

# **“BE AWARE: BE PREPARED”**

## **CREATING A FORMULA FOR TEACHING CHILDREN TO PROTECT THEMSELVES IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS**

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Lynn Robertson, Delgado Community College

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Delgado Community College began as a trade school for boys in 1921 at the City Park campus located in Mid-City, New Orleans. It has evolved into a multi-campus, multi-parish community college that now operates under the governance of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). It provides both two-year vocational degrees and certificate programs to prepare students for the workforce, and its associate degree programs provide students with the foundation to transfer to senior institutions.

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In August 2005, Delgado’s main (City Park) campus and the Slidell site were severely damaged by Katrina flood waters. College-wide enrollment prior to the storm in Spring 2005 was 16,787, with 11,441 students at the City Park campus alone; total enrollment in Spring 2006 was 10,002, with 5,927 at the City Park campus, the highest post-Katrina enrollment for higher education institutions in the city of New Orleans.

In Fall 2006, just one year into the College’s recovery from the storm, Delgado offered faculty the opportunity to enroll in faculty development workshops for service learning. Faculty who participated came from areas as diverse as marketing, nursing, speech communication, psychology, veterinary tech, and mass communication.

This article will focus on one of those post-Katrina service learning projects: the collaboration of Delgado’s Television Production students, Timothy Weller (a local singer/songwriter/teacher of children’s music), and St. Rose Elementary, a local public school.

### **WHERE THE IDEA CAME FROM AND HOW IT DEVELOPED**

The emergency preparedness music video for children developed from a small idea that grew into the concept for an entire series. Years ago, a local singer/songwriter, Tim Weller, teamed up with a television production teacher, Lynn Robertson, and her students to produce a music video for children entitled “Choose Your Attitude.” It was a

very educational experience and the students learned a great deal about the technical side of creating a music video.

Then “Katrina” came, and with it, years of rebuilding. One day, Lynn called Tim and asked if he would be interested in creating a song about hurricane preparedness for children. The TV Production students wanted to empower children with information so that they would not be frightened during hurricane season. Tim was excited about the prospect of collaborating on such a worthwhile project. Television production students learned about production, communication, collaboration, and what it is like to work with young children. Five children recorded the song and were in the video with several of the college students. The plan was to distribute 5,000 copies.

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They had all learned so much that Tim suggested that they partner with St. Rose Elementary School and do a second video about school emergencies to include on the video since they had received some grant money to make the copies. Children would get two for one on the DVD. The second project involved over 60 children from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Rose Elementary School.

## **INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMUNITY PARTNER**

The following insights are the highlights of the lessons learned from this exciting service learning project.

First, the project taught the entire team of community partners and the Delgado Community College television production students that in order to finish a project, they had to communicate, collaborate, and treat each other with respect and dignity. The diversity in age, race, gender and background proved to be a worthy challenge for building consensus.

Next, Tim explained that he was not used to having to wait for all aspects of the production to come together. He initially wanted instant gratification and the entire group of participants expected the project to be complete as soon as production was finished. This however is one of the myths of the magic of television. It looks easy to do, but in reality, it is a painstaking process. The TV students interacted with the grammar school students. Tim and his administrators shared their expertise and guided them through the process of working with young children. This was not only a strength of the project, but a weakness at times as well. Children demand the attention and

knowledge from the adults that surround them. In turn, the college students guided Tim through the production and post production process.

Finally, Tim had the chance to share his expertise from the musician's standpoint. The largest asset and deficit of collaboration with a community college and a grammar school is that the actual finished product always tends to be different than each side envisions. What one individual has in mind is

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different than what the entire team creates as it goes along. Each project develops itself along the way, much like a painting develops under a painter's brush. Tim considered this an asset because he learned patience through the artistic process. He learned the interconnectedness of the process. He also found that it was a weakness as well because sometimes the impatience for things to happen quickly led to hasty decisions that, in the end, took away some of the quality of the production.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Tim Weller, Lynn Robertson, the television production students, and the elementary school students are gearing up for the next DVD on Internet Awareness and Smoking Cessation. They all hope that this will be a continuing series.

In addition to this ongoing project, both Tim and the Delgado students are currently working together with another community partner to adapt a holiday stage play into a digital movie.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Lynn Robertson** has been with Delgado for 18 years and is currently an Associate Professor of Television Production and part-time coordinator of the service learning program. She has an M.F.A. in Video Production, an M.A. in Theatre, and a B.A. in Drama/Communications from the University of New Orleans.