Center for Catholic Education Newsletter, Fall 2011

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SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND

Through the works of the Excellence Initiative it is clear that many Catholic school teachers seek quality professional development. Two professors at the University of Dayton who are committed to Catholic education sought to fill a need in the area of literacy. Mary-Kate Sableski, Ph.D., Clinical Administrator for the Graduate Reading Program, and Jackie Arnold, Ph.D., Clinical Administrator of Online Programs, have worked together to create unique opportunities for communicating best practice in reading and writing instruction to Dayton area Catholic school teachers.

Prompted by devotion to Holy Angels and St. Brigid schools, where their own children are students, Sableski and Arnold desired to work with teachers and librarians in order to help implement the use of quality children’s literature in classrooms. Early in the planning stages, however, they realized that their expertise could serve a much larger audience. Armed with knowledge of the very best literature available to students and the ability to reach out to all Dayton area Catholic school teachers, the idea of a picture book read in was conceived. Many hours were spent securing book collections from local libraries and also soliciting donations of books to give away to participants, but all the hard work paid off during the summer of 2010 when the First Annual UD Picture Book Read In was held on campus. This fun-filled morning was attended by over 80 teachers and librarians representing at least 15 different Catholic schools. Participants spent the morning reading numerous children’s books, noting titles to enhance their teaching and add to their own classroom libraries. Those in attendance expressed great satisfaction and a desire to have similar opportunities in the future. Arnold and Sableski were inspired to repeat the event this past summer, this time for a full day, and once again to a very large and excited group of teachers, many of whom were returning guests.

Always ready for the next adventure, Sableski and Arnold thought about the success of the Read In and how they could use it as a vehicle for further professional development opportunities. Since reading and writing are tightly interwoven, it was a logical progression to create a writing camp for those wanting to explore ways of developing their writing programs around quality literature. The UD Writing Camp, which premiered this past summer, was an intense two-week study that developed teacher knowledge of best practice writing instruction. A unique component to the workshop was that it brought area Catholic school and Dayton Public school students to class to work alongside the teachers as they practiced some of the new strategies being learned. It proved to be a valuable summer writing experience for teachers and students alike.

The writing camp inspired several teachers to inquire about the formation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to continue their work and self-study as they implemented writing workshops in their classrooms. Without hesitation, Arnold and Sableski created the PLC, which has already convened twice since September and will continue to meet throughout the school year.
TOLERANCE AND INCLUSION

Urban Catholic elementary school eighth graders began the 2011-2012 school year with a plan of action for making their school communities more cohesive. The Urban Child Development Resource Center (UCDRC) hosted the first of two retreats for the school year in September at the Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark in Dayton. UCDRC staff, along with the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) and the University of Dayton’s Marianist Leadership Scholars (MLS), hosted the retreat for Immaculate Conception, Mary Queen of Peace, and Our Lady of the Rosary students. Using the 40 Developmental Assets as a menu of issues to work from, UCDRC chose the theme of Tolerance and Inclusion.

There is a three-pronged focus to UCDRC retreats: to select difficult issues students are exposed to in the violence prevention curriculum (SECOND STEP) presented weekly to all students by UCDRC staff; to bring different schools together to help students realize how much they have in common; and to assist students in forming new relationships that may cushion the often difficult transition to much larger high schools. Retreats are held at the beginning and end of the eighth grade year. Feedback from the students and principals indicate tremendous success in accomplishing retreat goals.

As an organization dedicated to fighting discrimination of any kind, NCCJ spent the day addressing in-depth the many forms of discrimination to which students are exposed. The NCCJ approach compliments the anti-violence curriculum UCDRC presents weekly to all students in UCDRC schools. Together with NCCJ staff and MLS, UCDRC counselors worked with the students to help identify barriers and problem-solve solutions that would foster tolerance and inclusion in their respective schools. Prayers at the beginning and end of the day were led by students.

By the end of the day, each school had developed a plan of action by which they would address the particular issues identified at their respective schools. They have taken their plans to school and will be assisted by the UCDRC counselors for implementation. Towards the end of the school year, the students will re-convene for a second retreat at which time they will report on the success of their plan of action. They will also discuss what discrimination issues they might face as they move on to high school next year and what students have learned that might help them deal with these problems.

The day ended with prayer and a renewed commitment by students to make their communities stronger and peaceful.

UCDRC is a grant funded program made possible through the generosity of several dedicated foundations. The mission of UCDRC is to enable students to achieve their full educational and social potential by empowering students and their families to achieve emotional, physical, and spiritual health within their own cultural framework.
As we count our blessings during this season of Thanksgiving, it should be noted that a very special blessing occurred on August 22, 2011. On that day, a small group of people gathered on the back porch of 4252 Vine Street in Cincinnati to formally welcome four new Lalanne teachers and to participate in a blessing of the community house. Performing the blessing ritual was Bishop Joseph Binzer, Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. In attendance were Dr. Jim Rigg, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese, Jacinta Mergler and Peg Brun, members of the Lalanne staff, principals and teaching colleagues of the schools Lalanne is serving this year, representatives from the Franciscan community and Roger Bacon High School community, Lalanne alumni living and teaching in the Cincinnati area, and of course the new community of teachers: Elizabeth Scott, Ann Sacksteder, Kelsey Ott and Kelly Mullen.

The ceremony was filled with spirit and God’s grace. The readings talked about the first Christian communities of the Church and how Jesus continually invites us to a life of service, working together to help others come to know God through our living example. After the house was sprinkled with holy water inside and out, those gathered for the celebration enjoyed refreshments and friendly conversation.

Lalanne is excited and proud to be serving schools in Cincinnati for the first time. Teachers are working in St. Frances DeSales Catholic School, Holy Family Catholic School and Mother of Mercy High School. We are grateful for the continued interest in and support of Lalanne from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and we look forward to working with them, and especially Dr. Rigg, as we talk about expanding into other areas that have a need for Catholic school teachers.

In 2010, the University of Dayton’s School of Education and Allied Professions was awarded a one-year planning grant from the Better Way Foundation of Minnetonka, Minnesota to address the school readiness needs of children and families in the Old North Dayton neighborhood. Dr. Roberta Weaver, Cindy Currell, Dr. Shauna Adams, and Susan Ferguson formed a team to initiate activities that would bring together schools and community partners interested in strengthening relationships between families, teachers, administrators, university personnel and social agencies for purposes of establishing ready communities, schools and families. The Dayton community is blessed to have a number of programs and activities that have been established for the express purpose of assisting in school readiness for children throughout the region. The grant narrows the foci of these reputable initiatives to Catholic schools and public schools in the Old North Dayton neighborhood.

After a successful planning year, further funding was granted to the group by the Better Way Foundation to implement the community building activities necessary for school readiness. Partners in the grant initiative learned of a successful parent support program called the Parent Cafe. All agreed that parents/families supporting parents/families would be an authentic, empowering program. In May 2011 an initial Dayton training of thirteen potential parent leaders from the Old North Dayton community, Catholic schools, the Miami Valley Family Care Center, Neighborhood School Centers, and the Kroc Center was successfully launched. A second Dayton Parent Cafe and training for potential parent leaders from each of these segments was held in September and October 2011 at the Pilarczyk Center, the hub of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic School Office in the Northern region of the Archdiocese. About seventy-five participants and their children attended these evening sessions and left with the desire to establish Parent Cafes in their own school communities. Parent Cafes at Miami Valley Family Care Center and Edison PK-8 School will happen soon. Our Lady of the Rosary and Mary Queen of Peace are in the planning stages of hosting a shared Parent Cafe with the two school communities in early 2012. The Kroc Center and the Neighborhood School Centers are in the planning stages of Parent Cafes in the upcoming months. These programs contribute to the support parents and families desire in their effort to be aware of their children’s needs and to find the means to help their children grow in the skill areas necessary to successfully begin a school career.

This grant will continue to develop and share resources in an effort to increase school readiness and early childhood quality as well as foster quality transition from pre-school to kindergarten in collaboration with parents and families as part of the Old North Dayton School Readiness Collaborative.
There is an online component built in for further sharing and discussion. Sableski and Arnold, through the Center for Catholic Education, were awarded the Bonnie Campbell Hill National Literacy Award for 2011 through the National Council of Teachers of English Children’s Literature Assembly. This award helped to support the Picture Book Read In held this past summer. It will also support the literacy PLC during the 2011-2012 school year and will fund one lucky teacher’s attendance at the National Council of Teachers of English conference being held in Chicago November 17—20.

Not only are Drs. Arnold and Sableski very knowledgeable in the field of literacy, they have a passion for Catholic education and have chosen similar paths in their own educational journeys. Both are Catholic elementary school and high school graduates, both earned their undergraduate and graduate degrees in Education from UD, and both earned Ph.D.’s in Language, Literacy, and Culture from The Ohio State University.

When asked about their experiences with conducting professional development programs, both agree that it feels good to make a difference in the teaching practices of Catholic school teachers. The level of commitment, motivation, and dedication to self-improvement demonstrated by the teachers is Sableski and Arnold’s greatest reward. They hope teachers will continue to take advantage of these opportunities because they find quality professional development rooted in best practice instruction as one way they can impact teaching and learning in our Catholic schools. We, likewise, hope Dr. Sableski and Dr. Arnold will continue to bless us with their dedication, motivation, and commitment to Catholic education for many years to come.