

## Student Leadership

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This packet includes...	Description of a WANY community service project and reflections on student leadership by students who presented WANY to immigrants at El Centro del Inmigrante.
This material was created by...	Caryn Davis and students in her CUNY Language Immersion Program class.
She teaches at...	CUNY Language Immersion Program, College of Staten Island
She can be contacted at...	<a href="mailto:carynterri@msn.com">carynterri@msn.com</a>

# **Building Bridges with We Are New York**

## **A Community Service Project**

**Caryn Davis, CUNY Language Immersion Program,  
College of Staten Island**

*We all helped everybody to build bridges of mutual understanding.  
and these bridges of mutual understanding help us learn English better.*

**– Nadejda**

### **OVERVIEW**

In September 2009, my CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) class of 24 intermediate-level, college-bound ESOL students at the College of Staten Island (CSI) embarked on an experiment. I aimed to develop their capacity to participate in a community service project that I knew would at first seem impossible to many: to lead day-laborers and domestic workers at a community center on Staten Island in a series of discussions based on the *We Are New York* ESOL video series.

The nine dramatic episodes of *We Are New York* (WANY), produced by CUNY and the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, focus on topics relevant for immigrants in NYC, such as accessing affordable health care, preparing for parent-teacher conferences and opening a bank account in NYC. The series features language structures that English language learners can readily grasp and emulate, in and outside the classroom. The topics of the videos are high interest topics for adults.

I knew my students would enjoy watching the episodes, learning about the topics they deal with, and sharing valuable information in the series with other immigrants on Staten Island. The project is predicated upon my observation that adult ESOL students, particularly those preparing for college are:

- motivated to increase their English skills quickly and wish to advance their abilities to communicate effectively both in and outside of the classroom
- have leadership capacity and react positively when given chances to develop their leadership skills
- wish to learn about and to connect to the communities in which they live

CLIP is a content-based ESP (English for Academic Purposes) program that prepares students for college by integrating English language instruction with content learning and critical thinking skills that students need to succeed in college. Building Bridges—between students, between the class and the college, and between students and the communities they live in—is the theme of the courses I have taught in CLIP. The WANY series is ideally suited for this theme. In each of the stories, people of different ethnicities help each other take action to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and their communities. The WANY episodes, together with related texts I chose for the course, made it possible for me to integrate all skills-based tasks in a cohesive content-based CLIP curriculum.

### **Note on FINDING WORKSHOP VENUES:**

The community-based organization we were slated to work with was unable to provide ESOL students due to funding cuts. Since many classroom teachers and program directors are eager to implement this kind of community service project, the CSI CLIP project director and CLIP administrators were able to provide me with contact information for other ESOL programs at CSI and community based organizations on Staten Island. We were also able to work with a CSI ESOL class to model the workshop I facilitated.

My students worked with Mexican day laborers and domestic workers and their children at Project Hospitality/El Centro del Inmigrante, which runs a community center on Staten Island offering educational, work-related and other services.

Project Hospitality's website: <http://www.projecthospitality.org/>

## **WANY Workshop Plan (90 minutes)**

### **“Love and Money” Example**

1. **Welcome**—2 minutes

The teacher of the class provides a brief introduction, describing “We Are New York” and the student facilitation project.

2. **Introductions**—5-10 minutes

The student facilitators introduce their names and one facilitator asks:

Please tell us your names.

Today we’re going to watch a DVD to practice English.

The show deals with banks.

What do you think about banks?

What is your experience with banks?

3. **Overview of the Workshop**, 2 minutes

One facilitator says: The DVD is called “Love and Money.” As we watch the show, we will stop it to make sure you understand it. After the show, we will discuss the information and ideas. Before we watch, we have some pictures from the show.

4. **Pre-Viewing Discussion**, 10 minutes

Facilitators hand out pre-viewing pictures (1 for every 2-4 people). Then one of the student facilitators says:

- “These pictures come from the video. Before we watch the show, let’s talk about the picture.”
- “Look at the picture and talk about what you see.”
- “What do you think is going on in the picture?”
- “What do you see that makes you say that?”
- “What do you think is going to happen in the show “Love and Money?””

Participants talk in small groups for a few minutes, then they share what they talked about.

5. **Introduce the Episode**, 2 minutes

Two facilitators introduce the episode. They say:

“Love and Money” will help you learn English and help you learn about banks in NYC. You will also learn about where you can get more information about banks so your money is safe. You will learn about calling 311 for more information.

We’re going to start soon. We will stop the movie at different places to make sure you understand it. The people in the movie speak slowly so you can try to understand them. Also, there are English subtitles so you can read, too. We’ll stop and translate if you need help.

**Note:** Pause the episode after one of the pictures and have people sitting next to each other talk about what’s going on.

6. **Post-Viewing Discussion**, 15 minutes

**A facilitator leads by saying**, “Look at the pictures again and talk with a person or two people next to you about what you saw.” After a few minutes, a student facilitator asks for ideas from the group:

- “What do you think?”
- “What is your favorite part?”
- “What words did you learn from the show?”
- “What else did you learn from the show?”

7. **Spread the Word about WANY**, 5 minutes  
**(Pass out the WANY posters to everyone)**

Point to a WANY poster (placed on a board or wall) where episodes can be viewed, including the library, and ask people: “What do you want to tell your friends and family about watching “We Are New York”?”

8. **Talk about Studying**, 2 minutes

Ask people: “Do you think you want to learn more English? Do you want to continue your education?”

Tell people about the program you are in and where people can get free English classes and continue their educations. (People can call 311 to find out about free English classes. They can also go to the WANY website: [www.nyc.gov/LearnEnglish](http://www.nyc.gov/LearnEnglish) and click on the Mayor’s Office of Adult Education.)

9. **End the Workshop**, 2 minutes

Tell people: “Thank you for watching the movie and talking about it with us. Remember, call 311 for information about City services in NYC! If it’s an emergency situation, call 911.”

## **WANY Workshop Results & Reflection on Student Leadership Project**

**Caryn Davis  
CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP)  
College of Staten Island**

Many folks who attend El Centro are undocumented Americans from rural areas in Mexico where the majority finish 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Many people are illiterate in Spanish, some come from communities that have resisted Spanish and speak another language. Most people comprehend some English, most are unable to speak very much. Port Richmond is a 20 minute bus ride to CSI. I have been teaching at CSI for 3 years and three Mexican people have attended my classes during this time.

El Centro's staff and community welcomed us. They were willing to interact and participate, despite their shyness and lack of English skills. Approximately 50 Mexican women and men attended the six workshops, and many attended more than once. Approximately 20 children were in attendance, and sometimes the older children (on Veteran's Day) contributed to the post movie conversation. Approximately 6 attendees spoke with me directly about the CLIP program.

All but one CLIP student (who had traveled to Mecca for Haj) presented their WANY workshop at El Centro. When students were not presenting, their attendance in the audience was at 80-95%.

### *Additional outcomes:*

A CLIP students' junior high school aged daughter decided to volunteer with the children at El Centro, a CLIP student was hired to work at a bank in Brooklyn (the letter of recommendation I wrote for him centered on his leadership with WANY), my students and I will present a WANY workshop for Staten Island program and executive directors who serve the immigrant community at their quarterly breakfast.

### **My Reflections on Building Bridges**

Building bridges between me and my students continuously engages me in developing my teaching practice. Finding a successful way to work with an immigrant community on Staten Island was deeply satisfying. I put into practice my belief that students need to be at the center of their learning and that they can do more than they ever thought possible. I have also become more insistent that contributing to our communities is as important as anything else we do.

Given my penchant to experiment with ways to put hope and possibility into action, I try to set up the conditions for truly student centered authentic learning. I find it is always challenging because of the baggage I carry as a student and because of the limitations and restraints heaped on all students and teachers everywhere in our institutions of learning.

However, working with the WANY series and developing an effective workshop format assisted my students to become aware of their own effectiveness and strength, as students, and as leaders in their class and community. At the end of the semester, I can say that we made a small, yet significant difference to each other and to the people we met at El Centro. Our simple idea of what defines a leader was put into practice. I learned to raise the bar even higher for myself and my future students.

## STUDENT VOICES

A sample of students' writing from our class blog, a letter to incoming CLIP students, and the WANY Workshop Journals offer some students' views of the project. From my vantage point, it seems every student became more confident, which I primarily noticed in their ability and willingness to speak English to each other, to other immigrants and to CSI administrators. Although all CLIP tasks were realized through this project, the most invaluable aspect was what Qua Hua said in her letter to incoming CLIP students, "Open your mouth, try to talk with other students."

### **Excerpts from THE CLIP FAMILY BRIDGE BLOG: *How has the theme building bridges helped you in your first 3 weeks of CLIP classes?***

Everyone helps each other, everyone works hard, maybe this is the idea of building bridges.—**Nataliia**

During the class we are organized in reading groups and we are focused in our activities since we share our ideas about the book Seedfolks. This idea of working in groups in our class helps us become experts because we're helping each other and this motivates us to make a difference in our CLIP class. Building bridges is a very important tool because my classmates and I learn how to develop our English language skills, writing skills and we're working as a community.—**Nidia**

We worked in reading groups, and that is very important for us, because we can exchange our ideas and points of view. I enjoy it, and I really like it. This is one way to build bridges between me and different students from different countries. I feel my reading is better than the first day in CLIP class.

Another way to build bridges was the interviews because I met my partner and at the same time I learned more English pronunciation and writing. Doing these kinds of activities helps us to build bridges together. The most important way to build bridges is working together and helping the other people who need help.—**Marco**

I think building bridges is important for me. It not only helped me get more information about my partner, I learned how to organize my ideas before I started to write, and it also improved my writing.—**Qing Mei**

My own opinion about building bridges: Today it is more important than before because things are getting worse every day and we have to help each other in order to get a better future for us and for the new generation. If we don't help ourselves who is going to do it? If we don't have bridges made between people things will be harder for us. For example, if you have made a bridge with a person that works for a big company like Microsoft or Apple and you are studying Computer Science in college, when you are done with college this person can help you join the company where he has been working. Just remember how the economy has been and it's just getting worse and worse and many people have lost their

jobs. Think about it carefully. If you don't have bridges made between people, it will be harder to get help.—**Gabriel**

Building bridges is related to asking the professor questions. If we ask her, we can learn every single thing that we don't know.—**Agita**

For me the book *Seedfolks* is like building bridges in our class. In every chapter you can find yourself. I think our class with 24 students from different countries, coming here for a better life, are building bridges the same as the people in *Seedfolks*. The other thing we are doing is the *Literacy Review* book. The book was written by students just like us, immigrants with hard beginnings but who are very successful in the end. Building bridges is very beneficial. It's going to apply not just to us but to our family, to our city, and we can make the U.S.A. a better place. We can change the world.—**Hane**

Building Bridges that is very good project for all the students and other people, because it helps not just in studying English. This project helps consolidate all the community of the Staten Island. For example, I know a new Polish family which arrived on Staten Island not long time ago. They didn't know many important things which could help them. Every day I meet them and talk to them about benefits, educational programs and about other important things. I am building bridges between our neighbors too.—**Yuliya**

We have finished the workshops presentation. Each group did an excellent job from Hanne's group that was the first one to Margaret's groups that was the last one. Each group was prepared and organized I felt so inspired while we were doing the workshops because my classmates and I built bridges of friendship with the Staten Island community. For example I met a lot of nice and smart people at El Centro like Martin, Hilario and of course David the one who is the leader from EL Centro. We taught immigrants about many problems that immigrants have in USA and how they can get help. also we taught them about 311 It is a number that they can call if they need any information. Also we gave them information about CSI and CLIP classes. Now they know if they want to go to college they have to get the GED or the high school diploma. This presentations were and are a great experience for any college student. —**Marco**

## Excerpts from WANY Workshop Journals

**Margret:**

WANY was a wonderful workshop to help other immigrants from El Centro. Thanks to the workshop, I learned more things about the movies. I felt a lot of motivation and I was ready to spread my experience by helping other people, especially immigrants who come here and don't know about very important information or everyday problems. WANY workshop gave me opportunities to be confident and responsible.

**Adnan:**

***What is the most important way you have changed because you participated at El Centro, as a presenter and as an audience participant?***

I have changed in my ways. I have gained things from presentations and also I got rid of couple of things. I have gained the confidence to present something in front of a big majority of people. I also got rid of shyness problem that I had for many years. Before this workshop I was very shy to even talk to the people whom I don't know. As a presenter I have noticed one thing in me that I can talk loudly and clearly. In an audience I am a good friend maker now. I can even be friendlier now because of my practice in El Centro. I can make friends any kind of gender or any age.

***What was your favorite moment at El Centro?***

My favorite moment was when a little child from El Centro called me uncle. I felt like family with that child. Also when people from El Centro called me to start conversation with them.

December 9, 2009

Dear New CLIP Student,

Open your mouth try to talk with other students was very important. Through conversation improved the English skills. The WANY workshops were including many things inside. When you do the presentation, you must know very well what's summary about the movie and you can learn more English words in the movie or when you presentation in El Centro. However you are a presenter or audience participant with El Centro, you all can learn more. Little by little, you talk more so you learn more. That's very helpful with you in the future when you want to learn English well. That's important way to improve you English skills.

Sincerely,

Guihua Lin