2004 Annual Report: Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy

Jesuit colleges and universities seek to embody the search for justice as an ideal. A primary way to accomplish this is to participate as community partners in seeking the well being of the communities in which they are located. The Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy is dedicated to promoting adult literacy as a vehicle for personal, economic, and community empowerment through the vehicle of mutually respectful partnerships from the local to the international level.

The following report summarizes the activities of the Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy for the past year that align with themes Two (Programs)—“having academic and nonacademic programs that are recognized as among the best in the nation”; and Seven (Institutional Character)—“provide leadership in our community and to other institutions in areas of service learning, literacy initiatives, justice, and diversity” of Loyola University’s 2003-2004 academic year objectives. It highlights the Center’s partnership activities related to these two themes at the local, state, national, and international levels.

I. Greater New Orleans metropolitan area

A. Creating a community-wide effort to address adult literacy

Work conducted with two planning grants from Baptist Community Ministries in 2001-2 culminated in the creation of a non-profit metropolitan organization, The Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans. The Alliance’s mission is to coordinate and focus a multi-year campaign to raise the level of adult literacy in this region. The key tasks of the Literacy Alliance are to support local adult literacy programs and hold them accountable for results; create innovative approaches to adult literacy with special emphasis on connecting adult learning to motivating incentives for adults such as gaining and advancing in employment, helping children with schoolwork, and learning to read the bible; and developing a broad base of community awareness of the significance of adult literacy as a limiting factor in personal opportunities as well as economic development in the region, as the financial and political capital to address the issue.

The main indicators of the success of the Literacy Alliance thus far, and the best sign of its potential impact over time continues
to be the number of diverse stakeholder organizations that have seriously engaged with its work. National partnerships with Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Penn State University, have been regularized and are now bringing state-of-the-art technical assistance to the work of the Alliance.

One of the major priorities of the new metropolitan Literacy Alliance is the creation of “workplace literacy” programs, which teach adults to read, write and do math using curricula and instructional methods keyed to the sectors of the workforce for which they are preparing (e.g., teaching reading using the vocabulary and forms associated with licensed practical nursing). Our investigation of best practices in workplace literacy in the United States indicates that these programs require close collaboration between employers, adult educators and community support services such as transportation and childcare. The Boggs Center has been in the thick of analysis and planning meetings in the metropolitan area aimed at creating a strong workplace literacy capacity in metropolitan New Orleans, and has come to be widely regarded as a key partner in that effort. Innovative workplace literacy programs are now being planned in the food manufacturing, health care, and shipbuilding sectors.

As one example, an initiative by the Boggs Center and MetroVision led to talks between the New Orleans Jobs Initiative, a workforce preparation program for economically marginalized people, and Northrop Grumman Ship Systems in Avondale, the region’s largest employer, on a comprehensive pilot program to open up access to good jobs to disadvantaged people led to a detailed plan being submitted for state funding through the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). A favorable response is expected, and if one is forthcoming, that pilot will be launched prior to the end of 2003, with the Boggs Center responsible for technical assistance and evaluation.

C. Adult literacy and the arts

An original dramatic and musical work on the history and significance of literacy in the African American community entitled “13 Lessons,” which was commissioned by the Boggs Center and created by the artistic staff of the Ashe Cultural Arts Center in Central City, was performed on three occasions in Central City for diverse community audiences and warmly received. The play is available for subsequent performances at the option of the Boggs Center when funding permits.
D. Local learning center partnership

An adult learning center created jointly by Hope House, Christian Unity Baptist Church and the Boggs Center celebrated its second anniversary in March, 2003. Discussions are under way for the center to become a formal part of the ministry of Christian Unity Church at the conclusion of the three-year agreement now in place, at which time funding of the center would shift from the Boggs Center to the State Department of Education, as planned.

II. State of Louisiana

The statewide Louisiana CPPR (Connecting Policy, Research and Practice) Network was formally established to bridge the gap between research and practice by creating a two-way street. During the first year, practitioners were exposed to the best of current research in areas of concern to them through a “study-circles” methodology. Participating programs have been "plugged in" to ongoing exchange and have the opportunity not only to bring the best of current research back to their programs in user-friendly form, but also to inform researchers of their concerns. Eight regional practitioner leaders under the leadership of a statewide coordinator are responsible for coordinating this effort.

The LA CPPR network is a state and national partnership involving The Louisiana State Department of Education, the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy at Harvard University, and the Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy at Loyola University New Orleans. The State Department funds the program, the Harvard Center provides access to current research and technical assistance with programming, and the Boggs Center hires and supervises the work of the CPPR coordinator. In May, 2003, the Boggs Center hosted a meeting conducted by members of the NCSALL staff of leaders from New Mexico, Delaware and Louisiana, the three pilot states in NCSALL’s national CPPR Network. Based on positive feedback from participants throughout the state, and the three partners, negotiations with the State Department of Education for year two of the LA CPPR Network in AY 2003-4 have been completed, pending approval by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. NCSALL has committed
to continuing technical assistance and professional support for year two of the project.

The Louisiana CPPR Network is the Boggs Center’s first opportunity to play a statewide role in enhancing adult literacy practice. This year’s successful launch of the Louisiana CPPR network has demonstrated to officials in Baton Rouge that, while the Boggs Center is rooted in metropolitan New Orleans, its focus and concerns are not parochial, but in fact extend to the entire state and beyond. Because federal adult education dollars are funneled to local communities through the state, this growing partnership will serve the Boggs Center, the Literacy Alliance, and the greater New Orleans area well in the years ahead.

III. National collaborations

NCSALL—National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (Harvard University)

Partly as an offshoot of the Boggs Center’s continuing partnership in the Louisiana CPPR Network just described, NCSALL director, Dr. Johns Comings, has agreed to serve on the Boggs board, bringing a unique national perspective on research and practice in adult literacy to the board. We are currently negotiating for New Orleans to become a laboratory site for an evidence-based model of adult literacy in partnership with NCSALL.

NCSALL is currently a consortium of five institutions: Harvard University, Rutgers University, University of Tennessee, Portland State University and World Education. I have begun negotiations with Dr. Comings, NCSALL’s executive director, to formalize a relationship between NCSALL and Loyola’s Boggs Center. I will meet with him and the other members of NCSALL’s management committee at Rutgers in October and in New Orleans in December to move this discussion toward resolution, and I expect an offer of affiliation in some form to be forthcoming. Such an outcome would solidify the role of the Boggs Center as a key partner in national literacy deliberations, enhance funding long-term funding possibilities for the Boggs Center, and connect the local Literacy Alliance every more closely to research and best practices in the field of adult literacy.
NCAL—National Center for Adult Literacy (University of Pennsylvania)

Year one of the Boggs Center’s effort to coordinate the New Orleans area’s participation in a major national experimental study to determine the relative effectiveness of several methods of helping low-literate adults learn to read is underway under the direction of Dr. Petrice Sams-Abiodun, Boggs Center research coordinator. The first year of the study involves recruiting and training local professionals to deliver the experimental treatments, validating research instruments, and strengthening relationships with the local programs from which participants will be drawn.

ISAL—Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy (Penn State University)

After surveying best practices in the developing area of workplace literacy mentioned above, Barb Van Horn and the staff of ISAL has agreed to offer technical assistance to the Boggs Center and the Literacy Alliance in the development of a state-of-the-art workplace literacy capacity in metropolitan New Orleans. That process is underway in a first pilot effort at Brown’s Dairy in Central City is in its initial stage.

ABS—American Bible Society

ABS has received a grant from the Ford Foundation for a national ABS pilot program on using bible study in black churches as a vehicle for adult literacy. The approach will bring together traditional bible study in black churches with contemporary methods of instruction in adult literacy. The Boggs Center will convene and coordinate this effort in metropolitan New Orleans in partnership with ABS, national literacy experts respected pastors from both sides of the Mississippi.

IV. International collaboration

An international consultation concerned with developing an international exchange on best practices and research in adult literacy, convened for its third meeting in Belfast in June, 2003, with representatives from Ireland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States. The U.S. groups includes the National Institute for Literacy,
National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, the University of Tennessee, and Loyola’s Boggs Center. The ongoing aim of the international exchange is to agree on common challenging areas of national literacy work and prioritize areas for collaborative work, which would involve sharing of best practice, carrying out research, and publishing a documented outcome for our respective national governments. In the period leading up to spring 2004, the group will produce an international paper on quality and reporting in adult literacy: the issues, challenges and way forward. Following thorough discussion and debate among the participants, a final report will contain an overview of quality and reporting in each member country, an analysis of the key issues and challenges to be addressed as determined by consultation with key adult literacy stakeholders and suggestions for the way forward. It will be presented to our respective government departments and other relevant stakeholders. The annual international papers to be produced by the group will be a unique contribution to the field of adult literacy, and will greatly inform the work of the Boggs Center and our local Literacy Alliance by extending the scope of available best practices from national to international.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael A. Cowan, Ph.D., Executive Director
Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy