**Case Study[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**ARTS & LITERACY PROGRAM**

**of the**

**COALITION FOR HISPANIC FAMILY SERVICES**

*Hilario Villafana walks on stage in the IS 291 [Middle School 291] auditorium in Bushwick, Brooklyn, during a performance in August 2011. A young man in his early twenties, Hilario is a Homework Warrior for the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services Arts & Literacy Program, focused on helping children with their schoolwork. This summer, however, he is trying something new: engaging a group of 5- and 6-year old “Elves” in an integrated arts project, the kind of project usually led by the program’s Teaching Artists.*

*Villafana explains that the “Elves” have been making masks and investigating the sounds of different instruments in a project to develop joy. “We’ve made music!” With that, six masked players (four children and two staff) pick up drumsticks. When the music track starts -- and with intent focus -- they begin beating a rhythm on the wooden table.  Gradually, rhythm takes over. The music stops, leaving only the call and response drumming led by Villafana -- until the children’s powerful performance calls forth a cheer from the audience.*

**COALITION for HISPANIC FAMILY SERVICES (CHFS):**

**"BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES ONE FAMILY at a TIME"**[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the 1980s, an alarming number of children across many New York City communities entered the city’s foster care system, the result of growing economic instability as well as the spread of crack cocaine and AIDs. Although the ultimate aim of foster care is to reunite families, the pressure to find "safe" foster homes often leads to children being placed outside their own neighborhoods.

Denise Rosario, a social worker born and raised in “El Barrio” (East Harlem, New York City), became concerned that placing Latino children outside of their communities meant children were separated from their language, culture, and schools, as well as from their families.  Rosario and other child welfare professionals from The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families came together to address the issue, believing that traditional Hispanic values could offer a solution -- values emphasizing collective responsibility, mutual aid, and economic support among extended family networks.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Initially aiming to keep foster children within Latino communities and reuniting them as soon as possible with their original families, the group, under Rosario’s leadership, established the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services (CHFS), an independent not-for-profit organization. At the time, Hispanic families were among the poorest New Yorkers[[4]](#footnote-4) and often faced additional stresses of recent immigration, language barriers, and poor health. But, Rosario and her colleagues had seen the resilience and strength of these families. They believed that an organization providing foster care and other services in Spanish as well as English, hiring community residents, incorporating Latino arts and culture into programming, and training staff to know the culture of those being served, would better aid the Latino community.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In 1990, Al Vann, a New York State Assemblyman from Brooklyn, sponsored a discretionary allocation enabling the Coalition to open a community-based foster care program for Hispanic children in Bushwick.  Over the years, the program has expanded to provide a full range of health, mental health, and family support services in and beyond Bushwick to Williamsburg and East New York in Brooklyn as well as to Ridgewood, Corona, and, in 2012-13, Jackson Heights in Queens.

The organization's mission -- to “empower children, youth and families with opportunities for success and self-reliance while reinforcing their sense of cultural and self-identity” through a “holistic, culturally competent, family based approach” -- undergirds all of its programs.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**The Arts & Literacy After School and Summer Program (A&L)**

In 1993, the Coalition’s search for funding brought it to the Robin Hood Foundation[[7]](#footnote-7) which then advocated “wrap around” services for foster care families, including afterschool programs. With the funding, CHFS hired John Paul Gonzalez to design an out-of-school time program for children in foster care. Rosario and Gonzalez, whose background was in music and theater, saw the arts as a powerful means of self-expression, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. Gonzalez piloted an arts-oriented summer camp in 1993 and then, with the Community School District Superintendent, arranged to open an afterschool program at PS 86K (Elementary School 86) in District 32 in Bushwick.

One Sunday morning in mid-1993, visual artist Laura Paris was looking through want ads for a job. She spotted the Coalition's ad for staff and was intrigued. Recently back from Spain where she had taught English, Paris was thinking it was time to move on from the complications of life as an artist, perhaps to do something “important” such as social work. Among the advertised CHFS positions was an “Arts Specialist” who speaks Spanish.  That, she knew immediately, was the job for her.

When she was hired, Gonzalez provided two instructions: make art and recruit children for an afterschool program at PS 86.  Paris went ahead -- despite objections from a politically-connected Latch Key program in the school -- vigorously recruiting 9- and 10-year-olds for the afterschool arts program.  Fifty children, ages 7-12, showed up, including a number in foster care. After reducing the number to a “manageable” 30 children, Paris began. Instinctively, she engaged them in making art -- bringing literacy into the process. She had great faith in children’s ability to communicate when given the chance in a supportive environment as well as in the potential of art projects to create openings for self-expression. Early on, she integrated literacy by inviting children to create plays and write descriptions on their drawings. While recognizing the children's brightness, she was overwhelmed by their many needs. One boy, for example, did not yet know the alphabet. Still, she accepted the challenge, knowing that she had to find a way for children to have fun and experience success.

Initially, the Robin Hood Foundation was the sole funder of A&L. In 1995, Dianne Kangisser, then Executive Director of the Robert Bowne Foundation, visited A&L when CHFS applied for Bowne support. While appreciating the program’s grasp of the importance of literacy, she also saw that the staff needed support to realize its vision. Bowne awarded a small grant for a literacy educator and, in her award letter, Kangisser urged the staff to look at the work of other community-based programs:

It is obvious that you have a vision of a literacy rich environment which allows youngsters to develop as creative readers and writers.  The problem is the gap between the vision you hold and the reality I observed.  It is a daunting task to operate a quality afterschool program in a public school setting.  Therefore, I would urge [Gonzalez] and his staff to visit other agencies that are trying to meet that challenge. I would start with Project Reach Youth in Brooklyn. Call me for details.[[8]](#footnote-8)

She also encouraged A&L staff to attend Bowne-sponsored staff development sessions as well as participate in Partnership for Afterschool Education (PASE) offerings.

Arts & Literacy staff embarked on its learning process by attending the Creative Literacy in After School Programs (CLASP) seminar series at the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC).  Paris felt CLASP confirmed her instinctive understanding that art and literacy can be effectively integrated to provide tools for children to express themselves and interact with the world around them. She recalls her “revelation” when Anne Lawrence -- then at LAC and since 2002, Bowne Program Officer -- talked about "invented spelling." Paris found it exciting that children could express their creative ideas *first* and shape them *later* into coherent, comprehensible messages.  This seemed very much like making art – experimenting with visual images in order to communicate something personally meaningful.

In addition, each CLASP participant engaged in a project to improve an aspect of his or her program. Paris focused on involving parents and community members, aligning the afterschool program with the Coalition's priorities. She experimented with and compared the effectiveness of such practices as meeting separately with English and Spanish speakers versus holding a single meeting with translation.

On their part, both Lawrence and Kangisser were impressed by how quickly Paris and other A&L staff took literacy practices to heart, adapting what they were learning to engage children in projects that integrate arts and literacy. As a result, in year two, Bowne increased its grant amount to the program.

In 1998, John Paul Gonzalez left CHFS and Laura Paris became Director of the Arts & Literacy Program. Under her leadership, A&L continued hiring teaching artists who approach their work with children as they approach their work as artists -- imagining, creating, innovating, taking risks.[[9]](#footnote-9) A&L staff members pursue learning opportunities, and many have taken advantage of Bowne-supported technical assistance and professional development initiatives. Over time, the program has become a model to the field of out-of-school time education for children.[[10]](#footnote-10)

A Multi-Faceted Integrated Arts & Literacy Program

Arts & Literacy has developed into a multi-faceted integrated arts and literacy program as well as expanded to additional school sites in Bushwick as well as to the Corona, Elmhurst, and, in 2012-13, Jackson Heights neighborhoods in Queens. The program operates in economically-stressed areas where elementary schools struggle with low reading scores and students need support to achieve. To help meet such needs, A&L components are designed to: develop children’s expressive voices, both individual and communal; strengthen children’s literacy and academic skills in collaboration with host schools; and help families access needed services, while recognizing and building on the strengths of families and communities. Through its multiple, integrated components, the program engages children, parents, and other family members in a celebration of art and literacy.

*Family Art Night at PS 377*

*Five o'clock one early November, 2011, evening. Preparations are underway for Family Art Night at the A&L afterschool program at PS 377 (Elementary School 377) in Bushwick. Tonight,100 children, ages 5 to 12, will present dance and visual art projects that they have been working on for six weeks. Soon, the auditorium will fill with mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and sisters! Arts & Literacy engages parents as full participants, implementing the commitment of the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services to see children as members of families and larger communities.*

*The audience is starting to arrive. A&L Art Therapy Supervisor Gabriela Ortiz greets parents by name at the auditorium door. She volunteered to translate tonight because she loves the event. Moreover, such events are good ways to catch up with families -- and there's always a lot to catch up with!*

*Ortiz knows the families because she supervises the A&L parent leader and the art therapy graduate student intern at each A&L site. Her interns set the tone of the relationship between the program and families through the hour-long intake interview with each child’s family. The parent leader follows up on referrals, assists families with advocacy, ensures that events and materials are translated, and works with Ortiz to plan family activities.*

*With her cross-site perspective, Ortiz understands just how different one school community is from the next. At PS 92 in Corona, Queens, for* example, *the afterschool program serves new immigrants from Mexico and Ecuador, families who welcome help in navigating the unfamiliar customs and expectations that come with being in a new school in a new country. Here at PS 377, families who have lived in the United States for several generations tend to be more reluctant to ask for assistance. But tonight they open up when Ortiz tells them how eager she is to see their children perform, explaining, often with tears in her eyes, how hard the children have worked preparing for Family Art Night.*

*A mother with baby-in-arms is anxiously looking for site director Tamara Williams and the parent sign-in sheet. The mother knows from her intake interview that families are expected to attend Family Art Night and is concerned that, because of recent absences, her daughter might lose her spot in the coveted program. After reassuring the parent, Williams guides her to teaching artist Katherine Jernejec so the two of them can sort out the situation.*

*Williams then spots the custodian and stops to thank him for going out of his way to prepare the building tonight. An important part of the site director's job is to build relationships within the school community. Williams has found that keeping the school custodian and guards, as well as the administration and faculty, informed and involved in program activities eases the challenging process of navigating shared spaces – school classrooms, supply closets, cafeteria, auditorium, and grounds.*

*Supporting Youth Development*

*On the stage, three A&L youth workers (a “Homework Warrior” and two teens -- an apprentice and a student intern from Bushwick High School) are gathering a group of very excited 7-10 year-olds into a circle and leading writing and drawing exercises to help focus their creative energy. After only a few months with the program, the teens have learned, through the program’s weekly training and supervision, ways to use art activities to channel children’s energy into creative projects.*

*They have also learned to take into account children’s social and emotional needs, as well as the importance of supporting families. Two boys interrupt their exercises to make special requests. One worries that his mother has the wrong time and wants to call her to make sure she is coming.  The other sees his mom arrive and wants to give her a hug.  Both boys gain permission but are urged to hurry back.*

*Integrating Literacy and Children’s Art Projects*

*Earlier that afternoon, teaching artist Katherine Jernejec and the student apprentices had transformed three auditorium walls into a gallery for the display of student art work. Jernejec has been working with two classes on a project involving large drawings of fantastical creatures on brown butcher paper. She planned the six-week project to incorporate literacy using the program’s lesson guide template that, for example, asks the artist to list the vocabulary words that students will learn through the project. During weekly supervision, Jernejec reviews her lesson plans with Tamara Williams, who helps her think about additional ways to integrate reading, writing, and oral language into art activities.*

*Six weeks ago, Jernejec began the project by reading aloud a science fiction story about a robot. The children then designed their own robots, complete with pets and personalities. Tonight's exhibit includes each child’s “life-sized” robot drawing, along with a smaller preparatory robot design, a robot pet, and a piece of original writing mounted on construction paper to introduce the robot characters.*

*My robot likes vegetables.*

*She loves lipstick and she has pretty hair.  
Sometimes her hair goes flying everywhere.  
And she always likes to go places like outerspace.  
She likes outerspace more than earth.*

*Amber Ortiz*

*There will be a formal gallery walk after the performance, but families can’t wait, searching out their children’s work almost as soon as they enter the auditorium.*

*Building Community – In Two Languages*

*By 5:30, the house is "sold-out." And not by luck. The enthusiastic overflow crowd is the result of community building, another A&L focus. Some parents volunteered to make reminder phone calls;*

*others prepared food for the children’s post-performance meal. Children and staff invited members of the PS 377 and larger Bushwick communities, A&L staff from other sites, and former A&L students. The event is a time for neighbors to chat with each other and for some grassroots community organizing.*

*Families sit together, often with small children on laps, and there are almost as many fathers as mothers. Students sit by class at the front of the auditorium, 100 children dressed in freshly-laundered solid colored tops and pants or skirts; girls with hair pulled back by barrettes, adding a rainbow of colors.*

*Site Director Tamara Williams takes the stage to welcome the audience in English, with Gabriela Ortiz extending the welcome in Spanish. The first order of business is to thank those parents who helped with the event; the second, to urge everyone to “call your city councilman, we still need support.”*

*Celebrating Children’s Art Work*

*Finally, the performance begins! Dance teachers Michele Torino Hower and Williams introduce their classes -- the youngest, 5- and 6-years-old, the oldest 11 and 12. Over the past six weeks, they have all learned a range of creative ways to use their bodies to express what they feel inside -- as individuals and as group members.*

*Several students from the* Dragonsaurus *class of 9- and 10-year-olds introduce their* Integrity Project: *"We’ve learned vocabulary words like ‘respect’ and ‘trust.’ We’ve written essays about the people who inspire us. We’ve made up poses and movements to communicate our ideas non-verbally.” When the children read their essays, the audience responds enthusiastically, especially to the four who read from the stage in Spanish. The presentation ends with an energetic dance comprised of the poses and movements each child composed to depict the important people in their lives, creating a theatrical portrait of the community. Students capture the essence of their characters through gesture, body language, and music. The audience, sensing the children’s pride in their community, are caught up in the rhythms of the children’s dance animating the stage.*

*Next, visual art teacher Katherine Jernejec introduces the* Mermaids/Mermen *and* Squid *classes, the artists who drew the robots -- and the children take the stage with a “robot walk.”  Several children read essays describing their process, while Gabriela Ortiz translates the explanations into Spanish:*

* *We learned about the Surrealist movement.  It is art based on imagination and dreams.*
* *We studied Salvador Dali.  He used images, had a crazy mustache, and posed funny.  He played a game called* Exquisite Corpse *with his friends, and we played it too.*
* *We made Alien Robots that are life-sized -- first we did the head, then the arms and shoulders, then the legs and feet, and then a pet.*

*The children lead the audience on a gallery walk for a close-up look at drawings and writing.  Parents stop to read the captions and take pictures of proud children with their work.  Throughout the year, the A&L children have opportunities to share their artwork as they develop expertise, during Family Art Nights, annual Community Street Festivals, and in an A&L anthology.*

*Experiencing Family Art Activities*

*When the children return to their classrooms for a post-performance party, the rest of the crowd moves into the cafeteria for a family art workshop.  Parents, youngsters too young for A&L, and older children, many former A&L participants, will engage in an art project. Past workshops have focused on such themes as Family Journals, Reading without Text, Telenovelas and Puppets, and What is Art?*

*Newspapers, scissors, and rolls of tape cover the cafeteria tables. Dance teacher Michele Torino Hower and Tamara Williams encourage families to sit with people they don't know. After a brief introduction, Gabriela Ortiz gives the assignment in English and in Spanish: each table will make a joint sculpture with only the materials on the table -- and without talking.*

*Everyone seems to know just what to do, setting to work, laughing and engaging together.  When a timer goes off after seven minutes, Ortiz announces two minutes for table talk. She then invites a presentation of the creations.  One after another, each table shows off its creation: a snowman, dream house, mask, airplanes, a fountain. Families have explored an inexpensive, fun exercise: making a simple sculpture together.*

*Thirty minutes later, the gathering winds to a close. Williams and Ortiz end the workshop, reminding parents that activities like paper sculpture come in handy when it's raining and “there’s a lot of energy inside your house. All you need is newspaper.” The evening has run less than two hours.*

Program staff created a seamless, well-paced set of activities, offering a full taste of Arts & Literacy in a way that made the program's components and complexity accessible to all. Throughout and brightly visible was the growing confidence of their children -- and their joy of self-expression.

Beginning with Artists

Denise Rosario’s decision to hire *artists* -- instead of experienced educators -- to do art projects with children has shaped the program’s methodology, making staff training a priority. In addition, when piloting the Summer Camp, John Paul Gonzalez's decision to define "part-time" as 21 hours/week, whether for a teaching artist or college student assistant, the organization committed to a hiring policy with long-term staffing impact. The figure -- 21 hours/week -- is the number that triggers employee benefits. The policy attracted -- and continues to attract -- such artists as site director and dancer Tamara Williams. Prior to A&L, Williams had never seen a part-time dancer's job with benefits and did not believe it until her interview. As a teaching artist, she spent 16 hours/week with children and the remaining hours honing her craft as literacy educator, attending weekly staff meetings, preparing lesson plans, and debriefing with her supervisors.

Just as important, the program respects Williams' work as a professional dancer, heightening her sense that teaching artists contribute to children's growth. After becoming an A&L site director and full-time employee, she spent January 2010 in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, studying Afro-Brazilian dance and culture:

When I returned, I was able to teach the children in the program what I had learned, the different dances, Capoeira, and some Portuguese. The kids were very excited to learn about a new culture and they’re more intrigued about other countries now.  If I had been working for another organization . . . I would not have been able to go on that trip.  And I’m not the only one.   Jodi [Connelly, site director, PS 123] is just back from doing an art project in Ireland.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In addition to her A&L work, Williams founded her own dance company, Tamara LaDonna Moving Spirits, Inc.  In June 2012, when her company of African American women premiered *Morning Honeysuckle, Sunday’s Greed*, half a dozen A&L colleagues came to support her.

All current full-time A&L managers -- Paris, Wilhoit, and the site directors – first worked as program teaching artists. Each brings an individual approach to creating art and applies it to teaching children. Paris describes the A&L culture, shaped by artists, as “a Petri dish for trying things out.”

**The Robert Bowne Foundation and the CHFS Arts & Literacy Program**

The Coalition for Hispanic Family Services came to the Bowne Foundation with a vision of a holistic, multi-cultural arts curriculum aimed at building on children's interests and strengths. The Foundation offered professional supports and resources that helped transform the vision into reality. Paris credits Bowne with making a crucial difference: supporting the staff to develop an innovative approach to integrated arts education.

This program could easily have ended up a traditional afterschool program.  It was the fact that the Robert Bowne Foundation liked what we were doing and gave us a sense of direction, gave us new ideas, and never asked us to do test prep. The money came with a vision that supported staff ideas about programming.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Bowne provided three types of support that shaped the direction of the Arts & Literacy Program:

* Professional development to strengthen the program's literacy component
* Tools for ongoing assessment, reflection, and inquiry
* Technical assistance to develop organizational structures conducive to managing a reflective learning community.

Support for Literacy

Arts & Literacy personnel have participated in Bowne-supported professional development almost every year since 1995, engaging with such topics as classroom management, inquiry methodology, multi-cultural curricula, team teaching, and technology in education. They have worked with a range of technical assistance providers, including the Literacy Assistance Center, Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, Partnership for Afterschool Education, Brooklyn Children’s Museum, and Center for Educational Options. As a result, A&L staff have integrated literacy and the arts, developed a repertoire of teaching strategies, and created vital tools for academic support, such as libraries and tutoring tool kits. More recently, they enriched the program through Julia Palmer Library Development grants and Hot Topics in Literacy seminars.

*Just before snack time, Tamara Williams walks into the PS 377 cafeteria and approaches a young boy sitting at a long table reading a book.  She wants to see how he is doing after having what the teaching artist called “a meltdown” in the classroom.  The boy looks up, saying that reading* One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish *helped him calm down -- and then jumps up to show-off the program’s mobile cart library nestled in a slightly-indented cubby section of the cafeteria.*   
  
He is justly proud of the library -- children were intimately involved in all aspects of its creation.  A 2011 Julia Palmer Library Development Grant from Bowne helped fund the library resources and engaged two A&L site directors, Williams and Stephanie Dhulos of 51st Academy, in a series of library development sessions.  These broadened Williams’ perception of what a library could be, including ways children can help build and structure their libraries.  After that, she invited PS 377 A&L children to clean and decorate two junky rolling carts, their artwork brightening the casings of the compact carts.

Children also selected, organized, and color-coded the books and videos with stickers. Fifth-graders even went on a field trip to Barnes & Noble to purchase the books they had selected. Student class librarians are responsible for checking out and returning books for their 2nd - 5th grade classmates.   Apprentice youth workers use a modified system for K - 1st graders, bringing well-organized bins of books into classrooms so children can easily check-out, take home, and return their library books.

The Bowne Foundation promotes libraries as an essential resource for literacy programming. Since A&L programs meet in borrowed classroom spaces, one challenge has been establishing its own distinctive, literacy-rich environments. Ever since Dianne Kangisser’s initial grant, the Foundation has helped A&L develop creative solutions to the challenges of partnering with schools.

Williams has additional plans for the A&L library at PS 377:

We’re expanding our library beyond the carts into a larger space with benches and seating -- to attract the kids to the library space and to be excited about reading. From that same seed planted by the Bowne Foundation, you have, for example, the little boy . . . who was having behavior issues . . . using a book to refocus. . . . students who can’t afford books in their home having the library as a resource.  And with this school struggling with reading scores, the library is there to help kids succeed and to enjoy reading.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Although only two A&L site directors participated directly in the library professional development, other sites benefited as well. Harold Lehmann, PS 116 site director and teaching artist, used books to inspire such theater projects as adapting *Aesops Fables* as a play. However, he was concerned about children mishandling their library books.  After Williams and Dhulos shared their training insights, he put student librarians in charge of his site’s mobile cart library and involved children in creating rules about handling and shelving books. Once in charge, children's respect for the library and books has grown.

Then Lehmann and Destiny Rodriguez, a Homework Warrior at PS 116, participated in the Bowne-supported *Hot Topics in Literacy* seminar series that culminated in May 2012. As part of the effort, seminar leader Suzanne Marten met with them on-site at PS 116. They wanted advice as they planned workshops for their A&L colleagues to share such techniques as book-making, which they had tried with great success with their students. But more, they wanted to convey information beyond specific activities. Lehmann tells Marten:

What I have loved so much about your workshops is that it is about the questions and getting people excited, rather than worksheets and projects to take and try.  What is successful about Arts & Literacy is that it is about connecting with passions, and this connected well with the Hot Topics approach.[[14]](#footnote-14)

He and Rodriguez begin talking about the series lessons they want to convey to the rest of the A&L staff. Lehmann had been struck by a piece of literacy theory: readers use three cueing systems to grasp written text.[[15]](#footnote-15) Assessing children's use of the cueing systems would allow A&L staff to assist struggling readers more effectively. But, he explains, teaching artists “come in with passion for their art . . . not the skills to teach literacy” -- and homework warriors and apprentices are new to literacy too. The management team was “blown away,” he says, when he described how deciphering a story composed only of consonants indicates whether a reader is able to use all of the cueing systems to comprehend text. Lehmann encourages Rodriguez to talk about her adaptation of the “fill in the missing vowels” seminar activity as a game to play with non-English speaking parents, demonstrating how it could be fun to help their children with homework.

Marten encourages them to select activities and texts for each staff workshop that would resonate with the particular group, and to engage each member of the group in discovering his or her own reading and writing strategies. “Reading and writing," she reminds them, "is all about what you do when you get stuck. A lot of times, kids don’t realize that, but adults don’t know that sometimes either.”

Support for Inquiry and Reflection

The Bowne Foundation's second major area of influence on A&L is the focus on inquiry and reflection, including: participatory evaluation, action research, and strategic planning.

*Participatory Evaluation*

Bowne first introduced A&L to participatory evaluation in 2000, pairing the program with a Participatory Evaluation Coach. Later, some A&L staff completed several phases of Bowne’s Participatory Evaluation Institutes led by Kim Sabo-Flores, Ph.D., and Anita Baker. [[16]](#footnote-16) Anne Lawrence explains Bowne's support for integrating evaluation into literacy programs in a 2006 Literacy Assistance Center newsletter:

An evaluation process woven into a program’s everyday life gives all stakeholders, especially staff and participants, input into program design. It helps practitioners understand what they are accountable for. It gives participants continuous feedback on their progress. Finally, evaluation gives everyone involved a sense of what is working – and what is not.[[17]](#footnote-17)

A&L staff have incorporated participatory evaluation processes into all program aspects, from planning to instruction. Teaching artists use student portfolios to review evidence of progress toward program outcomes and reflect on the effectiveness of instructional practices. Staff monitor and assess program impact through such tools as surveys, focus groups, attendance data, report cards, socio-behavioral data, and logs of contact with families.

Everyone connected to the program -- students, family members, school personnel, program staff -- participates in some aspect of data collection. By integrating data collection into its day-to-day functioning, A&L routinely provides opportunities for staff to reflect on what they are doing and learning, and bases its decisions on input from those involved. Thus, when a 2006 New York City Department of Youth and Community Development contract required increased hours of service, A&L

followed its common practice: surveying parents to learn what they wanted.  Parents requested a full-day program on school-closing days, including a martial arts component; A&L revised its DYCD contract accordingly.

*Action Research*

When Assistant Director Wilhoit first came to A&L, there were only eight program staff. The atmosphere was warm, supportive, and inclusive, with everyone engaged in all program discussions and decision-making. Director Paris met weekly with the full staff and reviewed every lesson plan. Then came 2006, the year of “big expansion,” and things changed, resulting in increasingly low staff morale. Teaching artists were rotating, changing schools every six weeks. Meetings were so large that many no longer engaged in the seemingly endless discussions dominated by small issues like snow days.

Dispirited, Wilhoit asked herself, “*What* is going on?  When I first started, everyone was super invested --and now it's scattered, with not as much investment or loyalty.”

In 2006, Wilhoit brought her question to a Bowne sponsored Action Research Seminar led by Suzanne Marten. There, she learned an inquiry process, framed her question for research, and investigated by interviewing her colleagues, asking how they felt and what could be done. “They said it was confusing for school staff when we rotated [given] all the nuances at the school, like relationships with school guards and other staff. It was a struggle for managers, too, that the teams changed all the time.”[[18]](#footnote-18) She presented her interview data to the Seminar and then to her A&L supervisors, who agreed to try some changes. These began with food at staff meetings, moved to holding team meetings within full staff meetings, and eventually to making all meetings, staff assignments, and supervision *site specific*. Wilhoit says:

When we stopped rotating people among the sites, it was better for families and children, but also for the schools and managers.  Now people are at the same site for the whole year.  When there are 25 people in the room you can fall asleep.  When there are only five, you are forced to speak up.  The planning and site supervision makes each site a mini-Arts & Literacy, and it’s like it was at the beginning . . . .

The structural changes -- facilitated by Wilhoit’s research -- boosted staff morale and created an atmosphere that allows A&L to grow and remain effective. By the 2011-12 school year, there were 75 A&L staff, including apprentices, and further expansion in the planning. Although the full staff has outgrown the home base conference room, the new meeting structure keeps everyone informed and feeling part of a common enterprise. Moreover, A&L continues to evolve, the result of such practices as participatory evaluation and action research. This is a reflective learning community, constantly responding to changing conditions.

*Strategic Planning*

Arts & Literacy has also taken advantage of Bowne-supported management development and strategic planning assistance from such providers as Community Resource Exchange (CRE) and Columbia University's Institute for Non-Profit Management (INM). As part of its strategic-planning and decision-making processes, A&L regularly solicits opinions and ideas from participants, staff, parents, colleagues, teachers, and funders. In 2007, for example, CHFS decided to expand beyond its North Brooklyn neighborhoods, which were beginning to gentrify, and into Queens. The first Queens site, PS 92, is in Corona, a Latino community. But Queens is a borough of diverse immigrant groups, and the second site, 51st Academy in Elmhurst, serves a primarily Chinese and South Asian community. The Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, founded to support Hispanic children and families, thought long and hard about whether and how to make this move.

To guide the expansion, A&L management drew on its insights into the meaning of a culturally competent agency and recognized that parent services and materials had to be available in parents' own language. Hence, a Chinese speaking art therapist and Chinese-language materials became part of the program. Moreover, acknowledging that language is but one aspect of community culture, A&L hired some staff from the community. Funding proposals listed a new program goal: to provide cultural competency training for staff within the context of an Asian immigrant culture and community.

Once again, in 2012, with the assistance of CRE consultant Louisa Hackett, supported by Bowne, the A&L staff thought about opportunities for program expansion. A planning team engaged in a strategic planning process whereby they developed a plan for expanding infrastructure, staffing, and some new program directions -- arts & literacy programming for a middle school site and including STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).

Managing a Reflective Learning Community

The third area of Bowne influence follows and supports the previous two. Drawing on its experience with participatory evaluation, action research, and strategic planning, A&L has established management structures that promote internal reflection, collegial sharing, organizational strategic planning, and collaborative decision-making. As Assistant Director Wilhoit says:

I’m constantly thinking about what we could do better. Everybody assesses themselves and the work.  It's part of the practice of the program, even if [some A&L] teachers weren’t here when we did the work on evaluation with Bowne. It is part of every thing we do.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

Staff regularly have opportunities to reflect on their work, review data, share insights and challenges, ask for feedback, and suggest changes. Management structures that promote such reflection include: weekly site-based staff meetings; staff supervision; weekly youth worker (apprentices, interns) training; weekly management team meetings; and genre-specific teaching artists meetings (dancers, visual artists, and so forth) to elicit area-specific feedback on lesson plans.

In addition, there are weekly managers meetings that include Director Paris, Assistant Director Wilhoit, the art therapy supervisor, and all site directors. Managers also go on annual planning retreats where they evaluate program structure, staff positions, and hiring/training practices. As a result, they are ready to respond as communities gentrify, government funding opportunities expand and contract, and rules and regulations change.

*Evaluating Staffing Patterns: Establishing a Career Ladder*

In a continually-evolving organization, A&L management is constantly re-evaluating staff roles, hiring procedures, and training. Moreover, the management team has begun to establish a career ladder, partly with an eye to developing staffing practices conducive to program growth. Thus, for example, Paris and Wilhoit began noticing that those teaching artists who participate in inquiry and reflection processes become the most successful new site directors. The insight, Wilhoit explains, has influenced the way they now think about hiring new teaching artists:

We did once hire [a site director] from outside and it didn’t work out.  The program is unique.  If you teach in the program, you have a sense of the core values and the philosophy.  And you can supervise because you can empathize with the teachers. We’re realizing that we want to think about, right away while we’re hiring, whether we could see a potential teaching artist stepping into the management team.  Because, as we get bigger, there are more holes to fill.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Now, new staff positions are designed by assessing needs, testing a response, and evaluating results.  Thus, in 2010, as part of an intensive training on helping children tackle homework, a group of classroom assistants underwent a visioning process about their role.  As a result, the assistant position was re-titled “Homework Warrior,” and redefined to include partnering with children’s school teachers as a way of ensuring that children’s academic needs are addressed. Moreover, when the management team noted that many of the most successful Homework Warriors had been apprentices, a new qualification for apprentice was added: the potential for becoming a Homework Warrior.

Arts & Literacy program leadership also noticed that a few Homework Warriors, such as Hilario Villafina, who led his own integrated arts project during Summer Camp 2011, were undertaking new responsibilities.  As a result, Director Paris has opened to rethinking staff roles and qualifications:

This summer is challenging my thought that only teaching artists can do this work.  The junior staff has absorbed the idea of interdisciplinary art projects and integrating literacy. Maybe they just need exposure to strong teaching artists.  We are at a place where we can think about strategically moving and planning our model.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Bringing such reflections to the 2012 strategic planning process, Paris aimed to stimulate deep discussion of goals, expansion opportunities, and implications for staff roles and training.

*Training and Support*

When CHFS opted to hire artists to lead the afterschool program, they committed to preparing and supporting teaching artists to become integrated arts and literacy educators. Training and support are important for each of the other staff positions as well. Management solicits input in thinking through the necessary training and support each time a new position is created.[[22]](#footnote-22) As a result, weekly hands-on training for apprentices includes topics they need for their job, such as classroom management and literacy skills, but also more personal skills such as writing resumes, applying for college, obtaining scholarships and grants, and grassroots organizing.  Apprentices also have access to art therapy interns who, in addition to serving the children and their families, work with youth workers to help address their social and emotional needs in ways consistent with the program.

The management team plans several weeks of intensive training in early September for Homework Warriors and teaching artists. Such training also aids the development of site directors.  Each experienced manager is responsible for one or more training sessions, with agenda topics that will support their *own* development.  Each presenter plans, and then rehearses with colleagues, his/her sessions to ensure that they model instructional strategies that teaching artists and Homework Warriors can use with children and families.  As Assistant Director Wilhoit says, “We talk about training being interactive, breaking into groups, not talking at people.  Like what we’d do with kids.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

*A September Thursday during the intensive training period.[[24]](#footnote-24) Twelve Homework Warriors from five sites have been meeting together every afternoon for a full week on such topics as facilitating academic projects, working with apprentices, classroom rituals, parent workshops, and student assessment.*

*In this hour, Tamara Williams is leading a session on communicating with school staff, engaging each participant by drawing out responses and helping them recognize and name what they know from their own experiences. She begins by asking for some challenges that Homework Warriors faced the previous year in communicating with teachers.  Jermaine describes feeling belittled when a teacher tells him that he is not a real teacher. Crystal depicts another who did not want to talk to her about the needs of a particular child. After discussing communications strategies, Williams invites participants to role play interactions between teachers and Homework Warriors.  Acting the role of teacher, Hilario challenges:  “Your program is all fun and games.” Kimberly answers, using a strategy of staying grounded while validating the other person’s perceptions: “We do play games, but they’re educational and we try to make learning fun.” Williams encourages others to volunteer next , reminding them, “This is good practice for presenting in front of people. You have a parent presentation you have to make soon.”  
  
By hour's end, Williams has posted wall charts throughout the room listing effective communications strategies and every participant has actively shared experiences and ideas, as well as acted out the role of a teacher, student, or Homework Warrior. They have all practiced and learned strategies designed to support productive partnerships between the program and host schools.*

*Connecting with the Field*

Arts & Literacy has found that another component of managing a reflective learning community is connecting with others also working in out-of-school time youth education. Bowne facilitates such relationships through, among other venues, structured networking meetings that bring together out-of-school time program staff to share experiences and insights. As Paris reported in the 2012 Bowne grantee questionnaire: “The Networking Meetings help the staff feel part of a larger community.”

In addition, networking sessions are opportunities for A&L to partner with Bowne in its support for grantees and the field. Thus, Paris and other A&L staff collaborated with professional development provider Suzanne Marten and Anne Lawrence in sessions on family involvement in October 2011 and again in March 2012. For the October session, Paris, Lawrence, and Marten introduced strategic planning tools. During the session, Paris first discussed the history and evolution of family involvement with A&L, encouraging participants to consider how they might develop such engagement in their own programs. Participants then met in small groups and, with strategic planning guides created for the session, went step-by-step through planning and assessing their own program activities.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Paris considers the opportunity to collaborate with Lawrence and Marten another example of Bowne's ongoing professional development. During a debriefing discussion, the three collaborators reviewed participant evaluations and discussed what worked and changes for a more effective presentation. Paris says, “I thought the process of developing this was really great. We began with such an ambitious idea and it was amazing to see how you took these ephemeral ideas and made them into such concrete documents.”[[26]](#footnote-26) She now uses processes modeled on her work with Bowne when she and A&L colleagues plan agendas for management meetings, trainings, and retreats.

**Arts & Literacy: Constantly Evolving**

The A&L staff have always appreciated the accessibility of Bowne Foundation personnel. Ever since the 1990s, Paris and her staff have been comfortable asking questions, big and small -- from thinking through ways to engage children in the world, requesting articles for a management meeting, or asking for a reference to someone who has successfully diversified its program funding sources, Paris knows she can call RBF Program Officer Anne Lawrence or Executive Director Lena Townsend for assistance.

When Laura Paris tells the story of the evolution of the Arts & Literacy program, she talks about the gifts left behind -- from John Paul Gonzalez, first A&L director and the one who insisted on benefits for part-time staff, to an early assistant who passed out small amounts of paint and supplies so children would use, rather than spill, them. She invites all staff members to bring their own gifts – their personal interests and goals – to continue building the program into the future. And she always recalls what the Robert Bowne Foundation has given: “I want people to remember what has inspired us.  And I’ve been inspired by Anne [Lawrence, Robert Bowne Foundation Program Officer].[[27]](#footnote-27)”

**APPENDIX**

**Arts & Literacy Program Staff Positions – as of September, 2012**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Position Title** | **FT/PT** | **Responsibilities** | **Background** |
| Director\* | FT | * Responsible for Overall Program * Supervises Management Team |  |
| Borough Director\* (2) | FT | * Supervise Site Directors * One Brooklyn, One Queens Based | Former Teaching Artists |
| Program Assistant (2) | FT | * One Brooklyn, One Queens Based |  |
| Art Therapy Supervisor\*  (2) | FT | * Supervise Art Therapy Interns and Parent Leader * One Brooklyn, One Queens Based | Certified Art Therapist |
| Parent Liaison/Caseworker | FT | * Referrals * Advocacy * Family Events |  |
| Site Director\*  (5 in 2011; 7 in 2012) | FT | * Collaboration with School * Supervision of Site Staff | Former Teaching Artists |
| Teaching Artist (18) | 21 hrs/week | * Art Project Period | Artists |
| Homework Warrior (18) | 21 hrs/week | * Academic Period | College Students, often former Apprentices |
| Apprentice | 15 hrs/week | * Follow a group of children and Assist both Art Project + Academic Periods | HS or College Students, Usually from the Community |
| Art Therapy Intern (13) | 16 hrs/week | * Serve Children, Families, and Apprentices at Two (2) Sites | Graduate Art Therapy Students |
| Intern | 10 hrs/week | * Tutor, under Homework Warrior Supervision | Bushwick HS Students through St. Nick’s Alliance |

\* Members of Arts & Literacy Management Team

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tagline, Coalition for Hispanic Family Services website home page: http://www.hispanicfamilyservicesny.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example: "Bridging the Cultural Divide: Building a Continuum of Support for Latino Families, 2007," Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. <http://www.chcfinc.org/policy/BridgingtheCulturalDivide.pdf>

   p iii: “Latino families are resilient, resourceful, and the bedrock of Latino culture and communities. Overall, Latino families continue to remain strong in large part due to Latino cultural norms which include extended family networks, a tradition of mutual aid and economic support among family members.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p. 2, with a footnote to U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey: “Latino children are poorer than any other group in New York City, accounting for 39% of children living in poverty, as compared to 15% of white children and 30% of African American children.”

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, “Cultural Competency Indicators” chart, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See: http://www.hispanicfamilyservicesny.org/about-us See also, CHFS foster care “Child permanency values and beliefs” at: http://www.hispanicfamilyservicesny.org/foster-boarding-home/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See: www.robinhood.org [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. November 17, 1995, grant award letter from Dianne Kangisser, Executive Director, The Robert Bowne Foundation, to Denise Rosario, Executive Director, Coalition for Hispanic Family Services. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a chart of 2012-2013 staff positions, see the Appendix, page 110 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example:

    A&L described as a model program in “The Role of the After School Program in Children’s Literacy Development,” 2002, by Julie Spielberger and Robert Halpern, funded by Wallace-Readers Digest Funds.

    The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities in 2004 selected A&L as one of its “Coming UP Taller” Award winners, citing the program’s “unique approach to arts education [that] brings together youth development, literacy building, cultural studies, and community building that serves as a model for other programs.”

    CHFS’s A&L was one of five programs meeting such criteria as high quality afterschool programs and high levels of organizational effectiveness for Phase II of Dr. Kim Sabo-Flores' five-year RBF funded study: *A Dynamic Framework for Understanding the Complex Work of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs,* 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tamara Williams Interview, October 27, 2011.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Laura Paris interview, June 28, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tamara Williams Interview, October 27, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Quotes from field notes from site visit to PS 116, May 3, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The cueing systems are: Grapho-phonic (sound-letter correspondence); Language structure (grammar or syntax); and Meaning (semantics). An efficient reader employs all systems. By assessing which system[s] a student uses, one can more effectively target assistance for a struggling reader. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See July 19, 2007, power point presentation to the Robert Bowne Foundation Board: "Evaluation of Participatory Evaluation Institute." Arts & Literacy was one of 14 agencies completing more than one phase of such institutes. Reported participation outcomes include: completion of program evaluation plans and reports at or above the level of graduate students; personal growth; increase in program quality in terms of activities, communications, and staff development; after one year, there was: continued use of evaluation tools, integration of evaluation into everyday practices, and improved internal and external communications. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Anne Lawrence, “How Are We Doing? Using Evaluation to Inform Program Decisions,” March 2006 issue of *Literacy Update,* Literacy Assistance Center newsletter. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Melissa Wilhoit interview, October 6, 2011. At the time of this interview, Wilhoit’s title was “Assistant Director.” In 2012-2013 she became “Borough Director“ for Brooklyn A&L sites. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Melissa Wilhoit Interview, October 6, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Wilhoit Interview [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Laura Paris Conversation, August 16, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Over time, new roles have included: art therapy interns, Homework Warriors, apprentices, student interns, Site Directors, site coordinator assistants, and borough directors. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Melissa Wilhoit Interview, October 6, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. All quotes from field notes taken during the training session, September 15, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Strategies for Improving Family Involvement” planning documents guided participants through: (a) assessing current activities and identifying key program values and components as well as (b) outlining steps for creating a plan, including: identifying and meeting with stakeholders; preparing an event, activity, product (who, what, when, where); implementing the plan; and getting feedback from stakeholders. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Fieldnotes, October 12, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Laura Paris Interview, June 28, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)