

Director's Report

By Barbara Bass, T-C '88, bbass@towson.edu



Barbara Bass

Access, Relevance and Diversity through Project Outreach

Last fall, I put out a call over the *mwpconnect* listserv asking for T-Cs interested in participating in writing a proposal for an NWP initiative called Project Outreach. The project is intended to improve our site work with teachers whose students live in communities affected by poverty. **Del Arnold ('97)**, **Cheryl Foreman ('02)**, **Gina Calvachi de Añazco ('02)**, **Valerie Josenhans ('04)** and **Angela Cephas ('03)** all answered the call. This writing team worked intensively throughout the month of December to complete the application process. Now we are waiting with fingers and toes crossed to hear if our proposal has been accepted for the NWP Project Outreach, Cohort 3.*

Here's a bit more background on Project Outreach, an initiative driven by three goals: access, relevance and diversity. It is a three-year process of site inquiry whose goals are (1) to increase the opportunities of sustained professional development to teachers who work in communities impacted by poverty—**Access** (2) to increase the quality of services provided by writing project sites by improving the professional development they offer and by making it more relevant to teachers of students in communities impacted by poverty—**Relevance** and (3) to increase the quality of programs conducted by writing project sites by

increasing the racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in project leadership so that teacher knowledge can more closely reflect the diversity of local communities—**Diversity**.

Sites join Project Outreach as part of a cohort committed to a three-year process of site inquiry and action. Six to 10 sites are chosen to participate. Selections will be made with the idea of assembling a group that is representative of the diversity of sites within the NWP across geographic regions, site histories, interests, capacities, and inquiry questions.

The NWP is seeking a group of sites that is representative of the diversity that characterizes the NWP, yet which is commonly committed to advancing the goals of Project Outreach, and has the potential to assume leadership roles with respect to other sites. Each site that is chosen will receive \$15,000 each year to conduct its study. The Maryland Writing Project has the potential to do this work. I hope by the time you read this report, we will have been accepted into Cohort 3.

Below are some excerpts from our site's proposal for Project Outreach:

In *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers should Learn and be Able to Do*, Darling-Hammond and Bransford write, "There are marked discrepancies in the educational outcomes and learning conditions

for students who vary by race, culture, language, socioeconomic status, and learning differences ... the percentage of African American and Hispanic children living in poverty is much higher than the average, at 42 percent and 40 percent, respectively." We understand that students affected by poverty "face different kinds of borders as they negotiate a variety of socio-cultural, economic, linguistic, and structural differences between home and school, which can be bridged by school efforts or made into chasms into which students fall." Our teachers often work in educational systems that are structurally ineffective and that fail both them and their students. These are teachers already involved in meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in high-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, neglected and/or delinquent children, children in need of reading and writing assistance and children labeled with emotional and learning disabilities. Our T-Cs also reach nontraditional children, including those who are English Language Learners and those who are placed in alternative settings designed to promote quality services for children and youth with disabilities. We are hoping to call on these teachers as we explore how our site can grow to become more accessible and more relevant to the work that they do.

Each time our site has participated in an NWP initiative, we have made inroads into deepening our site and serving even more teachers of students affected by poverty. As part of the Teacher Inquiry Community Initiative, we conducted a site study that deepened our leadership, made it more equitable and integrated inquiry throughout our work. Through the New Teacher Initiative, we worked with new teachers in urban settings, including Baltimore City, Prince George's County and Montgomery County. Through this work, we have established mentoring programs at schools in each of these counties, and we have explored questions regarding what it takes to support new teachers in schools affected by poverty so that they will develop into highly effective classroom teachers. Three of our mentees—Diana Sennaar, Cornelia Vanderlain and Fred Price—have become T-Cs, and Fred served as an intern coordinator last summer at our TU Summer Teacher Institute. All three continue to work with children affected by poverty. We have grown from our work on these initiatives. We have understood our site more clearly, made leadership more equitable and responsive and served our T-Cs better.

Project Outreach is not only important to our site at this time, it is crucial for us if we are to increase our own awareness of the conversation around diversity at our site and in our schools, to question the assumptions that we hold about diversity, access and relevance, and to



*Project Outreach Planning Team
(left to right): Angela Cephas,
Cheryl Foreman, Del Arnold,
Valerie Josenhans, Gina Añazco*

create a space for an ongoing conversation about issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and language. Even though our site is strong—we have a cadre of talented, dedicated T-C leaders, we have the best administrative staff and student office support, and we provide many programs for both students and teachers—we need to continue to do “the work before the work,” as my friend Wyatt Coger likes to say. How do we continue to maintain the course of the site, but at the same time broaden and deepen our reach and effectiveness? We need to explore which T-Cs show up at the table when a new opportunity for growth occurs. We want to develop, as Earl Weaver once phrased it, “deep depth.” We want to see our leadership develop with two T-C leaders prepared to take the place of anyone who steps down. We want to see those T-Cs be more of a reflection of the teachers who work in the school systems and communities we serve. We have made progress toward access, relevance and diversity over the last several years, but we understand that we have “miles to go before we sleep.”

If you are interested in becoming a part of the Project Outreach team, please let me know. If our proposal is accepted, we will need a “traveling team” to attend the Project Outreach Institutes across the country and bring what they learn to our home-based team to work with the questions that we want to explore. You may reach me at bbass@towson.edu or at 410-704-4573.

MWP-ily yours,

Barbara

*Thanks to Del, Cheryl, Gina,
Valerie and Angela for their collaboration on this report.*

** The MWP was not chosen for this Project Outreach cohort, but we plan to move forward with our site study. Stay tuned for more details.*