Improvising, Adapt and Inspire — this was the title of the keynote address at the recent San Diego Regional CATESOL Conference, presented by Dr. Michael Jones, Division Chief of Training, Testing, and Evaluation for the Office of Citizenship. I was very inspired by his remarks because he reminded us of the great challenge we face in inspiring our students to learn again. So many learners in our classes are refugees and immigrants who have suffered tremendous losses in their lives, which are in part what brings them to the United States. They have lost their careers, they have often lost loved ones in wars or are separated from their families and have lost so many aspects of their culture. According to Dr. Jones, who has studied brain research, losses such as these lead to a “loss of meaning” in our students’ lives. Restoring meaning is directly connected to the ability to learn. If we don’t facilitate the ability of our learners to restore meaning to their lives, it will be very difficult for them to learn English. So what can we do to help learners restore meaning in their lives and thereby open up to learn English? Dr. Jones provided these suggestions:

- Tie our lessons to our learners’ previous experiences. Help them remember what was important to them and strengths that they have.
- Keep the stress level down in our classrooms. Use humor where appropriate.
- Keep lessons short — in chunks.
- Have students work in pairs or small groups, which makes participation less threatening.
- Make learning active. Use TPR (Total Physical Response) when appropriate. (The other evening, I visited an evening literacy class taught by Anna Armendariz, and I observed her do a 5 minute exercise regimen with her students that she does every night. I was amazed at the enthusiasm of her students in doing these exercises and could see the power of this physical activity in stimulating learning.)
Jottings Continued...

- Incorporate music into our lessons.
- Teach the patterns of our language and how they might compare to the patterns of their own languages. This helps learners find meaning in their new language. He also commented on the value of using graphic organizers to help learners organize their thoughts. (One of our own teachers, Magda Kwiatkowski, will be doing a workshop for us that she did at Regional CATESOL on the role of word order in English compared to other languages.)
- Use activities that build memory skills. This is especially important for older adults.
- Finally, don’t be shy to share your emotions with your students. If we model this in our classrooms, as Dr. Jones did with us, we will get to know our students better and help them restore the loss of meaning to their own lives.

While most of us are aware of the above strategies, it was good to be reminded of the power of these activities in the classroom. Walking away from his presentation, I was truly inspired and reminded of the awesome role we play in making a difference in our students’ lives. Here is one example from our own program:

ESL Classes do more than teach English

By Mozhdeh Fadavizad
Instructor, Beginning ESL class, West City Campus

I have an elderly student (Taji Mojabi) who thinks the ESL class has helped her overcome her depression problem. She has had this issue since her husband passed away. All her children are married and she was all alone by herself at home, so she decided to register in the ESL class at WCC. She has lived in the U.S. for 33 years, but never attended the ESL classes. Now, she feels good about herself and thinks she is doing something useful. She comes to class every day and stays until the last minute of class.
The following statistics were drawn from the annual Saber Report and CASAS testing results.

Enrollment:
For the second year in a row, enrollment declined to a total of 18,166 students, despite long waiting lists at some campuses. The inability to add classes due to budget cuts explains part of this decline. There was a significant decline in enrollment from Mexico, Vietnam, and Somalia from the previous year. The Cesar Chavez campus had the biggest decline in enrollment (-33%), while Miramar and Centre City had increases in enrollment.

Placement statistics indicate that for the first time there is a larger percentage of returning students entering our program than new students. The poor economy and immigration restrictions perhaps explain the declining number of new students entering our program.

Attendance:
The total number of attendance hours also declined (-12.7%), but we maintained an average class size of 26. The inability to hire subs certainly affects the total number of attendance hours.

CASAS Testing Results:
The good news is that despite declining enrollment and attendance hours, the number of learning gains increased by 2% from the previous year. This is due in part from the significant increase in benchmarks (+19%) from passed EL Civics assessments. 66% of our ESL students made a significant gain on CASAS tests. Kudos to all our teachers who worked so hard to get paired scores from their students. Without two scores, no gain can be measured. In 83 classes, 80% or more of the students had paired scores. One instructor, Cindi Hartman, had paired scores from 100% of her students. Congratulations, Cindi.

More Good News:
With increasing CASAS learning gains for the past two years, our WIA (Workforce Investment Act) 231 grant award is the largest ever this year – more than 1.7 million dollars. It is ironic that as our state funding decreases, our federal grant award increases from year to year, and unfortunately, we cannot use our grant funding to open more classes, but we can use it to support the quality of our program through providing new technology, instructional materials, professional development, and student support services.
By Barbara Raifsnider, Assistant Program Chair

Centre City

New Office Manager—The biggest change to Centre City this year has been having Karen King as our new office manager. It’s really been an asset for us to have someone in charge here who knows our program inside and out. She’s a super office manager and all the teachers are happy to see her on campus every day.

Facebook—Several instructors have set up Facebook pages for their classes. Ann Marie Holzknecht and Donna Price pioneered Facebook class pages for the rest of us and are continuing with their current classes. Sandie Linn has started a Facebook page for Transitional English, and Barbara Raifsnider has a Facebook page for her level 6 class. It’s a great way to communicate with the students about homework assignments, projects and community activities as well as a forum for the students to interact with one another.

ESL Student Successes—Centre City’s own Joy Mergen, former student of Donna Price, Sandie Linn, Gail Satter and Barbara Raifsnider, won an award for the California Adult Education Student Succeed Project. Jose Ore, formerly a student of Barbara Raifsnider, won a 1st place and Best in Show for CD packaging at the 2012 San Diego County Fair (Click to see project). Two of Richard Weinroth’s students, Belen Fernandez and Leslie Gomez, won the positions for ASB Vice President and Secretary for Centre City.

Four of our current Centre City aides were formerly Centre City ESL students. Overath Bassa was a student of Barbara Raifsnider and Sandie Linn before he became our evening assessment aide, and before transitioning to the Auto Tech program at ECC. Elsa Lopez was in Richard Weinroth, Barbara Raifsnider, Sandie Linn and Donna Price’s classes before she began taking classes at City and before she became an assessment aide. Irene Sanchez was in Barbara Raifsnider, Gail Satter, and Sandie Linn’s classes before she became Sandie Linn’s classroom aide. Lubin Pineda was Gail Satter and Sandie Linn’s student before he started at City and before he became an aide in the front office. Lubin also works with Eileen Chung at Kimbrough Elementary School.

Chavez

Evening classes at Chavez are larger this semester. However, Chavez can still accommodate more students in levels 1/2, 3, and 4/5.

Elizann Senier has reported the following student successes from her class: Angelina Carrillo, is the new ASB President for Chavez; Angelica Escobedo, also attending GED either at ECC or CC; and Barbara Sousa (Castro) and Makaria Christou are both Citizenship students. Carlos Fuentes’ employer requires proof of attendance so Elizann is having him keep a daily journal in class that will teach him the terminology and English he needs for his job. Evarista Alvarez from Thomas Williams’ class has just passed her Citizenship test. Marina Vera’s student Luz Marina Becerra just recently had her BS in accounting revalidated to the English equivalency. Rosa Limon’s student, Antonio Ramirez Paz, was involved in the ASB sponsored Big Cleanup for 2012.
By Barbara Pongsrikul, Assistant Program Chair

This is my second year as the Assistant Program Chair at the North City/LVPC Campus. We have been teaching, cleaning, meeting and then cleaning again, meeting again and we are finally almost ready for our move to the San Diego Continuing Education Mesa College Campus coming up soon. The ESL instructors at the LVPC location are a very collaborative group, so our merge with the ESL instructors at the Clairemont location will provide us with a great team of instructors.

This year, our morning LVPC instructors in levels 1-5 are using All Star and the evening instructors are using Ventures. Students are able to see their progress when they are using the same core text series. Using the same core text series also helps to keep our ESL classes at the correct levels and encourages learner persistence.

We would like to welcome two new instructors this year to the LVPC campus. Gretchen Bitterlin, our ESL Program Chair, is team teaching with Lydia Hammett in the level 3 class. Gretchen was an instructor for many years at LVPC, so it’s very nice to have her back with us as we get ready for our move. Gretchen also presented at the fall regional CATESOL conference in San Diego.

The LVPC evening program is very busy with a couple of waiting lists with a couple of changes this year. Patty Griffitts is now teaching level 1-2 and Joyce Thompson is teaching level 5-6. Our evening instructor Diane Desroches is doing Program/Course completion certificates again this year and is still teaching level 3-4. Carolisa Morgan had some students pass their citizenship test in her Citizenship class that meets Monday and Wednesday nights.

Our offsite San Diego Continuing Education Bridging Lab at Mesa College has moved to Room I 4-203 on the Mesa College Campus. We would like to welcome Lori Saldana who is team teaching this class with Ann Gianola. We look forward to sending more of our ESL students to the bridging lab when we move to the new building at the Mesa Campus.

During this busy time with teaching, El Civics, CASAS testing, and preparing for the move, I would like to personally thank all the instructors and especially the instructional aides. Our ESL instructional aides Gladys Gonzalez, Celia Lujan, Cuong Nguyen, and Tomas Paz help us with so much everyday in the ESL placement office at LVPC, in the computer lab and in the classrooms. We are very appreciative of their continued dedication to the LVPC ESL program.
This fall semester the West City Campus Point Loma and Clairemont Campuses are off to a great start with many students wanting to get into an ESL class. We have waiting lists at both sites. The common theme that I see at both of these sites this year is “teamwork”. Our instructors and aides work very well together and students notice this. The majority of instructors at the West City Campus are doing level completion certificates, and this helps keep the students motivated and involved in their own academic success.

In the spring 2012 Dialogue I reported that the West City Point Loma instructors Toni Fernandes, Liz Flynn and Mozdeh Fadavizad had students writing, writing and writing! Well, there is new student writing this year again hanging on classroom bulletin boards and on the ESL bulletin board in the main school hallway. These collaborative teachers always meet and talk about their students’ needs, so there are no gaps between the levels. Toni teaches level 6-7 and has students who still have problems asking questions, so her students are working on comprehension questions using the News for You newspaper. Liz’s level 4-5 students have reported having trouble using the phone in English, so Liz has students call her and leave a message in English. The students call Liz’s Google Voice number that sends the messages straight to her e-mail.

Mozdeh, our level 1-3 instructor at Point Loma, has a full class again teaching a challenging multi-level class. One of her students, an elderly woman from Iran, told me that her ESL class is what gets her out of bed in the morning and that her ESL class has changed her life (Mozdeh wrote about this student in this Dialogue). There was such joy on her face as she spoke about her experience attending her ESL class, and for me this is a good reminder of how our ESL classes transition students of all ages not only into careers and colleges, but back into the community.

The West City/Clairemont program is off to a fabulous start this semester with some waiting lists and enthusiastic students still enrolling ESL classes. The instructors at the West City/Clairemont Campus, levels 1-4, alternate using two core texts. This year the instructors have been using Ventures after using All Star the year before.

Our instructors participated in the following fall flex activities. Stephanie Thomas did a PowerPoint presentation that was well received. Currently Stephanie is in TIMAC (Technology Integration Mentor Academy) through OTAN and is working on a technology project that will provide training to our literacy instructors. Stephanie Thomas, Rheba Smith, and Magdalena Krupa-Kwiatkowski presented at the fall 2012 Regional CATESOL Conference in San Diego. Ann McCrory is co-chairing the Textbook Committee again this year and Magdalena Krupa-Kwiatkowski is now an ESL voting member for the SDCE Academic Senate.

Rheba Smith is the Clairemont ASB Advisor at Clairemont again this year. The ASB is busy with fall activities like the Halloween pumpkin carving contest and the upcoming Food Bank Drive that begins on November 1st.

Our West City Clairemont Evening Program, levels 1-4, is also using the same core text Ventures this year. We welcome a new teacher to the Clairemont evening program, Carl Luster, who is
teaching the Level 5-6 class. Carl comes from the San Diego Continuing Education Bridging lab at Mesa College. We would also like to thank Neil Dewse who has been a long-term sub in our level 4 evening class.

Both the West City Point Loma and Clairemont Campus ESL Programs have been very busy with the new online registration at the Point Loma location and getting ready to move from the Clairemont location. The new online registration at the West City/Point Loma ESL program has been running smoothly, and we continue to improve our ESL placement process.

The West City Clairemont Campus and the North City Linda Vista ESL Program will be moving to the new San Diego Continuing Education Mesa College Campus. The West City/Clairemont ESL instructors and aides have been cleaning, purging, meeting and discussing our big move to the Mesa Campus. I want to thank all the instructors and instructional assistants at the West City Campus for their patience and understanding during this busy time.

In addition to the important role our faculty plays in our West City ESL Program, our dedicated instructional assistants help our ESL program in many ways. We are very fortunate and grateful to have such a great team of instructional assistants: Jennifer Bennett, Martha Gomez, Nga La, Tomas Paz and Saeed Abdollahi.

The way the budget has been, we haven’t had the opportunity to welcome many new faculty to ECC in the past few years, but this fall, ECC said welcome back to Ingrid Greenberg, CE’s new Academic Senate President. Ingrid is splitting an evening class on Monday and Tuesday with Bob Johnston and team teaching on Wednesday mornings with Wes Popham. Thanks for taking on that leadership role and being so flexible with your assignment, Ingrid.

ECC would also like to publicly thank another very special lady on our campus, volunteer Stephanie Jaret. Stephanie is a retired BIT teacher who has been volunteering on campus for several years. Most recently, she has been working with small groups of students who want to improve their English conversation skills. Stephanie has two groups of students that she works with on a weekly basis. One group is in Beth Bogage’s Advanced Transition class, and another group is composed of members of our afternoon ESL computer lab who want to take an hour offline every week to chat with Stephanie and their fellow students about a variety of topics in a room connected to the lab. Thanks, Stephanie, for making a difference in so many people’s lives each week.

It may seem redundant that in every issue of Dialogue I have to thank our ESL office staff, “but come on,” they just helped to electronically pre-

---

**By Jim Brice, Assistant Program Chair**

---
register the entire student body this past August and are continuing to do so into the fall. So thanks Liz Hernandez, Eva Duenas, Janisse Hernandez, and Blanca Corona.

“The waaaaaaaaaiting is the hardest part,” to quote Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and I hope it’s not a heartbreaker, but at the writing of this Dialogue article, we still don’t know the outcome of the election or its long term consequences. Not knowing compels us to have two visions for the future: one dystopian and the other utopian. The dystopian vision of the future has CE with solid brand new ESL buildings, but they are empty with shackled doors, like the perhaps apocryphal story of the police station and jail in San Jose that was built, but which remains unstaffed, ironically, a prisoner of the state budget.

In the utopian version of the future, ECC is moving into our building very soon and offering more classes to meet the needs of our overflowing classes and sending unneeded, excess smart carts to other campuses.

I think that no matter what happens in the election, most of our ESL classes will be in the new southern wing of the ECC complex, up and running by the spring 2013 semester, and the election will be well behind us, hopefully just a scary nightmare like the one you had before the final exam that you aced!

Mid-City Campus Update

By Corinne Layton, ESL Assistant Program Chair

The ESL Program is off to a very strong start with full classes and waiting lists, which may be partially due to the early registration conducted in August. Our cadre of experienced instructors has remained constant; however, we have had a number of “in-house” changes in assignments this semester. Colleen Fitzmaurice has moved from level 2 ESL to the level 4 prevocational ESL class. Nonna Sadoudi, who has had an assignment in the evening program for many years, is teaching a level 2 ESL class in the morning. Harla Yesner has moved from an afternoon to morning beginning level ESL class at Marshall Elementary.

Leah Haeber, who previously taught the morning ESL class at Marshall Elementary, is currently teaching the level 1 ESL class in the afternoon. Veronika Norris has moved from the level 1 to level 3 ESL class in the afternoon. We’ve had some changes in instructors in the special subject ESL classes as well: Karla Rodas is teaching both the early morning grammar and conversation classes. Andrea Sperling is teaching the noon-time intermediate/advanced level conversation class, and Corinne Layton is teaching the noon-time intermediate/advanced level grammar class. Elaine Barrett is team-teaching with Anagit Traganza in the noon-time ESL Computer Lab, and Leah Haeber is teaching the mid-afternoon pronunciation/conversation class.

In addition, Thelma Moore who teaches the Literacy A class in the afternoon, should be commended for her presentation at the Regional CATESOL Conference on “Creative Ways to Promote Language Acquisition with Miniature Whiteboard.”

It’s hard to believe, but this is the seventh year Mid-City has been offering managed enrollment classes in addition to the more traditional open entry enrollment in both our morning and evening program. Currently there are 7 managed enroll-
ment classes in the morning program (levels 2-7 and VESL) and 4 managed enrollment classes in the evening program (levels 2-5). Last year the ESL Learner Persistence Committee administered a “Student Perception Survey” on managed and open entry enrollment to students in levels 3-7 at Mid-City. The study indicated that students were very satisfied in both types of classes with 92% of students in both managed and open entry classes feeling that their English has improved. The survey confirmed that the managed enrollment model is very effective in building community in the classroom. With limited enrollment periods, there are fewer students entering and exiting the class, promoting a stronger classroom community. The study showed that 89% of the managed enrollment students knew most of their classmates compared to 76% of the open entry enrollment students. Having a support system in the classroom can certainly have a positive effect on learner persistence.

The most significant change that has come to Mid-City this semester has been the implementation of online registration. In August we conducted two and a half weeks of online registration for students who had attended summer school as well as new and returning students. We had hoped that providing two weeks of early registration would make the fall online registration lines more manageable. Our ESL placement aides as well as other classified staff assisted with the online registration process, which took place in one of our ESL Computer Labs. We were pleased at the large turn-out of students who took advantage of the early registration. In addition, due to the large size of our ESL program, we continued to use our two ESL Computer Labs during the first two weeks of school for students who were unable to register in August. Implementing online registration requires thorough planning, thoughtful reflection and a willingness to make changes to address issues and problems that arise. The following suggestions are based on Mid-City’s experience with online registration:

- If your campus provides early registration, design a schedule that assigns specific times for specific classes/levels as well as optional times for students who cannot come on the assigned day. If you don’t have a schedule, you may end up with more students than you can handle on a given day. At Mid-City, summer school students were given a paper with information about the date, time and location of online registration for their class as well as some alternative dates/times.
- Get the word out to your students about the importance of getting a CSID Card and completing the online registration process. Both new and returning students who registered in August were able to go directly to their class and avoid the usual long placement lines on the first day of the semester.
- Make sure that you have adequate support staff to assist with online registration. Many of our students have limited English and computer skills and require one-on-one assistance.
- Realize that no matter how much planning you do, unexpected issues and problems will arise.
- Meet with your faculty and support staff to talk about those issues and come up with solutions to those problems.
- Implementation of the online registration process may vary from campus to campus, depending on the size of the program and resources available. For example, since Mid City has such a large ESL program, we had to use the ESL Computer Labs for online registration for two weeks with additional assistance from the classified staff. Other campuses may be able to conduct online registra-
tion in the Placement Office.

- If possible, begin the online registration process as a pilot with a limited number of classes to see how the process works and make any necessary adjustments prior to conducting online registration for the entire program.

Implementation of any new system is a team effort and requires input and support from all parties involved. I would like to thank Dean Alma McGee and Office Manager Jose Hueso for ensuring that we had adequate support staff. I would also like to express my appreciation to the following ESL placement aides and other members of the classified staff who have demonstrated great patience and expertise assisting our ESL students with online registration: Albina Velazco, Zakia Nassrat, Liliana Gonzalez, Abdisalaam Haji, Evarist Kharelimanana, Edilberto Mendoza, Noel Puga, Maribel Diaz, Jean MacDonald, Lori Carver, Carmen Moi, Maude Verdin, Nedra Augustine and Rita Avila.

---

**Mid-City Campus Evening Update**

*By Steve Gwynne, Assistant Program Chair*

The Mid-City Evening ESL program warmly welcomes two new teachers to our instructional team this fall semester. Anna Armendariz joins us in our Level B Literacy class and Kara Valenzuela teaches our ESL managed level 2. Meanwhile, seven levels of ESL instruction, VESL, and Citizenship are full. Students are also attending two popular specialty classes – a computer lab, taught by Elizabeth Osborn and Lynn Graver, and a conversation class with Marla Goldfine.

Mid City has made strides in teaching and technology integration. The ESL department has two new carts equipped with LCD projectors and Internet access available for teachers. Cassandra Heard and Elizabeth Osborn are already using the technology in their lessons. Special appreciation goes out to Cindy Wislofsky for bringing everyone up to speed on the technology and to Zad Pishyar for making it actually work.

Additionally, room 321 has a new Smart Board. Teachers Jane Cranston, Steve Gwynne, and Mimi Pollack are using this technology in exciting ways which include *Ventures Classware*, video (with subtitles), audio, etc. Especially interesting, was the representation of the Electoral College votes in a dynamic graphic that allowed students to see the ‘what if’ of various swing-state election scenarios. They were enthralled by the changing board. Furthermore, the graphics made a complex process easily understandable. However, teachers will need a little more practice to approach CNN John King’s level of expertise at manipulating the board. We can only dream. Thanks also go out to the mysterious elves that came in and solved the ‘light’ problem in room 321. ¡Gracias!

Our evening instructional assistants, Hector Salazar, Bianca Belmonte, Maria Elena Hernandez, Alan Lam and Abdisalaam Haji contributed greatly to the success of online registration. One of their innovative ideas was to divide the access codes into organized binders thus allowing us to have multiple sets in order to move between the computers in assessment, the foyer, and ESL labs. Great idea! And an additional thank you to all the staff and management who pitched in and assisted when needed.

Finally, waking up to a different election result reminded me of what Mark Twain once said, “Apparently there is nothing that cannot happen today.” It was a pleasant surprise.
Business is booming at Miramar! We gave placement tests to 777 students in August and September. This was accomplished by three very hard-working aides, Rosa Lopez, Abdullah Abdullah, and Van Pham.

Unfortunately we continue to have long waiting lists in both our morning and afternoon programs. As of October 31st, we have 211 students waiting to enter a class.

We are thrilled to now offer a total of three Transition to College classes at Miramar. Rose Babayan, who teaches Level 7 in the morning, and Madonna Ostrye who teaches level 6/7 at night chose to become part of the Transition team, since they have so many students with academic goals. Susan Morgan is continuing to teach the morning 6/7 Transition class. On the day of CASAS testing, every student in her class was at school, so she doesn’t have to do a single make-up test. I can’t quite imagine that!

We are so happy that Jean Washington is back on our ESL faculty. She is team-teaching the morning Level 1/2 class now and is also teaching our Saturday Beginning level class.

On a Saturday morning it’s really fun to drive through an empty campus and find our little corner, bustling with students attending our two ESL classes and one Citizenship class. We applaud our Saturday teachers, Jean Washington, Starlene Dahl and Donna Huchel, who not only do a superb job of teaching, but also serve as front desk staff, aides, and custodians!

WELCOME!

Mary LeDuc

WELCOME to MARY LEDUC, the new Administrative Technician for our ESL Program. Mary is replacing Karen King, who is now the new Office Manager at Centre City. Mary comes to this position with 18 years’ experience in the District as a Senior Account Clerk and Accounting Technician. She will be a wonderful guardian of our 231 budget and resource to all our faculty and staff. Her phone number is 619-388-4541, and her e-mail is mleduc@sdc.edu
New citizenship students enroll just as experienced citizenship students get ready to leave and later report back about successful interviews. We have a great group of citizenship instructors that are flexible and accommodating to meet the needs of all our students. We also appreciate a good working relationship with community agencies. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) collaborated with us to provide citizenship tutoring during the summer weeks when our program was cut short. Those students with July, August, and September interviews were grateful for this community assistance. Our citizenship teachers met together in late September to discuss course objectives for our citizenship completion certificate and to share the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) news and lesson ideas. Cindy Wislofsky highlighted updates from our citizenship public folders including many outstanding lesson materials created by Colleen Fitzmaurice, Lesley Robin and Rosaelena Pilco. We also previewed a new website, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institute and the USCIS. The website combines the USCIS 100 civics questions with historic images from the Smithsonian. Check out the website at http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/

**Tighter Security at Oath Ceremonies**

Because of the recent terrorist acts, like the movie theater shooting in Colorado this past summer, USCIS will now have security checks before Oath Ceremonies at Golden Hall and other venues. Tell students and their guests to expect longer lines and a longer wait. USCIS asks us to remind our students to leave at home items that may cause unnecessary problems like a pocket knife or large belt buckle-- things that are either prohibited or will set off the metal detector alarm.

**Issues with Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Policy**

The Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy will allow young people without legal status to work here for two years. The first applications for DACA opened August 15th and immigration lawyers report some problems to solve in the processing of these young people. Here is one example. Though a government issued ID is not required to apply for DACA, the DACA process includes fingerprinting, and a government issued ID is required to get into the federal building for the fingerprinting. This is a problem for some of the applicants. Many of these young people don't have government IDs from their native country. The Mexican Consulate will not issue IDs if only the mother is the custodial parent. Without the father verified, the mother cannot obtain a birth certificate or other government documents for the child. Lawyers are concerned that the young people will pay the $465 fee and then not be able to complete the process. The lawyers urged USCIS staff to forward their concerns to Washington.

**USCIS October Bi-Monthly Meeting News and Reminders**

**Report Immigration Status Change to the Social Security Administration**

ESL teachers and citizenship teachers, please remind your naturalized citizen students to report the change from being a permanent resident to U.S. citizen to the Social Security Office. Reporting this change to Social Security may help the student. One benefit is that employers check citizenship status with the Social Security Office, so updating immigration status may help in job hunting. Also, some disability benefits are only available to U.S. citizens. Updating the immigration
Citizenship Class for Seniors: Students' Hard Work Pays Off

By Rosa Elena Pilco

The fall 2010 article in the ESL Dialogue "Golden Door Citizenship Program Outcomes" reported the end of the one-year collaboration between the International Rescue Committee and our Citizenship program. Since then, the special Citizenship class for seniors 65 and older has continued as a regular class at Mid City campus. Now, three years later, the slower paced citizenship class geared toward older learners 65 and over with low to even advanced levels of English language proficiency has proven to be a success. Since December 2010, over 43 students have enrolled in the class each semester with an average class size of 28 per semester. At the end of each semester, at least 10 students have perfect attendance, never having missed one single day in 18 weeks! Most of the other students have only 1-5 absences throughout the semester.

The program has been a complete success with Citizenship test passing rates of 95%. It is a significant accomplishment for the Citizenship department but more importantly for the students. Most of them commute from downtown by bus three days a week.

The average age of the students is still 70 years old. During spring 2012, students demonstrated their ability to pass the history/government section of the naturalization exam by passing the CASAS History and Government test with a passing rate of 85%.

Highlights of the class over the past two years include the following:

At least 35 students took the Citizenship test and became citizens of the United States. The majority of the other students who are currently enrolled in the class have filed applications and are waiting for appointments.

To ease the students' anxiety about the naturalization test, a field trip was incorporated to the class syllabus. This is an opportunity for the students to see the building and to have an idea of what the real interview looks like. It has also contributed to helping them feel more comfortable and prepared for the interview.

The class had a special visit from USCIS during the fall semester 2012. Dr. Michael Jones, USCIS Office of Citizenship, came to visit the class to meet the students and learn about their personal stories. The students were excited to meet the USCIS representative who played an
important role in approving the grant to make this special class possible back in November 2009.

**Amazing Success Story:**
The oldest student in the class, Puguo Li from China, successfully passed the Citizenship test at age 87 after attending class for five semesters. He hardly missed any class, rain or shine, and although he was limited by his language ability, he made it his goal to study long and hard for the Citizenship test. His dedication was truly an inspiration to me and to his fellow students. As a teacher, I’m truly humbled and amazed by my students’ willingness to learn and dedication.

Puguo Li, 87 years old – Oldest student in class
Registered in Fall 2009–Passed his U.S. Citizenship exam in Fall 2012!
Oldest student: 80 years old
Youngest student: 58 years old
5 Students in their 50s
12 Students in their 60s
25 Students in their 70s
2 Students in their 80s

Student Becomes U. S. Citizen and Votes in Presidential Election the Same Day!

By Lesley Robin, evening citizenship instructor

Mid-City citizenship student Abbas Noor began attending the evening class in the 2012 summer session. He attended regularly and also enrolled in the fall semester.

Abbas, who is a 32 year old refugee from Somalia, had his naturalization interview on September 28, at the USCIS Chula Vista office. He passed the interview and then was scheduled for his naturalization Oath Ceremony on October 24 at the San Diego Civic Center, downtown.

As most students do, Abbas returned to report to his classmates about his naturalization interview. Students get a flag lapel pin from the teacher when they come back to class with a “you passed!” report.

He also came to class on the evening of his Oath Ceremony. He brought his new U. S. citizenship certificate to show his classmates. To the teacher’s surprise, he had an “I voted” sticker on his jacket, next to his flag lapel pin. How could he have voted so quickly?
In Abbas’s words:

At the oath ceremony, someone from the voter registration people told us that right after we were citizens, we could register to vote. They also said we could vote today, but only at their office.

So, after the ceremony, I went to their big, long table inside the building. They helped me fill out the form. I showed them my new certificate. When I registered, I picked a political party. When I walked outside the building, the Democrats and Republicans both wanted to talk to me. I told them I had picked a party and was going to go vote now.

I was happy. I promised myself that if I passed and had my Oath Ceremony, I would vote as soon as possible.

The registration people gave me a receipt number. They gave me directions and a map to the voter office (Registrar of Voters office in Kearny Mesa). They said to wait one hour and then drive there.

When I got to Ruffin Road, there was a long line of people outside the building. Someone came out and asked for the new citizens. They gave us a short cut and we went inside. I voted on a paper, not on a computer. I didn't know about the other things on the ballot, but I knew which people I wanted to vote for.

After I voted, they gave me a sticker. After we walked back outside, some of the people waiting asked us who we voted for. Some people said who and some people didn’t. I was so glad I got my citizenship in time to vote.
By Jan Forstrom, EL Civics Coordinator

Teachers from the North City Linda Vista Campus report the following outcomes from doing the EL Civics Unit on Getting a Job (#33):

From Xanh Lam’s class, level 5 – Xanh was wondering why one of his students was so happy when she returned from her EL Civics speaking test. Apparently, she was just coming out of her mock interview test at school when her cell phone rang. She found out that she got the office clerk job that she had applied for the previous week.

From Valerie Long’s class, level 4 – One of her hearing impaired students applied for a job and the interviewer asked her one of the questions that she had been practicing all week for the EL Civics test – “How are your English skills?” She proudly answered, “My skills are good enough to do this job.” The good news – She got the job.

From Uta Cole’s class, level 7 – One of her students reported that a friend who was not in our program saw the student’s EL Civics booklet on getting a job and asked for it because she was looking for a job. What a great validation of our curriculum.

The following students from Sharon Javdan’s beginning level class at West City/ Clairemont wrote about their experiences doing the EL Civics unit on reporting a crime or emergency:

Shu Hua Li (May)

I had the El Civics Test on Tuesday. I went to the office. I was very nervous because I thought it was difficult. The test was very easy. I think El Civics was interesting. I learned to call the police and I can use what I learned when I have an emergency.

Walter Fuentes.

I think the El Civics Test was interesting because I learned how to call 911. I practiced with my partner. Now I know how to help other people in case of an emergency. I also learned that getting nervous in an emergency does not help.

Guadalupe Corona
EL Civics Cultural Lessons Inspire Fashion Show, Cookbook

Students in David Santana’s morning and afternoon classes at Miramar Campus took EL Civics lessons on cultural differences to a whole new height. David reports, “When we were studying Objective #11 on cultural differences, I really wanted to present the human aspect of culture… food, funerals, celebrations, how we dress … to focus both on how we are different, but also how we are all the same. The approach opened the road for a lot of communication. Students started sharing their political thinking, their religious thinking, thinking that was very personal.”

Class discussions related to clothing ranged from daily wear to traditional attire for formal celebrations to the meaning of color in various attire to variations in dress in urban regions vs. agriculture regions in various countries. But more meaningfully, the discussions about clothing led to very personal sharing about how clothing represents cultural and religious values, regard for women, joy and sorrow. A few students in the morning class suggested bringing in samples of attire from various cultures. A fashion show was born.

Students from different cultures worked together on various committees to prepare for the fashion show. Some researched and downloaded folk music from various regions that would “match” the attire modeled, other students with fashion background taught ladies how to do the “cat walk”, and still others researched and downloaded pictures of flags, etc., from represented countries to be projected on the wall as background to the fashion show. The actual fashion show took place in the classroom, and students teamed together to synchronize sound system, music, pictures, live modeling and narration. “The students did everything,” says David.

Students in the afternoon class were equally inspired and decided to share favorite family recipes as a way to share ‘who they are and where they come from.’ They, too, worked together to find recipes and pictures of prepared dishes online that matched a special dish that was meaningful in their personal lives or special to their region. The outcome was a class cookbook, “We Celebrate Life With Food.” Each of the 31 pages features not only a picture of the prepared recipe, but also a flag in the shape of the map of the represented country—“Another idea from students that was completely implemented by students,” reports the teacher. Each student wrote a narrative to introduce his/her recipe contribution to share how/why the dish is personally meaningful.

So how did all this come about from EL Civics lessons on cultural differences? David shares, “I believe when I stretch myself and push the students to their maximum capacity, they rise to the challenge.” Kudos to David Santana and all of his ESL students!
Staff Development Needs Assessment Results

By Gretchen Bitterlin and Cindy Wislofsky

Approximately 70 ESL instructors completed our annual staff development needs assessment. Below are the results, which will be the basis for planning staff development activities this year.

1. What technology training are you interested in?
   - 57% - Training on new classroom equipment, e.g. smart carts
   - 31% - Class webpages/ blogs, etc.
   - 30% - Internet lessons
   - 28% - Using the computer lab to support instruction
   - 25% - Using ESL computer software
   - 22% - PowerPoint

2. What face to face OTAN training workshops are you interested in?
   - 24% - Internet Resources for ESL Teachers
   - 22% - Creating web pages
   - 20% - Advanced PowerPoint
   - 20% - Social Networking for Adult Education
   - 20% - Teaching Critical Thinking for the Internet

3. In which form of staff development training are you most likely to participate?
   - 72% - Face to face workshops
   - 63% - One to one or small group sessions
   - 20% - Online trainings

Other results are as follows:

46% of the instructors stated that they plan to give course or program completion certificates in our continuing pilot program.

63% stated they would be interested in viewing short online videos on successful classroom strategies. 17 instructors said they would be willing to share a successful strategy via a short video. We will be contacting these instructors and moving forward to develop some of these videos. This will be a wonderful opportunity to share successful strategies from highly experienced teachers in a convenient way.

Finally, instructors shared their ideas for staff development or program improvement, such as the following:

“It would be beneficial to our program to have a meeting or workshop where instructors at all levels could work together on gaining more continuity and emphasis on student writing as students move from level to level.”

“It would be nice to have level meetings.”
“I’m interested in developing podcasts for my students.”

“I would like to have Skype in a computer lab to teach students to communicate via Skype.”

“The tricky part of staff development is providing opportunities for follow-up support as instructors go through the actual process of incorporating new strategies… Follow up mentoring and /or peer coaching may not be feasible considering the time commitment involved, but even something as simple as a follow-up on-line chat group would give instructors a chance to share their experiences.”

“Using Google sites or another free online provider, instructors could be taught to guide their students to set up and maintain an online portfolio that they could show to employers.”

“But counselors just for the transition classes.”

“Transition to college workshops and materials.”

“I would like to observe one or two ESL classes without using personal leave. I have always found peer observations helpful.”

---

**Student Success**

**CE ESL Student Wins Statewide Student Success Award**

In April 2012, Donna Price nominated Joy Nesem Mergen for the California State Adult Education Students Succeed project. This award is given to students who have reached one of their life goals as a result of adult education.

Joy was a math teacher from Ankara, Turkey before she moved to San Diego in 2006. She was alone and struggling, working 55 hours a week at three jobs, with no days off for months at a time. She found her greatest support coming from teachers and classmates at the San Diego Continuing Education (SDCE) Program where she was pursuing a career in nursing.

Joy’s pursuit of a career in health care was thrown off course by her lack of English writing and pronunciation skills. She often felt frustration and disappointment over her inability to communicate in written English. She spent hours toiling over essays for Sandie Linn's ESL Transition to College class and Gail Satter's Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation class. Navigating the educational system was complicated and confusing for her. She worked 40 hours a week in a restaurant and went to school 30 hours a week. When she saw that many of her classmates were unable to pass the GED or college placement tests because they lacked math skills, she began tutoring them. This took up most of what little time was left during the week.
as a Technical Partner (CNA) at Scripps Mercy Hospital.

Joy has made many positive contributions to the community. Responding to an increasing occurrence of diabetes in the community and among her classmates in the spring of 2012, Joy, along with a physical education instructor at City College, created "Team D" (Team Diabetes).

She created fliers, set up a Facebook group and recruited students in college and adult education classes to join. With the help of others she posts events, workshops, videos, and classes on diabetes awareness, exercise, and food preparation specifically for diabetics. Joy is reaching out to the growing number of people who have this disease and is offering education and exercise to help them cope.

Joy is a true believer in the philosophy of giving back. She appreciates the education she received from adult school, and as a way of showing her appreciation, she volunteered in the VESL Personal Care Assistant class in the fall 2011 semester after she became a Certified Nursing Assistant. She helped the registered nurse instructor in the class demonstrate some of the technical skills to current VESL students. Her willingness to take time out of her busy college schedule was greatly appreciated by the teacher and students. She was a motivating force and role model to the students. "Last year, I was sitting where you are sitting now," she would tell them.

With the help of SDCE, Joy has met several of her life goals and established some new ones. When she started taking adult education classes in 2009, she knew she wanted to work in the health care field, but had no idea how she was going to achieve her goal. Now she is working as a health care professional and attending college. She recently decided to go to medical school and become a physician.

Joy admits she doesn't know where she would be now if adult education had not been available to her. She is extremely grateful and shares her experiences with friends and family and people in the community who might not have known about adult education, and now they are attending classes in pursuit of their dreams. Joy has been a fantastic voice for adult education.
Ann McCrory teaches level 5 at the Clairemont campus. She is using Ventures. Unit two teaches the students to write paragraphs about successful people they know. Ann was especially touched by the paragraphs her students wrote. Below are two samples.

My Successful Uncle

My uncle is the most successful person I know. He was physically disabled when he was born. He had just one arm. His family was very poor. His father's wages had to take care of their whole family, including his mother and seven brothers and sisters, so he couldn't finish high school. Even though it was difficult for him, he was always optimistic and never gave up. He passed the exams to become a high school teacher when he was 19. He used to write historical novels after working every day. Now he has five books published, and one of his novels was made into a movie last year. My uncle is a hero in my mind!

by Amy Choi

Great Scientist in My Country

Hideyo Noguchi had several obstacles on his road to success. He was born in a poor farm family, and his left hand was burned badly when he was an infant. After that, he lost the use of his left hand, and he couldn't work on a farm. His mother encouraged him to study instead of farming. He was smart and a hard worker, so he earned a scholarship and became a scientist. In addition, he was able to get an operation on his left hand after becoming an adult, and he became able to slightly use his left hand. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in medicine three times. Hideyo had faced many obstacles, but he became a great scientist.

by Mayuko Yagi

Richard Weinroth teaches a level 5 class at Centre City. At the beginning of the semester, students wrote about themselves for the purpose of creating a book of stories that would facilitate everyone getting to know one another. Below is one of the student stories.

(Written by Ayub)

I am from Afghanistan. I am married, and I have four beautiful girls. I have worked with Solace International a non-profit organization for over ten years. I enjoy working with them. In Afghanistan, I
worked in the construction department. We build seven girls schools and two internet classrooms in Afghanistan where for 2000 years no one constructed any girls’ schools. We talked with the community. They agreed to start to educate the girls. Sadly, in 2006 my family began receiving death threats. I am a man of integrity, and was unwilling to sell my daughters into marriage to the local military commanders. In order to ensure our safety and escape the threats of violence, Solace International facilitated the relocation of my family to Malawi, Africa. When I went to Malawi, I changed my position. I worked on a fish farm. It was the most successful fish farm in the country. I was careful with my work. I checked it twice to be sure that everything was complete and correct. Malawi was good to my family in the short term, but becoming Malawi citizens was not an option. I feared that because the family could not receive citizenship we would be sent back to Afghanistan, where we would certainly be killed. Because I was a dependable, friendly, and had been successful in my work, Solace International invited me here to the United States for fundraising. When I came here, I found this to be the greatest country in the world. I found real life and freedom. I know what the meaning of life is now. I found where there is education there is peace. For now, I am very happy that I am going to school and have kind, friendly, patient, and helpful teachers. I would like to improve my English skills. I would like to learn more and work better.

Below is a writing sample from Steve Gwynne’s Level 5/6 class at Mid-City Campus.

“My successful husband” by Nadia abdi

Abdelrahman is my wonderful husband. He’s also a great father. He has had many obstacles on his way to success.

His father died when he was 16 years old of a heart attack. He had eight siblings three brothers and five sisters. His mother was an amazing woman, instead of crying, she decided to work. She took care for all the family. Abdel also decided to help his mom. He worked after school at a gas station and studied in the morning. He was proud that he gave her a helping hand.

He finished high school with distinction, and they gave him a free scholarorship. He chose medical school to be a doctor, to help people.

He finished the university the top of his class. Now he is working with Doctors without Borders this organization help people in conflict areas in all of the world. For him success doesn’t mean money it means making a difference in the world.
By Sandie Lynn

The students in the ESL Transition to College class at Centre City and the students in Chris Stone’s ESL Transition to College class at Mid-City Campus are participating in a Facebook group called ESL College Transition – San Diego. Each week I upload an article that relates to transitioning to community college to the Facebook page. After reading the article, the students post their comments. So far, they have voiced their opinions about waiting lists for college classes, community college budget cuts, Propositions 30 and 38, and the advantages of getting an AA degree. By using Facebook in this way, they have become comfortable with sharing their views and being open to the different views of others in the Facebook group.

Personal Care Assistant Students Attend Resource Fair at City College
By Donna Price

On Friday, Oct. 26 from 8:30-1:00, Donna and about 20 of her students attended a conference at City College called "Finding the Balance in Caregiving," sponsored by the Caregiver Coalition of San Diego. Since Donna's class doesn't meet on Friday, it was especially gratifying to see students take the initiative to attend this conference on their own time. There was a resource fair with giveaways and employment information in addition to four workshops offered during the morning. A few of the excellent workshops were, "Managing the Emotional Aspects of Caregiving" and "Responding to Sensory Loss in our Loved Ones." When Donna asked the students to tell her one thing they took away from the conference, many of them said, "If we want to be good caregivers, we have to remember to take care of ourselves emotionally and physically."

Teaching Tips

On Giving Presentations
By Barbara Raifsnider, ESL Level 6, Centre City Campus

Now that oral presentations are a requirement for the course completion certificates for levels 6 and 7, I decided to look for a book that would help train my students in the art of giving oral presentations. Of the available materials, only the Present Yourself series looked about right for our students. This is a two level series which includes Present Yourself 1: Experiences and Present Yourself 2: Viewpoints from Cambridge University Press. I chose Present Yourself 2 for my low advanced class. Book 2 has 6 units and one introductory unit called “Getting Ready.” Getting Ready has the students do a simple classmate introduction while standing at their seats to help them gain confidence for giving a more serious presentation in front of their classmates.

The first unit of book 2 is called “A Motto for Life”. In this unit, a variety of mottoes and personal values that support each motto are introduced. There are some simple step-by-step activities to
help the students understand the outlining process and note cards. There’s a model of a presentation with its outline, and practical phrases for the students to use in their presentation. Unfortunately, there are no notes to go with the sample presentation. However, we used the sample presentation and made the notes for it together as a class.

The first time students wrote outlines their sentences often rambled and didn’t get to the point. To guide them through this, I took them back to the outline in their books and pointed out the language used there. I also pointed out that the book had information presented in short phrases and sentences. Sometimes I had to go back several times with the same students. I also told them that Americans need the speaker to get to the point right away. Once I repeated this often enough, the idea of getting to the point seemed to help a lot.

When I started checking their note cards, most of the students had left off some important pieces of their introduction. Even though I showed them what was missing and their notes now included key words and phrases for their introduction, there were still some students who launched right into the body of their presentation with no introduction at all. Some of the presentations were too brief, and some didn’t flow very well, but there were several that were really well presented. Everyone shared something interesting about their lives, and they usually shared some difficult experiences. It was a wonderful opportunity for building empathy among them.

During their presentations, I noted my observations on a rubric provided by the book. Afterwards, I gave them my notes, being sure to share something well done and something to work on with each of them. Since this was the first presentation many of my students had ever given, I decided not to use it for their certificate and passed all of them just for being able to stand up in front of the class and share their motto. As a follow up, I used the same topic and outline for an in-class essay.

Their next presentation will be based on a survey they will design and use on their classmates. I anticipate that these presentations will be even more interesting, better organized, and better presented than their first one since the students will have gained so much more of the necessary confidence and skill for giving oral presentations.

Using Google Voice
By Liz Flynn

This semester, after hearing the common complaint from students that they have a lot of trouble using the phone in English, I decided to give an assignment to call me and leave a message. I don’t feel comfortable giving out my cell phone number in class, so I used a Google Voice number that sends the messages straight to my email.

I pointed out in class that nobody would ever answer this phone - it’s voicemail only. For some students, this eased some of the nervousness they felt. The first assignment was just to call, identify themselves, and then leave a simple message either telling me which days they can usually come to class and what time, or which day they wouldn't be able to come to class in the future and why.

Most students, of course, completed this task successfully. But in listening to the messages, I discovered that many students (naturally) introduced themselves very quickly, and sometimes their names were difficult to understand. In class we practiced slowing down and speaking clearly when leaving messages.

I’m planning some more challenging tasks for the future - having students make polite requests, leave detailed information, and explain a problem.
A Good Writing Textbook
By Marcy Bergqvist, Instructor, ESL 7, Centre City

I haven’t been happy with the reading texts or the mix of writing texts I’ve used these past 10 years teaching Levels 6 and 7. This year I found one stashed in a cabinet, and I decided to try it out: Great Essays. It was an old book, not a new edition, written by Folse, Muchmore-Vokoun, and Solomon. I started out with parts of the first two chapters, and then decided to follow the text and the exercises on writing a narrative. This book used several examples of well-written narrative essays in both the presentation and the exercises. I included a personal one of my own in an oral version.

After analyzing the examples, they wrote the various parts of the essay—the hook, the introduction, the supporting details for the topic sentences given for each of the supporting paragraphs, and the conclusion, including what the character learned from the experience, or how it influenced him or changed his life. Then came the assignment, which was to write an essay about something that happened to them that changed their life in some way.

There was no grumbling. Instead I received the best set of papers I have ever received from a class of advanced students. Some, I have to admit, brought tears to my eyes. We’re working on other writing tasks right now, but I’m going to try using this text again for another chapter and another kind of essay. I’m crossing my fingers!

Writing activity from Miramar College Writing Workshop
By Barbara Raifsnider, Centre City Campus

In August, Gretchen and I went to a workshop on writing at Miramar College. While she and I were the only ones representing SDCE, there were English teachers from high schools, junior colleges and colleges and universities all over the county. Gretchen and I both came away feeling like we’d gotten a lot out of the workshop. One activity we did as a group really impressed me a lot, so I tried it with my students because it covered reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. I’d like to share what I did in my class using this model.

Just as the school year was about to start, I found a very interesting article in Parade Magazine in a section called How We Learn. This was a true/false quiz on how to study with each correct answer immediately following the question. Before I passed out the article, I went over the vocabulary that I thought might be new for them, then I passed out the article and told them they would have five minutes to read. I knew they wouldn’t finish in five minutes, but reading the whole article in class wasn’t my goal. After five minutes, I asked them to stop reading and write for an additional five minutes about something new they learned from the article. When that five minutes was up I asked them to turn to their neighbor to begin sharing the something “new” that they had just read about. There was a very lively discussion that followed, but I stopped them after five more minutes and asked them to write for another five minutes on something new they learned from their partner. Again, I stopped them after five minutes and had the same pair join with another pair and discuss what they had written about for five more minutes.

Once I brought the whole group back together we then discussed some of the interesting things that came up during this discussion. I also asked for some additional feedback. I asked questions like “had you known before you read this article that intelligence wasn’t fixed,” or “did you know that ‘pulling an all nighter’ is not a good way to learn?” Then I asked them what they thought of this activity. There was overwhelming approval because as one student said, “It covered everything.” The last question I asked was, “How many of you plan to finish this article on your own?” Hands went up all over the room. To me, having them finish a mainstream article and be able to understand it was the greatest success.
Grammar-based PowerPoints worth checking out from the Azar series.

All supplement the book chapters and include effective use of color, photographs, animation, and readings to enhance the target grammar. Even if you are not using this series, you might find some useful content to show your students.

Beginning level - Basic English Grammar (red book, 3rd ed.)

http://www.azargrammar.com/materials/feg/FEG03_PowerPoint.html

http://www.azargrammar.com/materials/feg/FEG04_PowerPoint.html

Advanced level - Understanding and Using English Grammar (blue book, 4th ed.)
Guess who?
By Lynn Francis

Happy Teachers: Being Present, Looking Deeply


This was at the top of the Schedule for the Meditation and Education Retreat I attended in April with two other colleagues, Nancy Johansen and Ann Marie Holzknecht. In every aspect of this experiential retreat we were invited to simply be aware, notice and be present with our experience. We were invited to be mindful and notice what was happening within, from a place of compassion. It would be interesting to see how this relates to being an educator.

I have arrived. I am home.

I already feel welcome. Driving into Deer Park offers the first glimpse of what is to come. Trees, hills, surrounded by nature, we pass the Clarity Hamlet (for women). Walking up the hill, I find a spot for my tent and Nancy wanders past the Big Hall and Solidity Hamlet (for men) to her dorm room. We have some free time to settle in and explore before dinner.

During our first meal together, with little direction, we ate in silence, being present with the food we were eating - remembering what it took for this food to have arrived at the table – growing with water and sunshine, transportation, preparation. We slowed down and put down our fork after every bite. The awareness of a habit of rushing or hurrying arose for me as I slowed down my actions. I was in the process of being present with what was in front of me while habit energies continued.

After dinner, we walked mindfully to the Big Hall. I focused my attention on each step, noticing how comfortable my shoes were, feeling the openness of nature around me, attempting to let go of thoughts that arose. Before the orientation for the weekend we sang inspirational little songs as we did each time that we convened.

Happiness is here and now. I have dropped my worries.
Nowhere to go, nothing to do, no longer in hurry.
Happiness is here and now. I have dropped my worries.
Somewhere to go, something to do, but I don’t need to hurry.

After the orientation, we remained in silence for the rest of the evening. I made my way back to my tent while others proceeded to their dorm rooms. Seventy dollars for the entire weekend seemed a small price to pay for this experience, gathering with other teachers, professors, administrators and students, practicing being mindful and present to our experiences.

The next day, wake up was at 5:30 and we gathered for walking meditation to the Big Hall for a sitting meditation. After breakfast we were divided into groups for working meditation. I think the picture is starting to become clear about the weekend. Everything was a meditation. Everything was
about being present with what we are doing. If we were washing dishes, be present with washing dishes. If we were walking, be present with walking.

And why would we do that, and how does that help us as educators?

There is a plethora of energy at the workplace, from people, from activities, from our workload - a culture of ‘hurry up’, ‘do’. This can, on a continuum, be motivational and inspirational or results in stress, anxiety and dis-ease. When I become lost in these energies, instead of present in my own experience, in my own body, self-aware, I lose vitality. I lose my own sense of being. When I can stay present with my own experience, I have choices. I can be more present with my students and colleagues. We have the seeds of negative and positive within us. Which ones will we nurture and provide the nourishing space to grow? If we want peace and stability in our world, we need to be that ourselves. “Happy teachers can heal the world” was supported. Deer Park provided a holding environment to be very present. They practice this, they live this, they walk their talk. I, myself, am a work in progress.

**Stop and slow down.**

The weekend also included talks, discussions, nature walks and a time for total relaxation in the Big Hall. The place, Deer Park Monastery, in Escondido, provides a living example of people who practice living in peace and harmony. They offer different theme weekends and those who attend include Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists and more. They are Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, Thai, African American, Native American and Vietnamese, to name a few.

**Looking deeply and smiling.**

This was at the bottom of the Retreat Schedule. Uncomplicated, simple, profound….and very relevant to educators.
2012 Student Showcase

4563 Packaging
Best of Class

Jose Ore

“Best in Class and First Place”
2012 Students Showcase
OUT OF THIS WORLD 2012
SAN DIEGO COUNTY FAIR