



Tent Tutoring

LSU Students at Renaissance Village

Nine months after two devastating hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast, things are still not back to normal. But life is especially different in Baker's FEMA relocation trailer community, known as Renaissance Village.

More than 520 fluorescent white trailers polka dot the 62-acre backdrop. Wood shavings replace the floors of the two tents assembled for children and adults to meet, play, or talk. A chain link fence stands for the wall. Picnic tables substitute for desks. And, a tent serves as the classroom.

The tents are only temporary, standing in for several mobile trailer classrooms. But, it is early May in southeast Louisiana and temperatures can reach the upper 80s. That doesn't stop LSU students from investing their evenings to tutor the children who now reside in Renaissance Village.

The students are part of a hurricane relief outreach effort known as The Delta Express Program, a joint venture between the LSU College of Education, the University of California Berkeley's UC Links project, Tulane University, and several other groups that are signing on to participate.

The Delta Express Program addresses both educational and social needs of underserved children displaced by the hurricanes by offering formal and informal learning activities that the children themselves consider "fun."

"Basically, we make it fun and let the kids be creative," said Jolanta "Jola" Smolen, a graduate student from Poland in the LSU College of Education who is interested in

international education. As Smolen handed out arts and crafts supplies for the children's project, she said "The kids are making Mother's Day cards today, using digital cameras, editing their photos and making them look cool with Photoshop.

The Delta Express Program has been active since April after a series of meetings with parents to discover what they thought their children needed and didn't need. Currently working with 12 to 15 students nightly, the program is growing in popularity. But, it's a hard crowd. Various "good do-ers" have been in and out of Renaissance Village, making some residents, and especially the children, skeptical of the shelf life of new programs.

"Every day we get new kids and new parents that stop by and want to know what we are doing and how they can sign-up. I think they are starting to realize that we are here to stay," added Smolen.

After its opening in October, Renaissance Village became a temporary home for about 2,000 hurricane evacuees. And, while no one is completely sure about the ever-changing number, most agree that a third of the residents are younger than 18.

With so many young residents with so many needs, the village caught the eye of philanthropist- comedienne Rosie O'Donnell. Through funds raised by the For All Kids Foundation, O'Donnell donated three mobile classrooms to Renaissance Village for the estimated 500 school-age kids that live there.

They arrived in early December, but FEMA is still in the process of setting up the classrooms. Computer banks were also donated by a local physician and the Virtue Foundation, but as yet there are no electrical hookups for the computers. Once everything is assembled and connected, many learning programs like Head Start and Early Head Start along with after-school programs like The Delta Express Program will benefit from the less temporary, air conditioned space.

"The school trailers should be open soon —once we get a room and out of the tent we can do more organized learning; we can do lessons; we will have computers and can do projects the kids can come back to the next day," said Sherri Taylor, the on-site coordinator for the project with 19 years of experience in special education and English as a Second Language. Taylor will graduate from the College of Education in the summer of 2006 with a M.Ed. focused on educational technology.

Taylor added how she is anxious to do activities with the students that focus on literacy building, "We want to work with them on writing stories and using computers to do it. They can read each other's stories and help each other. It would be really important for these kids to have a place where they can save their files every day and come back to it."

But, the LSU and UC Berkeley groups didn't want to wait until the trailers were assembled and ready to start working. College of Education Professor Jerry Willis said, "We started having meetings about this project last October. We must have had twenty different meetings talking about what we were going to do while waiting for the trailers to be set-up. Finally, we just decided we didn't need any more meetings or a trailer, we just needed to start helping these children."

"Basically, Jerry and I felt like we needed to get this off the ground. We can't talk about serving larger numbers of kids in Louisiana if we can't break through the bureaucracy and help the ones right here," said Charles Underwood, executive director of the UC Links program.

In operation since 1986, UC Links is a network of educational programs throughout the University of California System that connect community and university partners to provide computer-based and other learning activities for school children in low-income communities throughout California. Underwood and Willis collaborated to adapt educational activities and resources from the UC Links models to the situation in Louisiana.

But, the situation in Louisiana was unlike anything Underwood had ever seen in North America, he said after touring the area, "I have been in very low income communities all over California and the nation and I have never seen a camp like this in the United States before."

Underwood added that it was not easy to set-up the Delta Express Program in Renaissance Village. "The difficulty in putting this work together is greater than I have seen before because we usually have something to build on, even in very low-income communities ...But in this community, we have not had any type of infrastructure to build on."

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Renaissance Village had no computers, no electrical outlets, no electricity, no air conditioning, and, no building or rooms available for use on a regular basis for educational activities. Weary from waiting and hoping, the group came together. "We pooled our resources, got a handful of people together, did some training sessions, and got the program off the ground," said Underwood.

The students that come to the tent are devoted said Taylor, "One little girl has a two-hour bus ride from school. The minute she jumps off the steps of the bus, she heads straight to the tent."

And, while some children are in the tent doing a project, getting help with homework, or reading, others are riding their bikes or playing games outside. At best, this only accounts for about 50 children, bringing up the question, where are the rest of the estimated 500 residents under the age of 18?

Many of the children in the park have been through tremendous social and emotional stress—losing relatives, struggling to survive in the aftermath of Katrina, and then moving several times from one temporary shelter to another. "We don't push the kids to participate; we're here, we're consistent, and we accept and encourage the children," said Willis. "Kids may be afraid, depressed, angry, upset, and more. We help them work through that and involve them in learning without lots of pressure."

"Computers are a real magnet for kids these days," Underwood said. "These kids know that other kids have computers and that other communities have these kinds of resources....it can be a source of real engagement for the kids, especially kids that are struggling in school."

Taylor said they are trying to reach out to as many school age children as they can, "It is exciting to see that we are affecting lives. I can only imagine the impact we would have if a technology rich environment were available for us to engage more with the students."

Smolen added that while the tent is hot and not the ideal situation that it is in a great location to recruit, as she pointed to the basketball court nearby.

The sound of thumping basketballs echoed throughout the tent like a heartbeat. A few families passed by on an evening stroll, leading dogs on leashes. And, for a moment it looked like any neighborhood.

But, there is no need for a neighborhood watch group here. Instead, FEMA employs a private security firm with guards to monitor this community. Some even pop in and out of the tent, sitting down and talking with the children about their Mother's Day cards or helping the teachers move heavy ice chests.

Smolen added that the ice chests were a necessity in the heat and were a first attraction for some of the kids, "But, mind you, we had some parents that were very adamant about us not handing out sugary sodas and candy...very adamant." Instead, they offer iced down water, juices, and healthy snacks. "A hot commodity in this heat," said Jola as a guard kindly hauled off an empty cooler.

Like a camp or picnic, the tutoring center has an air of fun to it because it is so different from a classroom. It also gives new meaning to the term "field work," proving to be a truly unique learning experience for the soon-to-be teachers.

Emily Johnson, a tutor originally from New Orleans, works at the tent two days a week. She is majoring in elementary education with a concentration in astronomy and oceanography. While cutting shapes out of construction paper and handing them to a student, she said she enjoys working with the children because they are "so sweet" and "just good kids."

"It is a lot different out here from what people assume," said Johnson recalling friends' worries about her safety while at the village. "It is just so different than what you hear. And, the kids love having us here."

After hearing Johnson's comments, Carol Bell, a librarian at LSU who has worked with The Delta Express Program since the beginning, joined the conversation, saying "People need to know how sweet these kids are" and mentioned that fear may be what prevents more from going to the village to help in similar relief efforts.

Like Bell and Johnson, the tutors are dedicated to this project and have built an incredible bond with the students. As a New Orleans native, Johnson views her efforts with The Delta Express Program as her way of "helping get the city back, to rebuild in some way."

As a little girl hovers above her shoulders peeking at her project, Amanda Maddox said her reasoning was a little different, "I am helping but I am also getting experience on better ways of teaching, too. I want to give back to the community that I live in now, even if I am not from here." Originally from Atlanta, Maddox is a math major with a concentration in secondary education.

There are also tutors who are not in the College of Education. For instance, Kyra Brown is getting a general studies degree with minors in sociology, psychology, and corrections. LSU Libraries is also active in the village and The Delta Express Project. The students participating in the program all receive specialized training from LSU and its partner, the University of California at Berkeley, which has operated a similar program in the Oakland schools for more than ten years. There is also a great deal of parental and community involvement in the group as well.

Victor Stewart, a community member, who is also a displaced teacher, said he comes by the tent because he likes to see all the children learning and talking with the teachers. After working for the city of New Orleans for 32 years, Stewart retired and then a friend recruited him into teaching. He taught horticulture classes as a volunteer while getting certified through G.W. Carver High School, located two blocks from the industrial canal in New Orleans.

Stewart received his teaching certification three days before Katrina hit. "He is here every night and helps us any way he can," added Smolen. "Even if people are there temporarily they need some sense of community," said Underwood, "Anything we can do together to help build a sense of community will encourage the kids to have hope for a better future."

The College of Education is dedicated to fostering this hope to bring about a true renaissance for the children of the village, helping them rise above catastrophe and achieve the better futures of which they dream.

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Painting by Kate McLean, University Lab School Student

A College-wide Response to the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

In addition to continuing efforts in the CHILL project, it is important to briefly highlight the College's overall involvement with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita recovery efforts. Many of our faculty, staff, and students welcomed displaced family, friends, fellow educators, and even complete strangers into their homes. The College enrolled 125 evacuees as visiting students, created a program to accommodate the alternative certification students from the University of New Orleans, and acknowledged several visiting students who received their diplomas from several New Orleans institutions at the College's commencement ceremony.

While many College of Education members volunteered immediately after the storm at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center, the LSU Help Line, or the School of Veterinary Medicine's animal shelter, others spent weeks and even months offering both their expertise and their time at shelters and for relief efforts throughout the state.

Counseling professors Laura Hensley Choate, Gary Gintner, and David Spruill developed and conducted workshops offering tips for coping with the aftermath of the storms including stress response, examples of common reactions, risk and resiliency factors, and loss issues for health care professionals, parents, school counselors, teachers, governmental officials, and the LSU community.

The College of Education also actively collected and distributed supplies for hurricane assistance. In collaboration with the National Science Teachers Association, Fawn Ukpolo and other College faculty, staff, and students collected and distributed supplies to the City of Baker School System which experienced an incredible influx of many new students into the area after the FEMA relocation trailer site known as Renaissance Village was established in the city of Baker. Through her connections with executive directors from across the country in the Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance and the American Heart Association, Kathy Hill collected and distributed donations and supplies to help replenish class materials for physical education teachers, an estimated \$300 value worth of equipment per teacher.

Through a project funded by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, staff members from the College of Education worked with The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in developing and field testing a shelter survey assessment tool and conducted interviews at area shelters. This preliminary work aided in formation of the Child Friendly Spaces program that addresses the psychosocial needs of children through educational and fitness activities. The IRC also provided training to student volunteers in hopes of implementing the program in area shelters.

Students volunteered over the fall semester break for the Holiday Camp program at Renaissance Village organized by the Association of Hole in the Wall Camps and traveled to New Orleans with another non-profit aide organization known as Hart 4 Humanity to clean up parks and playgrounds. An elementary education junior deserves special mention for her relief efforts. Erin King served at the Istrouma Baptist Church, Green Chapel, and Shilo Baptist Church shelters in addition to volunteering at the River Center Shelter and the FEMA relocation trailer site known as Renaissance Village in Baker. King was moved by her experiences at these shelters; she postponed her studies at LSU for a semester in order to focus her time on working with the displaced children. King wants to dedicate her career to improving the living conditions and learning opportunities for children displaced by natural and man-made disasters within the United States and internationally.

The College of Education continues to explore ways to respond and to better understand the many challenges facing the state. This is only a small sample of the exciting and meaningful activities in which our faculty, students, and staff have been engaged. Some of these efforts are highlighted in more detail in the departmental sections throughout this publication. Due to the ever increasing number of ongoing activities, however, it is inevitable that many projects will go unmentioned—although not unappreciated.

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Understanding Educational Responses in Natural Disasters

With the one year anniversary of Katrina and Rita recently past, LSU researchers have shed light as to how educators dealt with the chaos and questions in classroom communities following two of the country's most devastating natural disasters.

The National Science Foundation and the Board of Regents' Louisiana Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (LA EPSCoR) funded nearly \$100,000 for the project conducted by College of Education Associate Professor Teresa Buchanan, School of Human Ecology Professor Diane Burts, and School of Social Work Associate Professor Timothy Page. The researchers collected information about both teachers' responses to and students' knowledge of the 2005 hurricanes.

To understand the educator side of the storm response, the group surveyed teachers' and schools' activities following the storms. In all, 344 teachers in Louisiana, 93 in Tennessee, 77 from South Carolina, and 78 from Georgia completed surveys that described what school response, planned teacher-directed activities and spontaneous student-led activities took place in the weeks immediately following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

They reported that school-wide responses differed according to location. As expected, Louisiana schools did significantly more school-wide activities than schools in any other state. A few common examples of these school-wide activities involved collecting or providing educational materials such as classroom supplies or toys for evacuee children and providing materials for evacuee families like clothing or dishes.

One of the most surprising findings of the study was that there were no significant differences in teacher-planned classroom activities based on location. The LSU research team found that teachers reported doing approximately the same amount of planned activities in their classrooms no matter where in the country they were located— state, school district, or hurricane-prone area.

“We expected to find a flurry of classroom activity in the Gulf Coast not only about weather but about hurricane safety. Instead, the coastal states did not adjust their classroom instruction anymore than Tennessee—where people don’t worry about a direct hit from a Category 4 hurricane,” said Buchanan, the principal investigator for the project.

Buchanan was most surprised to find that Louisiana teachers didn’t seem to direct any more of their classroom activities toward helping children understand the hurricane-related events, “I think teachers were operating under the impression that it would have been harmful to the children if they had discussed the hurricanes in their classrooms. There are a lot of misunderstandings out there about what to do in a classroom following a crisis.”

In contrast to those findings, the researchers found that children varied greatly in self-initiated activities in the classroom based on their locations. Children in Louisiana initiated significantly more spontaneous activities related to hurricanes than children in other states. The most frequent activities involved children telling stories about Katrina or hurricanes, discussing Katrina or hurricane-related events in the classroom with the teacher, and discussing Katrina or other hurricane-related events among themselves.

Another significant finding of the study dealt with grade-level learning. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who teach children ages four to five did fewer things related to hurricanes or weather than primary grade teachers who teach children ages six to eight. The researchers found that the most common classroom activities were related to reading stories about weather, lecturing about hurricanes, or teaching a unit or theme or conducting a project about weather.

Second-grade teacher Stephanie Sarver provided a clear illustration of outstanding hurricane-related classroom activities. At E.K. Key Elementary School in Sulphur, Louisiana, Sarver based her lessons off of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum and grade-level expectations. Those guidelines include sections that address community problems and engage the students in discussions about community problems. Among other activities, Sarver adapted these units after the hurricanes by commissioning her students to create Hurricane Rita commemorative stamps for a make believe relief fund.

The students also were required to come to a collective decision about how to use the funds raised by the stamps. They decided that the stamp revenue should be used to

fix all the “blue roofs,” clean up the trash, build an animal shelter, and and buy food for hungry people and animals.

“This school really rolled out the red carpet for us. We arrived to hand-made signs addressed to the LSU research team that read ‘Welcome LSU.’ They were excited to be a part of this hurricane project,” recalled Buchanan.

“We were glad they were part of the sample because we were able to see Mrs. Sarver’s terrific response to the hurricanes. We believe she demonstrated model teaching. Other teachers in the sample had equally impressive responses, but she did a particularly good job describing her teaching to the research team.”

To better understand learning outcomes associated with teaching practices, the researchers measured the children’s knowledge about hurricanes. For this sample, 15 teachers were selected in a stratified random sample taken from the returned Louisiana teacher surveys. The researchers selected three teachers from each grade who conducted various levels of hurricane-related activities in the class. The researchers then randomly selected and interviewed children in these classrooms to assess their understanding of hurricanes.

The six district sample of interviewees consisted of 108 children, ranging in grade levels from pre- kindergarten to third grade. Most of the children came from communities directly hit by the hurricanes with a significant percentage of children in the sample who experienced evacuation, injury, relocation to temporary housing or shelters, cohabitation with evacuees, or loss of property.

Two members of the team of interviewers went to each of the 15 schools for two days conducting interviews with the children using a new modification of the narrative story-stem methodology. Story- stem methodology uses children’s stories to assess attachment, an approach Page uses in his line of research. The research team adapted the methodology to assess knowledge of hurricanes. In this case, the researchers used six scenarios in which the children interacted with wooden human figures, farm animals, a city scape, cars and boats, and doll houses. The researchers filmed each interview, reviewed the footage and coded the children’s responses for statistical analysis.

“These were prompts that encouraged the children to tell stories. We started the story and the child finished it while we observed their words and actions for evidence of their knowledge about hurricanes in general and Katrina and Rita in particular,” said Buchanan.

The preliminary analyses of these stories indicated that the children understood the direct effects of the hurricanes. There was very strong evidence that the children knew that trees fell down or broke, that people left their homes to evacuate, that houses

were damaged, and that streets and houses flooded. Most children told stories that showed they understood that hurricanes are weather systems that can be destructive, often have heavy rain and strong winds, and that there is a hurricane season. Very few stories indicated knowledge of other characteristics or causes of hurricanes.

Ana Morales Boone, a doctoral student in the College of Education, was one of the interviewers in the project. She gained first-hand insight into the students' responses to the project by traveling to seven classrooms and conducting an average of 16 interviews per school.

"The children would take the little people figurines and immediately put them in the dollhouse attic to get them away from the water," said Morales Boone.

"In one scenario, the children would position the dolls in front of the television to discuss warnings about hurricanes and what they should do," said Morales Boone, adding, "They would have pretend conversations about hurricanes. These preschoolers would use the word 'evacuation' and tell the wooden 'friend' about going to shelters."

Morales Boone said that it was touching and sometimes heartbreaking to see such young children's dramatic reactions to storms, giving her an appreciation for what children and teachers experienced during this difficult time. The interviews also gave Morales Boone another appreciation as well, that of the research process. Morales Boone collected and analyzed social science data from the test and pilot stage through the interview, review and coding process, offering a complete tour of the complex research cycle.

"I worked with LSU faculty, staff, students and researchers from other universities and disciplines. I met with community members and educators from all over the area. And, I participated in every aspect of the project," said Morales Boone.

"I was involved with the development of our survey instrument, our methodology, our interviews," she said, adding "I have a profound respect for all of the work



researchers invest in these projects...not to mention the time and intellectual commitment it takes to get an article published and present the findings.”

Morales Boone will present these findings with the LSU faculty team at the Louisiana Early Childhood Association conference and the research team also has submitted proposals to several national meetings including the American Educational Research Association and the Society for Research in Child Development.



With most of the preliminary analyses underway, the researchers will have an interesting picture to paint at these professional meetings. While the teachers were hesitant to change lessons to directly tackle the 2005 weather phenomena, the children themselves were eager to address these powerful storms. The picture that emerges could help teachers know how to respond to disasters that might occur in their own communities.

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