



ACET, Inc.

Action Consulting and Evaluation Team

Summer 2006 Newsletter

Issue 14

Congratulations!

We would first like to congratulate Michael Rodriguez, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota, on his recent appointment as Chair of the Educational Testing Services (ETS) Technical Advisory Committee for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Michael has worked with ACET as a measurement consultant for the past seven years. He will surely make a strong contribution in his new role as committee Chair.

We would also like to show our appreciation for our Spring Intern, May Shoua Moua, who recently completed her three-credit internship with ACET. As part of the internship, she also co-presented a session on evaluation for the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and created our spring newsletter featuring research on Hmong philanthropic practices. We thank May for her hard work and dedication this semester.

Finally, we would like to congratulate Jason Butler, a former intern and Evaluation Consultant for ACET, on his recent acceptance of a full-time position as Research Associate for an organization in Naperville, Illinois. We wish him all the best and look forward to continuing to work with him in the future!

Dear friends and colleagues,

There are lots of exciting things going on this summer. To begin with, I just got married! We've also hired a new full-time staff member and have a new summer intern. Many thanks to everyone who helped make our Open House a success! For those of you who couldn't attend, feel free to stop by to see the new office soon. Our office hours are Monday–Friday from 9am–7pm.

-Stella SiWan Zimmerman



Meet our New Staff!

Kirsten Rewey has just joined the ACET team as a full-time Research and Evaluation Associate. Kirsten brings expertise in evidence-based research methodologies and the use of technology to improve student learning. She earned her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology and has over 15 years of teaching experience at the college/university level. When Kirsten is not working, she quilts, reads, and makes her own soap.



Meet our New Intern!

Cathy Suarez is joining us this summer from the University of Minnesota, where she is currently completing her Master's thesis in Educational Psychology. In her thesis she is exploring how to raise the academic achievement of diverse learners by developing programs that increase their levels of hope. In her spare time Cathy enjoys cooking, baking, and watching documentaries.

Featured Highlights

The Harvard University Civil Rights Project recently published "Pre-School Literacy Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Hmong Children in Words Work!," prepared by Vang, C., Cheung, S., Murphy, M., and McKendall-Stephens, V. (2004). <http://www.searac.org/savepapers2006.html>

Bolder Options, a Minneapolis-based after-school mentoring program, was featured on the "Today" show on April 19th, 2006 as part of their ongoing "Lend a Hand Today" series. The nonprofit organization was recognized for its unique focus on both education and physical fitness. ACET and Mary Ellen Murphy, Evaluation and Planning Consultant, worked with Bolder Options in designing their evaluation system. Highlights from the "Today" show appearance were also aired locally on KARE 11 News.

Sustainability: How One Local Organization is Making it Work

By Cathy Suarez, summer intern



An Interview with Program Coordinators Beth Menninga (left) and Sandy Heidemann

Recently I had the opportunity to meet with two program coordinators who are managing to sustain their program despite the sunseting of dedicated grant funding for formative evaluations. The Words Work! program is an early literacy initiative implemented in Saint Paul and Dakota County that was designed to increase literacy skills in preschool children and increase family involvement in literacy development. This program includes teacher training, family support, and continuous assessment of student progress. For the past six years, program staff worked with an external evaluation team to implement a comprehensive evaluation system included in their initial six years of funding. Results from the research study suggest that the integrated approach of Words Work! prepares children to be successful learners and may help narrow the achievement gap for students at-risk of academic failure. The following sections highlight factors that Menninga and Heidemann say facilitated sustainability or challenged the integration process, as well as suggestions they have for other organizations in a similar position.

What factors contributed to the sustainability of Words Work?

- ❖ The Saint Paul Foundation's focus on long-term goals
- ❖ Frequent meetings with center staff to discuss integration procedures and timelines
- ❖ Full-time support staff
- ❖ Constant reflection about which aspects of the program are most effective and which are not
- ❖ Adaptation of program to meet the needs of unique classrooms
- ❖ Knowledge of basic evaluation processes (gained through experience with professional evaluators)
- ❖ Overall program quality (based on evaluation reports, classroom observations)

What challenges are you facing as you move from implementation into the integration phase?

- ❖ High staff turnover means that more time must be spent training new teachers, mentors, etc.
- ❖ Creating surveys/instruments that will be properly interpreted and yield useful data
- ❖ Lack of knowledge about complex statistical analyses
- ❖ Maintaining progress towards useful program changes, rather than reverting back to old familiar patterns

What recommendations do you have to increase sustainability for future programming?

- ❖ Start planning as early as possible for integration
- ❖ Include in the grant proposal some time for the transition process to take place
- ❖ Allocate funding for staff training in program evaluation
- ❖ Promote staff buy-in to create a sense of program ownership
- ❖ Plan for follow-up support within the grant period

For more information check out this article on Words Work! from the *Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*:

<http://www.saintpaulfoundation.org/filerepository/downloads/heidemannforpdf.pdf>

Formative evaluation team: Murphy, M., Cheung, S., McKendall-Stephens, V., Vang, C., Zaragoza, A., Larson Nippolt, P., Davis Gooding, K., & Donovan, S. (1999-2005)

Research team: Cheung, S., Rodriguez, M., Butler, J., & Donovan, S. (2005)



The Intercultural Leadership Initiative (ILI) of the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Inc. in Wisconsin included a warm thank-you on their website for ACET's 3-day consultation that was funded through the Center for Applied Prevention Technologies (CAPT). As quoted in their newsletter, ACET staff "related very well to ILI staff's need to present our evaluation materials in the same creative, living way that we present our curriculum."