

Teacher Preparation and Education Programs: SAFE Project – 2006-2007
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Background and Introduction

Riverside County is one of the largest and most diverse counties in California. It spans 7,310 square miles and is composed of 23 incorporated cities. A large portion of Riverside County is agricultural-based and has large pockets of extreme poverty. Historically, Riverside County has had the second highest number of state and federally declared disasters in California. In October 2003, the county experienced some of the most horrendous fires in history. Our communities were not fully prepared to handle these catastrophic events. It was clear that homeland security/disaster preparedness should start in our own neighborhoods.

During 2004, Riverside Community College received a three-year *Supporting Action for Engagement* (SAFE) grant from the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE). For five of the original sub-grantees, a fourth year was awarded. In this fourth year of the SAFE grant, the college continues to be actively involved in preparing the community for disasters through meeting the diverse educational needs of various populations by focusing on providing training and information to students, parents, and the community. Service learning activities conducted under the SAFE project provided domestic preparedness training, public safety education, outreach, capacity building, and reflection to engage college students in developing emergency plans with elementary school students. The population of children in the elementary schools is largely from underrepresented groups of the schools that qualify for the Title 1 (lower-socio-economic) status.

The fourth year of the SAFE grant provided the needed funds to transition many valuable teaching strategies into other grant opportunities in order to sustain high quality service learning for our students. In this fourth year of being a SAFE grant recipient, the project maintained the previous faculty and strengthened the subject areas involved. The subject areas are: Early Childhood Education and Education 1, 3, 4 and 5; Mathematics; Business Education and Para-Legal Studies; Telecommunications; and History. The following is an overview of the project accomplishments, along with points of view from faculty, students, and community partners.

Education 1

This project provided Riverside Community College (RCC) students with the opportunity to contribute positively to the community. Each student developed a family disaster preparedness lesson plan based on an instruction model. Their lesson plan included handouts for the elementary school children to have when they developed their plans at their homes, samples of a disaster plan to show their children, and other materials relevant to the teaching of the lesson plan. When teaching their lesson, they watched and listened for things the children said that would give them better insights into their cultures. They met additional times with their children to help them with their projects in

case parents were not available. After laminating the children's projects, they met for a final session and celebrated their accomplishments.

The students in EDU 1 were excited and elated because they enjoyed the process of planning and teaching the lesson. They loved working with the children and contributing to the children's communities and lives. This project gave them focus and insights into their futures as teachers.

Child Health, Early Childhood Studies

Students created a resource unit on safety. Students researched and implemented a safety lesson on a given topic with a group of children, a family, or a classroom. Students had to show connections and applications of developing safety techniques and standards. This unit included checklists, safety plans, first aid (kits or administering), staff development ideas, parent letters workshops, and/or involvement.

History

The history faculty chose to approach this project from the perspective of being SAFE, not scared. With the heightened perceptions of "otherness" in the era since the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were attacked in New York in 2001, the American public has coped with feelings of insecurity concerning who they believe might be terrorists. These perceptions are loosely based assumptions that Arabs and/or Muslims, especially young adult males, are people that might be dangerous or threatening to homeland safety.

As an historian, this faculty member chose to use historical methods to emphasize that the U.S. has previously undergone this type of reaction to world events, for example: before, during, and immediately after both world wars. Anti-German sentiment was prevalent during the time of World War I, and although also present during World War II, was overtaken by anti-Japanese sentiment after the Japanese military attack on Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii in December 1941. In addition, the U.S. has also undergone intense periods of anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the evolution of this country's development. What does this all have to do with being SAFE, not scared?

Historical methods draw largely on primary documents and first hand accounts of those who lived through the previously mentioned eras and experienced the sting of "otherness," or those who expressed their disdain for "others." Some have also defined Americanism through subjective interpretations of loyalty and patriotism. In class, being "SAFE, not scared" translates into learning history accurately, giving context to our fears and understanding of the complex history of U. S. demographic changes and reactions to them. In addition to the classroom curriculum, students are encouraged to have conversations with one another and with family members, using history as a guide, to counteract some of the fear generated for the attacks on September 11, 2001.

The SAFE component of the class is the oral in-class interview. Students are assigned a partner to interview, using oral history techniques, with a very simple interview guide in

which they are asked to discuss who they are and identify their cultural/ancestral backgrounds. They are asked to define terms like diversity, race, and ethnicity and to interpret the meaning of the U. S. motto “e pluribus unum” (out of many, one).

The goal is to have students recognize their place in the continuum of U. S. history. Most can identify being part of a group that, at some time or other in U. S. history, was maligned due to their heritage or deemed un-American, and therefore unsafe, due particularly to political and/or religious beliefs. This awareness then helps the students understand current levels of fears of others, some of which they themselves harbor. Yet now, through discussions and debates of the historical past and one-on-one conversations with their peers, they discover commonalities across racial, ethnic, cultural heritage, and religious lines. They have tools to initiate conversations with and about “others” with their friends and family members. They can critically read the newspaper and view news broadcasts with a contextual basis for understanding the current political climate. All in all, arming students with historical knowledge and using oral history methods to elicit awareness of commonality despite difference helps promote being SAFE but not scared.

Introduction to Business

In the Business Department, faculty expected students to use their creativity to develop product or product template that could be used statewide for the education of children in family disaster planning. During the semester, students specifically addressed the following topics and their relationship to the project:

- Patents
- Trademarks
- Business creativity
- Product development
- Marketing and advertising

Business Law and Paralegal Services

The participants from this course took an active role in determining how the Disaster Project should be created and implemented. Thus, the overall goal and focus was to create and implement a plan for the “Protection of Legal Documents during a Disaster” in Phase I and Phase II of the project. Through service learning, students provided a vital and unmet service to the community, children and parents by enabling them to actively prepare for the storage of vital legal documents in case of a disaster, thus mitigating the recovery of documents after a disaster.

Telecommunications

Students produced a video campaign that totaled 8-10 minutes of broadcasting-quality video in the areas of domestic preparedness and public safety. The videos were designed to better prepare communities to respond to disaster by educating various populations, including children, parents, teachers and the general public. Student videos consisted of:

- A public service announcement (PSA) of 10-30 seconds that promotes preparedness as an effective response to disaster and public safety

- A four- to six-minute magazine segment highlighting RCC's involvement in service learning projects under the SAFE project
- A one-minute instructional module that teaches one strategy or technique for disaster preparedness or public safety at home or at school.

Mathematics/Statistics

In mathematics, students assisted two to three elementary students with creating a family disaster plan. Faculty provided college students with sufficient information on how to create a family disaster plan. Students created a one-page questionnaire on each child that they were to assist. The data was compiled by the class. They then coded the data and performed descriptive and inferential statistics using the data. For example, they answered questions such as "What is the mean age (in months) of the children?" and "Is there a relationship between having received disaster preparedness information at school or in another venue and already having a plan developed?" College students were also asked to create some histograms, pie charts, etc., and to write a final report incorporating the statistics and any observations about their experiences.

Reflections of Riverside Community College Students

"This project was an awesome experience. I enjoyed doing this project because I was able to contribute something positive to the community. Sometimes parents don't have the time to go over important facts such as house fire safety and I feel good about myself for being able to help out a little."

"Having the opportunity of working with children was a positive experience. Doing research to present the lesson also helped me to learn new things I was not aware of."

"I liked it. I enjoyed working with the kids and doing something that could one day save their lives."

"I gained a lot of knowledge and insight on how to write a lesson plan and use the plan to instruct children."

"I was scared at first before breaking down the different parts of the project. However, over all, I enjoyed teaching the students and it was a great exercise for all future teachers."

"I think this project is very informative to the students. I think it really helps these families as well. Most families do not have disaster plans until it's too late. Now that the students I worked with have a *Home Fire Plan* that they went over with their family, it is comforting."

“I really liked this project. It was nice to help the children make a disaster kit.”

What would I do differently? (From the Perspective of RCC Students)

“I offered the children only one example of an emergency escape plan and found that each one of the children used this example. When teaching this lesson in the future (and any others that this situation would pertain to), I would offer more examples for the children to choose from.”

“I would not do anything differently.”

“I would present this lesson to an entire class with a firefighter as a guest, and then the children could hear the information from someone who has been in a house fire.”

“I think I could have been a little more organized, but overall, I think it went really well.”

“I would try to bring more information to the students earlier on, as in statistical data. This would help them get interested right away and see the seriousness in the situation. I would also like to ask them more questions about their home. Perhaps asking these questions before the project would have helped them relate and focus more on the issues.”

“I would make sure that I have enough time for each activity and be sure to remember that kids love to draw. I also wish that I would have had some kind of fire safety video.”

“I would have a map outline ready that the students could fill out. I would bring in a guest speaker.”

“I would love to work with children a bit older, as I found that their attention spans were short.”

“I would go deeper into the topic on how earthquakes actually happen and why.”

Reflections of Elementary Students

“It was fun. I can help my family in case of a fire.”

“I will not be scared because I have a plan.”

“We should do more safety projects.”

“At the beginning of the lesson one student said ‘Oh, is this more homework?’ However after getting more involved said, ‘Wow, I didn’t know there were so many house fires.’

“I had lots of fun with the hands on stuff.”

Reflections of Elementary Students’ Parents

“I felt this lesson was a great and necessary education for my children.”

“I’m glad to know that the children have learned the importance of house fire safety because being aware that a fire could happen and knowing what to do is very important.”

“I was very proud of them for bringing their plans home.”

“I made time for my child’s project when I found out how serious the situation could become.”

“You are teaching something useful to my child.”

“This project helped me to see the importance of a fire plan.”

“I’m glad that you went over a plan with them in case of a fire.”

“It was great for you to teach them so that they can be well aware.”

Responses of Community Partners

“I contacted the Riverside Fire Department for information regarding the E.D.I.T.H. pamphlets and spoke with their Public Education Specialist. She was very supportive and eager to help in anyway she could. She was kind enough to mail the pamphlets to me.”

“The teacher that I worked with told me she appreciated that I had the time to engage these students in a more focused lesson on earthquake safety. She was very helpful with setting up a time for my lesson.”

“The after school coordinator said that my project was a great idea to make students understand the importance of home safety.”

“My brother who came to talk to them about the importance of fire safety said it was a good idea to go over house fires because they are so possible.”

About the Author:

Ola Jackson is Associate Dean of Teacher Preparation and Educational Programs at Riverside Community College District. Prior to this, she had been a high school advisor, business education teacher, adult basic skills teacher, high school administrator, and had authored several funded grants. She received her Master’s Degree from the University of Redlands. She is the service learning specialist on campus and is actively leading the team for the SAFE Project. Ola Jackson’s credits include chairing, co-chairing, organizing, and providing presentations for many workshops, symposiums, and seminars on regional and statewide levels. She serves as a board member on the Riverside Regional Service Learning Council. **Phone:** 951-222-8858; **Email:** ola.jackson@rcc.edu