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Building Collaboration & Program Improvement

Imperative Collaborations

by Dr. Karla D. Brown

The African Proverb that states, "It Takes a Whole Village to Raise a Child," is no longer only synonymous with the proper development of children in our society. This powerful truth can be said to apply to adult learners. While further along in life, this vulnerable group of individuals is becoming an increasingly greater percentage of the college and university demographic.

According to the Center for Law and Social Policy, thirty-six percent of post-secondary students were twenty five or older in 2008. This drastic increase in the number of more "independent" learners creates the need for different strategies to address the diversity of hurdles. The challenge could prove to be mind boggling for any higher education institution attempting to address and meet the needs of every sector of its population on its own. Any effort to ensure the success of all learners, regardless of age or circumstance, will depend on establishing collaborative partnerships with the various community agencies.

Collaborations can take many shapes and serve a plethora of purposes. As with any partnership (relationship), joining forces may strengthen both organizations. It is also important to note that a partnership does not connote weakness or imply that an institution is unable to meet their students' needs. It simply demonstrates the value of teamwork when helping others reach their goals. Each partner has a specific mission and collaborations allow each to focus on its established purpose.

Simple ways that community-based organizations can assist institutions of higher learning include:

- Assisting one another in applying for grant funds in order to sustain program components and to reach organizational goals,
- Addressing issues of student attendance and retention by working with students directly on specified concerns,
- Developing individualized plans that can be maintained by the partner organizations,
- Engaging in continuous community-based outreach so that students are well informed about other programs and services that are available to further assist,
- Tracking individual students who participate in the program so that the community-based organizations can provide follow-up services, and
- Utilizing longitudinal data to determine institutional and organizations reforms to leverage funds for sustainability.

This list is limited in scope and should not be considered an exhaustive list of collaborative opportunities. Each institution will have its own needs, and community-based organizations that have missions that match their areas of focus are a great place to forge lasting partnerships that are a benefit to all those involved.

Finally, it is inevitable that problems will arise in partnerships. And, for many organizations, the possibility of additional problems is enough to steer them clear of third party opportunities. Conflict can prove to be costly, possibly devastating one or both of the entities. For these reasons, Ellis and Hughes (2002) of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory suggest following their *Partnerships by Design Plan* prior to starting a collaborative effort. They state that both organizations should:

- Define the goals and outcomes for this effort, including both immediate and future directions, and describe the means you will use to attain those goals,
- Outline the details of the roles each partner will play in helping reach the overall educational

goals,

- Anticipate potential barriers along the way and formulate responses to them, and
- Identify strategies to evaluate the success of the partnerships in meeting the planned goals, and formulate a process to advertise findings and regularly revise the plan.

Developing the recommended plan or some variation of it can save groups from unnecessary heartaches that can be identified and addressed before the partnership is solidified. As the great Ben Franklin said, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The collaborative partners within organizations of today may not be considered villagers coming together, but the idea is still a very relevant notion in 2014. When everyone works together, more can be accomplished and society is better as a result. Collaborations are not a suggestion...They are IMPERATIVE!

References

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About the Author

Karla D. Brown, Ed.D., is the founder and Executive Director of The Providence on Southmore, Inc., a non-profit organization in Houston that assists students attending universities in the city with overcoming the obstacles that block many from completing their degree programs. She is an educator with over 20 years of experience as an elementary school teacher and administrator in southeast Texas and southern California. She has served as Adjunct Professor at Texas Southern University and California Baptist University preparing pre-service educators. She holds a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction and credits her academic and professional experiences with giving her the inspiration to see the vision of the organization to fruition.

KINGWOOD LIBRARY FAMILY LITERACY IN THE NEWS

LOCAL LIBRARIES OFFER BILINGUAL LEARNING PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

by Antonio Hebert

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After story time, toddlers, elementary-aged students and their mothers gathered around educational stations in a classroom at the Kingwood Library Monday evening, Dec. 29. It's part of an ongoing series of classes offered one day each month of the year called "Para Los Ninos," which is Spanish for "For the Children."

"Let's use our estimation skills. How many do you think are in here?" Assistant Branch Librarian Rose Sonnier asked a little boy as he stared at a jar of plastic eggs. The educational program, sponsored by the Children's Museum of Houston, began about 10 years ago, and has now expanded from the Houston Public Library system to the Harris County Public Library System. The classes are designed to teach reading and listening skills in English and Spanish as well as foster math and critical thinking skills through crafts and hands-on activities. The sessions usually start with story time. Students and their parents gather to listen to a story in English followed by one in Spanish. Afterward, they break into groups and go to stations to learn that month's lesson.

December's Session, called "Math at Home" focused on problem solving and estimation. Fun, interactive games dealt with Measurements, money, sorting and classifying, geometry and graphing.

"I think it's a really great program. I just love it," Sonnier said. Sonnier has been a children's librarian for more than 20 years. She began teaching the Houston Children's Museum's curriculum 10 years ago while she worked for the Houston Public library.

"They send me a box of activities and all of the materials. I teach it to the kids, and they just love it," Sonnier said. She enjoys interacting one-on-one with the children.

"My favorite part of working with the children is watching them learn something new. I like to see their faces light up when they've learned something," she said.

Parents and guardians can keep up with the upcoming dates and times on Kingwood and Atascocita Branch Libraries' websites. One incentive that encourages attendance is the Houston Children's Museum's offer of free tickets for the families who sign in the days of the classes.

For more information on Para Los Ninos, those interested may contact Tiffany Fontenot at the Children's Museum at tfontenot@cmhouston.org or Rose Sonnier at Kingwood Branch Library at rsonnier@hpl.net

http://www.yourhoustonnews.com/kingwood/news/local-libraries-offer-bilingual-learning-program-for-children/article_04b0df51-e94c-5b35-b44e-096b0be24907.html