fire school every summer at the university campus. One of the training programs dedicated to the education of fire and life safety educators is Fire Prevention VIII. The program provides training in educational characterization, make-up, puppets, improvisation and skit development. A portion of this course provides the participants to conduct a skit for the pubic on family night at the Fire School (Service, 2001).

In 1997, a group of Minnesota fire chiefs took a car and painted it as a racecar. The car would be utilized in fire prevention activities across the state as an attention getter. The decals on the vehicle, where sponsors are normally located, were fire prevention slogans. The plan is to utilize a "Sparky the fire dog" character, developed by the NFPA, to enhance the effectiveness of the presentations (Digest, 1997).

There are many instances where corporations have utilized characters, clowns or puppets to sell their products. The McDonalds Corporation centered an ad campaign on a clown, Ronald McDonald. The campaign was a great success in that the name recognition and the product identification went hand and hand. Ronald McDonald has grown to be an international icon for the hamburger chain ([www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)). Another corporation has developed a similar strategy by using a character. The Jack-in- the-Box Corporation used a character, Jack, as the center of its name recognition campaign. In the beginning, the character was just seen as a clown head located on the speaker box of the restaurant. In 1995, Jack came to life. The clown head is still the same as before but it has been placed on a human body to give it life and purpose. Jack has since become the CEO of the company and is the center of many successful commercials and promotions. Since the reintroduction, for example, over 17 million antenna balls have been sold ([www.jackinthebox.com](http://www.jackinthebox.com)).

A comprehensive review of the training records of FMFD personnel was conducted using the computer database available at the FMFD and Human Resource Department Training Divisions. The review is to identify courses our personnel have completed in educational methodology. The course list was based on but was not limited to the following courses: Methods of Teaching and any of the following NFA courses: Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs or Community Education Leadership (NFA, 2001).

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Literary Review**

This project is initiated by conducting a review of literature located in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy (NFA). The literature was utilized to answer question 1) why utilize clowns in fire safety education? It was also utilized to answer question 3) what training programs are available to train personnel in characterization and puppetry? References, trade journals, published texts, Executive Fire Officer (EFO) research papers, Internet, trade publications, federal and state statutes, and general publications were reviewed for this project.

### **Training Records**

Second, a computer review of the training records of FMFD company officers was conducted to answer question 2) to what level are the FMFD personnel trained in educational methodology? The training records of all Fire Department personnel were reviewed to develop a list of classes or courses that were taken previously. The course list included but was not limited to: Methods of Teaching and any of the following NFA courses: Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs or Community Education Leadership (NFA, 2001).

### **Feedback Instrument**

Finally, a feedback instrument (Appendix A) was developed and utilized to conduct a telephone survey of other fire departments. The feedback instrument was designed to answer question 4) what subject matter is being taught in other fire department programs? Questions one, two, and three of the feedback instrument are for demographic purposes. The remainder was used to answer the research question.

### **Population**

A convenience sample was used for this study. Fire Marshals and fire prevention educators in the North Texas area were surveyed. The total population for this study was 30 departments.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistics calculate and interpret the feedback instrument. Specifically, the raw numbers and the percentages are reported (Appendix B).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

This is a preliminary investigation and is not complete. Constraints in time are a limiting factor. Primarily, the initial standards list developed is not all encompassing. Other course materials listed by respondents of the survey were not considered as part of this study. Those courses will be evaluated at a future date if the program is implemented. The identified subject matter will be utilized as a starting point for the program. However, the subject matter utilized in fire and life safety programs must change with time and audience make-up. Lastly, every attempt was made to determine if the respondents were qualified to complete the feedback instrument.

### **Definition of Terms**

Characters – A person that portrays or adept at portraying a subordinate dramatic role whose mental or moral qualities are of the first dramatic interest.

Clown – a fool, jester, or comedian in a play or other entertainment. One who frequently or habitably plays the buffoon or engages in comedy.

Puppet – a small scale figure of a human or other living often constructed with jointed limbs, appropriately painted and costumed, and moved on a small stage by a rod or by hand from below or by strings from above.

## RESULTS

### Research Questions Answered

Question 1. Why utilize characterization, clowns and/or puppets in fire and life safety education? The research has identified several instances where the use of clowns, puppets and characters were utilized to produce a quality fire and life safety program. Tiller and Friends (Hays, 1992), Sootie and Flash (Davis, 1993) and the puppets utilized at the Children's Hospital (Chase, 1988) are prime examples of how children and adults react to the use of these medias to teach fire safety. These articles are a bit older, however, but the work cited is prevalent in many fire departments across the nation. I spoke to many people at conferences and meetings about their fire and life safety programs. The result of most of those conversations was that if your program utilizes clowns and puppets it will have a better chance of becoming successful. The research identified that national corporations have utilized clowns and characters to their benefit. The name recognition with product identification promotes the products they sell. McDonalds has been the most successful at this venture. It has evolved from a small hamburger chain into an international corporation ([www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)). It was also identified, that the Jack in the Box Corporation has had a great success since the return of Jack, as a person ([www.jackinthebox.com](http://www.jackinthebox.com)).

Question 2. To what level are the FMFD personnel trained in educational methodology? A comprehensive search of the FMFD and Town of Flower Mound Human Resources Department training databases was conducted. The search was conducted to determine which personnel have attended any of the following training courses: Methods of Teaching, and any NFA course related to fire prevention education that included but not limited to Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs or Community

Education Leadership. The records search indicated that 22 personnel have taken courses to be adequately trained to present effective fire and life safety education programs. Five personnel have attended Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, 18 have attended an accredited Methods of Teaching course, and three have attended the NFA resident course: Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs.

Question 3. What training programs are available to train personnel in characterization, clowning and/or puppetry? The State of Texas (Protection, 2001) and the NFPA (Association, 2000) do not mandate specific training for fire and life safety educators. Both agencies do not recognize the use of characters, clowns or puppets in the presentation of fire and life safety programs. However, they do establish general guidelines that can be utilized as a starting point for educational competency.

Fire Prevention VIII, offered at the annual fire school at Texas A & M University, presents introductory classes in educational characterization, make-up, skit production, use of puppets, and improvisation. The course is presented during summer fire school at Texas A & M University every summer the last full week of July (Service, 2001). The lead instructor, Keith Tanner (Fire Marshal; Round Rock, Texas), is well known for his innovations in the fields of characterization and clowning. In a conversation with him, he told me that the use of clowns, characters and puppets in their fire and life safety programs allows them to extend the schools programs to almost an hour in length. Before they used clowns, characters and puppets, he said the children would become bored and disinterested in less than 20 minutes (Tanner, 2001).

Just for L.A.F.S. (Life And Fire Safety) is an international educational society. This organization was developed to provide training for fire service clowns and puppets. They conduct training seminars across the nation on an as needed basis. They conduct seminars in

Texas, Arizona, and North Carolina at different times during the year. Part of their mission statement follows: to reduce through educational puppetry, clowning and characterization, the loss of life, property and injuries caused by fire and other emergency situations; to provide a network for the exchange of ideas and resources for Life And Fire Safety educators; and to promote educational resources among Life And Fire Safety educators and to coordinate and promote educational resources of life safety education for children of all ages (<http://www.justforlafs.org>).

The Arizona Fire and Burn Educators' Association (AFBEA) is committed to assisting communities in promoting fire and life safety education. They host an annual Educational Characterization Through Clowning & Puppetry Seminar every February in Bullhead City, Arizona. Subjects included in the seminar include but not limited to: make-up for white face, auguste, and hobo (tramp); improving your skits; prop building; training with puppets; puppets in education; puppet manipulation; stage presence; magic; canned music; and foam puppet building. This seminar is in its fifteenth year and is known nation wide for its excellence. The seminar has become so popular; it is now a "train-the-trainer program, allowing the attendees to take their knowledge back to their communities and teach others who may be unable to attend (<http://www.afbea.org>)

The NFA also has courses that can be utilized in training our personnel. Presenting Effective Public Education Programs course teaches newer educators their responsibilities in the education process. The course was developed to place emphasis on the presentation skills needed to present an effective program. Developing Fire and Life Safety Strategies course focuses more on course development and selection of the appropriate educational materials necessary for an effective delivery (NFA, 2001b)

Question 4. What subject matter is being taught in other fire department programs? A feedback instrument was developed and presented to a convenience sample of 20 north Texas fire departments. Of the departments surveyed, 100% of the departments contacted participated in the survey. Eight respondents (40%) reported they do not utilize clowns, puppets or characters in their fire prevention activities.

### **DISCUSSION**

The research revealed there is a place in the fire and life safety education programs for clowns, puppets, and characters. If you look at many very successful programs they utilize the character, clown, and/or puppets as an attention getter (Digest, 1997). Take a look at one of the most recognizable clowns in the world, Ronald McDonald. He was developed as a lure to bring children to McDonalds. If the children want a particular fast food and bug their parents enough they usually get what they want ([www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)). The NFPA has utilized a well-known character as its recognition symbol for many years, Sparky the fire dog. Sparky has become such a symbol; I have seen children refer to any Dalmatian dog they see as “Sparky.” These are prime examples of how industry has utilized the characters, clowns and/or puppets to promote their products. The fire service is slow to follow their lead, but I believe many departments across the nation have finally realize the value of developing programs that utilize characters, clowns and/or puppet. A quote by Ray Kroc of McDonalds corporation simply states: “ where there is no risk, there can be no pride in achievement” ([www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)). This is the way I feel about this venture, we must take a chance in order to improve our fire and life safety programs.

The review of the records revealed, many of the FMFD personnel have taken the initiative to increase their knowledge in the area of education. Although there are no required courses of instruction mandated to become a fire and life safety educator (Association, 2000;

Protection, 2001). The research has determined there are quality courses of instruction available. The courses identified and utilized for the preliminary list are: Methods of Teaching, Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs and Community Education Leadership (NFA, 2001b).

The research into training programs revealed, there are many quality-training programs offered for personnel to get specific training in developing programs and educational characters. The programs identified by the research are: Educational Characterization Through Clowning & Puppetry Seminar by the AFBEA ([www.afbea.com](http://www.afbea.com)), Fire Prevention VIII at Texas A & M (Service, 2001), Just for L.A.F.S. seminars ([www.justforlafs.com](http://www.justforlafs.com)), Presenting Effective Public Education Programs, Developing Fire & Life Safety Programs, and Community Education Leadership (NFA, 2001b). There are others across the country that are not as well known. People that have programs recommended the referenced courses to me. My budget for fire prevention training activities is very limited, therefore, I must select courses that are available and within my budget structure.

The feedback instrument revealed percent of the respondents of the convenience sample had a fire and life safety program, but only percent have clown programs. It is interesting to note that percent of the respondents having clown programs require or have pre- requisites to join the safety team. Many departments recognized the need for training in this area but like us they have limited budgets to send their people away for training.(Feedback instrument).

The implications of the research indicate the FMFD may be in a favorable position to change the fire and life safety program from a liability to an asset by introducing characters, clowns and/or puppets into the fire and life safety programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The FMFD should develop a clown program to aid in conducting fire and life safety education programs at the schools and other events in the community. The use of clowns, puppets and characters will make the programs more interesting, therefore, more memorable. The attention that clowns command, just by their mere presence will increase the attention span of the audience resulting in better attenuation of the fire safety message being presented.

A fire safety education team should be established of individuals that have; the basic knowledge in education methodologies and a desire to increase the effectiveness of the programs being presented. The team should be made up of individuals that are willing to work hard in developing and presenting interesting and educational programs. The citizens must be provided with a product that they can enjoy and remember. In the future, FMFD personnel that wish to join the safety team should have to meet the expectations and approval of the established team members before they will be allowed to join.

The members of the fire safety education team should conduct all fire and life safety programs at the elementary schools within the Town of Flower Mound. A portion of the Fire Prevention Division Budget should be dedicated to the travel and education of team members. Members should be provided every opportunity to develop their clown, puppet or character. Every effort should be made to attend courses at Texas A & M, the NFA, and seminars conducted by the AFBEA or Just for L.A.F.S. organizations to provide an educational base for the development of the program and the safety team.

The programs developed by the team should be interesting and should cover basic subjects identified in the feedback instrument. The subjects of stop, drop and roll; get low and go; dial 9-1-1; two ways out and meeting place are old but still need to be taught to our younger

students. The team should stay apprized of current trends in fire and injury prevention. Subject matter should relate to the audience and age level the training is intended. One suggestion is to look at the new Risk Watch program that NFPA has developed.

In the future, the FMFD should conduct a follow-up evaluation to identify improvements in fire and life safety programs, based on this research. The programs should have a feedback instrument that is given to the teachers that attend. The instrument should evaluate the effectiveness of the program on identified outcomes; the associated learning that was to have taken place, and any suggestions for improvement. An instrument should also be developed for the students that are age/grade specific to determine if the projected learning outcomes were actually achieved. This instrument should be given sometime after the learning has taken place to measure retention of the materials presented.

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## Appendix A

## Executive Fire Officer Program

## Executive Development

I am Fire Marshal Jerry Bonner of the Flower Mound Fire Department. I am conducting this survey as a part of a EFOP class research project. The following questions are informational only to assist the FMFD in determining subject matter being taught in fire and life safety programs. Let me know if you would like a copy of the results.

1. What is the name of your department? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many personnel are in your department? \_\_\_\_\_ In prevention? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does your department have fire and life safety program in the schools? Yes No
4. Does your department utilize clown, characters or puppets in your programs? Yes No
5. IF yes, does your department require any pre-requisites to become a member of the prevention team? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What topics are included in your department's fire and life safety programs?
  - Dial 9-1-1
  - Stop, drop, and roll
  - Stay low and go
  - Meeting place
  - Two ways out
  - Kitchen safety
  - Bike/helmet safety
  - Electrical safety

## Appendix B

### Feedback Instrument Statistical Analysis

This feedback instrument sampled 30 fire departments in the North Texas region during a time period of August 10, 2001 to August 21, 2001. All 30 departments surveyed responded to the question for a participation rate of 100%.

Does your department have fire and life safety program in the schools?  
 Does your department utilize clown, characters or puppets in your programs?  
 Does your department require any pre-requisites for team participation?

Yes	No	%
25	5	83%
20	10	66%
15	5	75%

The following indicates what percentage of the departments that provide the fire and life safety education training irrespective of whether they have clown program or not.

Dial 9-1-1	25	100%
Stop, drop, and roll	25	100%
Stay low and go	23	92%
Meeting place	21	84%
Two ways out	21	84%
Kitchen safety	14	56%
Bike/helmet safety	6	24%
Electrical safety	2	8%