

MASS COALITION COURIER

~Working Together to Prepare Quality Teachers for Our Urban Schools~

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**Saturday, June 26, 2004
Publick House, Sturbridge**

INVITATION

SCHOOLING IN THE POST-BROWN ERA: WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK, WHAT MIGHT MOVE US FORWARD?

Please join us for the Coalition's 2004 Summer Institute, the culminating event of our 5-year Title II Teacher Quality Partnership grant awarded to the Coalition by the U.S. Department of Education in October 1999.

We will consider and celebrate our five years of collaborative work on preparing and retaining teachers for urban schools. We'll look back at our achievements, examine the challenges to our progress, but, most importantly, look ahead for ways to sustain and build upon our Coalition work.

See you there! Dennis Shirley

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**Rosa Tempesta, Garfield School
Parent Coordinator**

How Can We Help Our Children?

**By Rosa Tempesta
Boston College/Boston Public Schools
Partnership**

"The single most important thing a parent can do to help a child learn to read is to transmit a love of reading."

**Phyllis Hunter, National Fellow of the
Institute of Learning**

This is the same quote I have used each time I publish the *Garfield Gallop*, the monthly school newsletter for staff, students and families. It states all that I want to convey to parents...help your child to LOVE to read, be an example to them of what a good reader is, to perform better academically but also simply to attain the joy of reading. This is my main goal at the Garfield, to help students to love to read and to make parents aware of the importance of their role in their child's education.

I try to achieve this goal by bringing parents into the school and connecting them and their child to the school while incorporating some learning and fun.

This year I have organized monthly parent workshops that are focused on Literacy of various genres while educating parents about school curriculum. They are presented by Patricia Riddick of the Title 1 Training Center For Families and Educators on such topics as Literacy, Music (co-presented and sponsored by WGBH), Math, MCAS (presented by the teachers) and even a Candy Bingo night.

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We understand that parents are very busy and often live and work all over the city of Boston. Simply by attending these workshops, parents help reinforce the silent message to their child that school must be pretty important. At the end of the event, parents have a better understanding of their child's curriculum, especially the "new" TERC math methods that we didn't learn in school while growing up. This enables parents to better help their child at home with homework too. The parents leave thanking us for the information and have to pull their child away from school to go home...which hasn't been easy since they are having so much fun!



Joe Bergin, Garfield School Science Specialist, and several Garfield students pose with science exhibits on volcanoes and earthquakes. The Earthquake Map was developed with faculty from the Boston College Geology Department and the Lynch School of Education.

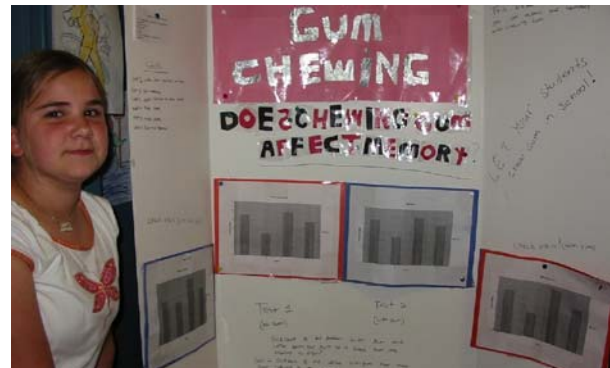
I also record and manage the Garfield Home Reading Program which tracks the daily home reading activity for every student in a monthly report. I contact parents at home regarding the importance of reading so they will encourage their child to read at home daily. We discuss activities they can do with their child that could help to lead to daily, effective reading. Teachers have thanked me for recording their classes' home reading results on one spreadsheet which they use as an effective tool to show parents their child's daily home reading activity.

This report has also helped the school to quantify the amount of home reading done by students and document the fact that home reading starts off strong in the beginning of the year and slowly loses steam over the school year. Therefore, this year we implemented an incentive program at the midpoint of the school year. The Principal, Victoria Megias-Batista, distributed award ribbons during assembly to recognize those students that have maintained their reading requirements and also challenged those kids that slipped a little to get back on the home reading track. This has proven effective to give new life to the program, and teachers have thanked me for the recognition program saying, "That was just what my kids needed." Next year I would like to implement monthly incentive awards.

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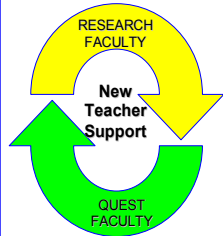
As liaison between the Garfield School administration and parents, I meet periodically with the Garfield administration and the School Parent Council to help communicate needs of parents. For most parents, attending meetings is difficult because of work restrictions so I bridge that gap whenever possible. Parents have confided to me their personal concerns regarding their child. I have helped to resolve issues by getting them assistance or simply listening and providing another parent's perspective that understands "both" sides of an issue. Being involved in the school and attending meetings with the school staff has given me insight as to how the school functions and the dilemmas/limitations they face in educating our children that I think most parents don't understand. I certainly didn't in the beginning. It also gave me a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the commitment these teachers and staff have for their students and their profession.

I tell parents to do the same, attend as many meetings as possible to gain the same experience and get the same connection that ultimately can only help their child, which, as parents, is our main goal in life. School is a child's full time job and they need management skills that only their parents can give them because parents have been the number one adults in their lives since birth. Teachers are important once the child reaches school age, no doubt, but parents are the first adults the child knows and emulates. They truly hold the key to their child's future.



5th grader Shannon Leonard and her Gum Chewing study

I want to add that what I do would not be possible if it weren't for several important people/groups coming together and working towards the goal of Literacy and bettering education for children. The first person is the Garfield School principal who is wonderfully supportive and understands the importance of literacy, parents, and community. All this is derived from her deep affection for her students. The second person and group that helps make it all happen are Darlene Martin and Boston College. Darlene Martin has been very helpful! This partnership between the Garfield School and Boston College is very much recognized and appreciated by myself, the administration, and families at the school. The third group is our partnership with the Boston Public School System which provides professional presenters who come to the school and make the evening educational. Lastly, is the commitment and involvement of our community partners such as WGBH...true evidence that it takes a village to educate a child and help ensure that no child is left behind.



Project QUEST News

From Darlene Martin, Project QUEST Coordinator

Project QUEST was limited to four meetings this year as we piloted new materials and got a sense of how we could support the development of new teachers around issues of equity and social justice. Two activities comprised the primary content of the four sessions. The first was The Five I's, a tool developed by anti-racist consultant Enid Lee that prompts groups and individuals to ask questions as they analyze school scenarios for equitable outcomes. The scenarios were written by the new teachers who were concerned about dilemmas involving specific students and about the tensions that arise in schools when, for example, teachers wanted to create curricula but had to use that prescribed by the district.

The second activity was a teaching autobiography developed by mentor Paula Elliott based on her reading of Marilyn Cochran-Smith's *Knowledge, Skills and Experiences for Teaching Culturally Diverse Learners: A Perspective for Practicing Teachers*. The autobiography goes beyond a typical accounting of life events to help new teachers connect their own schooling to that of the students in their classroom. Teachers examine their images of teacher/self, culture and difference by asking themselves questions such as, "Where in my autobiography might I look more closely to find my beliefs, values, assumptions and knowledge about people like me and unlike me?"

At the end of the program new teachers' feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Comments included: "This is a great program and I would love for it to keep going year round or even more often in the school year."; "A summer institute would be great preparation for the upcoming year."; "Next year I will bring more of my own cases to QUEST."; "I really enjoyed when your staff addressed the participants. Their questions and comments were insightful and reflective."

The new teachers also suggested changes to the program. One would like to spend more time in the large discussions in order to hear more of other teachers' comments; another would like more models for the activities and prompts for the discussions. Still another participant would like the activities in the program to have more coherence.

Finally, one participant's comments summed up our mission at QUEST, "QUEST reminded me of the importance and value of self-reflection. I felt as though QUEST provided support and push while concurrently respecting the privacy of each participant."

This summer we are using this feedback and the data gathered about the content, distance, length and timing of the sessions to build next year's program. In addition, the mentors are participating in intensive training with Enid Lee, and QUEST faculty and teachers are presenting the program to other educators at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators which is being held at the Hvatt Hotel in Cambridge on August 7-11. (see 'Announcements' on p. 1 for more information)

UMASS-BOSTON – BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

PARTNERSHIP CO-SPONSORS 2 SPRING CONFERENCES

On Saturday, May 1st the partnership co-sponsored Pursuing Academic Excellence: 50 Years After Brown v. Board of Education with the Black Educators' Alliance of Massachusetts, whose mission is to improve academic performance of urban students, especially students in the Boston Public Schools. More than two hundred attendees heard opening remarks by Dr. Thomas Payzant, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools, and Dr. Lester Goodchild, Dean of the University's Graduate College of Education. Local and national experts presented workshops on best practices and other research-based strategies to improve the performance of urban students, especially under-achieving racial and linguistic minority students.

On Saturday, May 15th the UMass-Boston/Boston Public Schools partnership sponsored The Role of the Community in Urban Teacher Preparation. The conference was held at the New Orchard Gardens Pilot School, a public school governed by a community board. The conference audience of teachers, parents, community activists, and representatives of local businesses discussed the importance of involving the community in urban teacher preparation and explored the valuable ways in which the community is helping teachers to understand the culture of their students, their school, and the community. We came away realizing that the better teachers understand their students and communities, the better prepared they will be to develop good parent relationships and engage in shared decision-making with parents and the community.

STUDENT TEACHERS AND COOPERATING TEACHERS CELEBRATE

On Monday, May 10th the partnership celebrated the last session of the semester-long seminar for cooperating teachers taught by Mari Koerner, Partnership Director and U Mass Boston faculty. Principal Ann Garofalo and her staff hosted cooperating teachers and their student teachers in the library of the Condon Elementary School. They gathered to say their good-byes and to share reflections of their student teaching experiences in the Boston Public Schools. The UMass students, mostly from rural and suburban communities, expressed how much they had learned – about themselves and their students. When asked to share what was most surprising about their placement in an urban school, a sampling of the responses included "Great", "I'm so happy I came here", "Now I know that all the negative things I hear about urban schools are not true", and "I never thought about teaching in an urban school, now I would never think of going anywhere else."

Literacy Inquiry Groups in Schools and Communities

Mieko Kamii
Wheelock College and
Young Achievers in Science and Math School
Partnership

Earlier this year, Coalition members traveled to Chicago to share our work at an AACTE (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education) meeting. Organized by Professor Peter Murrell (Northeastern University/Boston Public School partnership), the session was on "Doing Dewey." Each of us talked about "practices of deliberative or participatory democracy for improving teacher quality and student achievement."

Deliberative, Participatory Democracy

What does "deliberative or participatory democracy" look like in action? Murrell suggested that this form of democracy challenges college and university faculty members to

- Enter the instructional, personal, and professional space of practitioners with enough humility to become authentic and legitimate participants in the school's professional community;
- Communicate research-based frameworks in ways that honor and respect the integrity of practitioners' existing professional knowledge, and in ways that make them accessible to interested others, e.g. parents;
- Organize legitimate and authentic joint (co-constructed) enterprises that weave together licensure preparation, research and development of instructional practices, professional development of faculty, and student achievement.

Finding a Focus

For the last two years, staff members at the Young Achievers Science and Math Pilot School have self-selected to participate in an inquiry group focused on writing instruction. The activity structure of the group seemed to fit many of these criteria, so I reported on it. Many dedicated teachers seem to favor inquiry or study groups as a structure for professional development, perhaps *because* they reflect many elements that Murrell proposes.

The teachers' desire to participate in a Literacy Inquiry Group was fueled by a commitment to increasing student learning and raising student achievement, coupled with recognition that "writing was an issue" at the school.

Young Achievers asks children at every grade level to participate in formative writing assessments in September, January, and May of each school year. The kindergarteners and first graders produce curriculum-embedded writing samples over one to two days, and children in grades 2 and above are asked to respond to an on-the-spot writing prompt that gives them a topic or subject to write about in a limited amount of time. Classroom teachers score their students' writing using common rubrics.

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The staff discovered that starting in second grade, many of the children scored "below grade level" on the formative writing assessments. Coincidentally, it was the same grade level in which children were given specific prompts, in contrast to writing activities that grew out of their curriculum.

Formation of the Inquiry Group

Professional Development School Liaison Marcie Osinsky spoke with the K-2 teachers about forming a study group on writing. Then she asked Wheelock Language and Literacy Professor MaryAnn Johnson who taught an on-site graduate course on Reading if she would be interested in helping. Johnson agreed to become the Literacy Inquiry Group's facilitator.

Assuming the role of facilitator meant Johnson would have to listen carefully as group members identified problems, raised questions, and articulated concerns. They would jointly set the agenda for monthly meetings. The inquiry group structure enabled group members to look closely at the student work teachers brought to the group to illustrate the problems they were encountering. Group members asked clarifying and probing questions and respectfully shared practices they found to be successful with their own students. Johnson also became the "visitor" whose very presence meant that "we'll get to it tomorrow" was not an option: group members would have to attend the scheduled monthly meetings or miss out on the conversation.

Now in its second year, the Literacy Inquiry Group has expanded to ten teachers and one staff member, up from four and one, respectively, in the first year, and has three additional grade levels, now K-5. Beyond shared norms and dispositions, e.g. mutual respect and active listening, the group explicitly uses the "Tuning Protocol" as a collaborative practice.¹

Resources

While Johnson provides resources to the group, such as her knowledge of research-based practices, texts and videotape, the teachers contribute vital resources, too, including samples of children's writing and their knowledge of curricular context. Staff members add their specialized knowledge to the mix. Finally, the Title II grant provides materials and release time for the facilitator, and the school contributes the meeting space.

How might these structures and activities become even better exemplars of the type of deliberative democracy that Murrell envisions? What resources might families and community institutions have that we are missing, avoiding, or inadvertently denying, to the detriment of more effective teaching and learning in urban communities? How might we organize and staff joint activities and weave resources together in a *different* way that result in improved learning and teaching, and increased student achievement in urban communities?

¹ The Tuning Protocol can be found on www.lasw.org.