

The Robert Bowne Foundation

*clarity, consistency,
passion of vision & action*

Edmund A. Stanley, Jr., served as Chief Executive Officer of Bowne & Co. from 1956-1981. In 1968, he created a family foundation, naming it after Robert Bowne to honor his efforts both as a business entrepreneur and a builder of the social underpinnings of a young America.¹

The Robert Bowne Foundation and the *Third Arena*

From the start, the Foundation focused on supporting youth organizations. Then, in 1983, Edmund A. Stanley, Jr., invited Dianne Kangisser to run the Foundation. To the emphasis on youth, she added a deep commitment to and expertise in literacy, “and it was a great melding.”²

Since then, five major themes have characterized the Foundation’s mission:

- Youth and Literacy
- Afterschool programs as “the *third arena* in which children are educated”³
- “Afterschool” as a distinct field, “*a time and place between the increasingly burdened institutions of school and family, where our children can learn and flourish*”⁴
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) as the home of afterschool programs, and
- Recognition/Support of the critical link between a Program and its Organizational Context.

¹ Robert Bowne, founder in 1775 of Bowne & Co., Stationers, engaged in business and in building the young country. He was a founding director of the Bank of New York (1784) and the Mutual Assurance Co., “the city’s first fire insurance company” (1787), as well as a founder of the New York Hospital, American Chamber of Commerce, and, in 1805, the Society for Establishing a Free School in the City of New York. In 1784, along with Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Eddy, and George Clinton, Bowne helped found the Manumission Society of New York.

² Jennifer Stanley Interview, October 28, 2011.

³ See Dianne Kangisser, *The Third Arena: Afterschool Youth Literacy Programs*.

⁴ Dianne Kangisser, *The Third Arena*, p. 6.

The Robert Bowne Foundation provides financial and technical assistance in support of CBOs becoming “quality educational providers that exhibit nine essential program elements,” including:

- A philosophy of education
- Reading for enjoyment
- Literacy development as a social activity
- Integration of a youth development model
- Use of educational approaches and content that differ from school
- Ongoing staff development opportunities
- Availability of rich educational resources
- Promotion of parental involvement, and
- Employment of alternative assessment of program impacts.⁵

The Robert Bowne Foundation and the Meanings of Literacy

- Literacy happens in community
- Literacy develops through active engagement
- Literacy is a means to self-determination
- Literacy is a fundamental part of being human in 21st century America.

Or as a Bowne grantee expresses it:

*Literacy is not about the skills, rubrics, and learning the sound of ‘a’ and ‘b,’ but rather that it is about fun, love of books, and gaining an understanding of your place in the world. Bowne has given us a perspective, not a prescriptive way to think about the work. They also helped us to understand a more complicated definition of what literacy is -- as how you look at the world.*⁶

Susan Matloff-Nieves, Associate Executive Director, Queens Community House

Supporting the Vision of Each Grantee

Bowne staff understand that a grantee’s larger aims and values -- as well as practical constraints -- essentially determine the shape and priorities of any program. At the same time, with all its grantees, the Foundation asks about all relevant aspects of the program and organization, makes suggestions, advises about professional development possibilities, mentions other grantees with experience dealing with similar situations as possible resources, points to opportunities the grantee might find relevant and want to pursue.

When newly-appointed Director of the Teen Reviewers and Critics (TRaC) Program Eric Ost arrived, he had little program management and development experience to draw on. Through support visit conversations

⁵ Dianne Kangisser, *The Third Arena*, p. 6.

⁶ Susan Matloff-Nieves Interview, December 22, 2011.

with and encouragement from Anne Lawrence, he learned about the Foundation's professional development offerings. That first year, he took part in the Bowne-supported action research group led by Suzanne Marten of Center for Educational Options. Here, amidst program colleagues -- all current or former Bowne grantees -- he found support and ideas for his TRaC work.

*I'd ask, 'How do you do this?' 'What about evaluation?' . . . 'Do you have kids who drop out? How do you deal with that?' 'What do I change about the program?' . . . The group was so helpful to me -- I asked them about everything.*⁷ Ost also engaged in Bowne-sponsored evaluation seminars with Kim Sabo Flores, Ph.D. He recalls very practical information about ways to think about/integrate evaluation measures at the start of a program, thereby allowing for a useful evaluation at the end.

Throughout this period, he says, there was ongoing "back and forth dialogue with Anne [Lawrence]." Grounded in these months-long discussions, as well as interaction with other program people and continuing brainstorming with TRaC instructors, Ost learned about the ins and outs of managing and evaluating a nonprofit program as well as ways to think about, develop, and deepen its substantive offerings. He explored ways to interact with schools and teachers as well as the efficacy of different approaches to working with youth. It was structured access to the experiences of others working in non-profits and in the afterschool field that provided the deepest and most practical assistance.

Inquiry as a Fundamental Approach to Improving Practice

In supporting the development of an inquiry stance, the Bowne Foundation aims to help each grantee articulate its own questions -- and then answer those questions, reflect on the response, and take the next steps. Foundation staff and consultants help grantees step back from their work, the better to view, question, and improve it.

There were only eight program staff when Assistant Director Melissa Wilhoit came to the Arts & Literacy Program (A&L) at Coalition for Hispanic Family Services. The atmosphere was supportive and inclusive, with everyone engaged in program discussions and decision-making. Then came the year of "big expansion," with meetings so large that many no longer engaged. Dispirited, Wilhoit asked herself, "*What is going on?*"

Bringing her question to a Bowne-sponsored 2006 Action Research Seminar led by Suzanne Marten, Wilhoit learned an inquiry process, framed her question for research, and interviewed her colleagues about how they felt and what could be done. She presented her data to the Seminar and then to her A&L supervisors, who agreed to try some changes, including the creation of site-based meetings. Wilhoit notes, "*When there are 25 people [at a meeting] you can fall asleep. When there are only five, you are forced to speak up.*"⁸

The structural changes -- facilitated by Wilhoit's research -- boosted staff morale and created an atmosphere that allows Arts & Literacy to grow and remain effective. Moreover, the program 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.

⁷ Eric Ost Interview, August 31, 2011.

⁸ Melissa Wilhoit Interview, October 6, 2011.

Work at the City Level as well as with Individual Programs

The Robert Bowne Foundation takes its commitment to afterschool literacy programs into collaborative work with New York City governmental offices as well as into advocacy efforts. Here, the Foundation often engages side-by-side with its grantees.

In 2003, New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) brought together service providers, the funding community, and city officials to develop a strategic vision for Out-of-School Time (OST) services in New York City. Queens Community House staff members, along with hundreds of others, including Robert Bowne Foundation representatives, participated on design teams for the city's new OST initiative. These teams aimed to design a more efficient and coordinated system of afterschool programs for the city's school-age children and youth. Since 2005, DYCD's OST initiative has funded school-based afterschool programs throughout the city.

Impact of the Robert Bowne Foundation Goes Well Beyond Grant-Making

It takes time, work, commitment, and focused attention to translate vision into practice. And it takes time, work, commitment, and focused attention to support and enrich that translation.

[B]efore Bowne, we never had a granter that said 'we believe in this vision you have and the desire you have to meet needs in your community, and we're going to invest in you.' . . . For Bowne to come in and believe in what we were doing was crucial. It gave us a sense of identity. . . . and we saw that we do do a lot with a little, and can keep pushing ourselves to do more.

. . . . Bowne. . . provided us with way more than the financial support. They helped us clarify what we see, made connections, helped us network. . . . They have connected us to people and organizations who have helped in all kinds of ways, expanded what we do. . . .

. . . . They've empowered us to go on beyond them. It's been invaluable. A lot of organizations and foundations, when they're gone you're back to square one -- and that is not where we find ourselves now.⁹

Tiffany Triplett Henkel, RMM Executive Director/Pastor
Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries, Metro Baptist Church

This excerpt is based on *The Legacy of the Robert Bowne Foundation* by Janice Hirota, Ph.D. and Sara Schwabacher, Janice Hirota & Associates, December 2012. See the online version at:
http://www.robertbownefoundation.org/frontpage_full.php?frontpageId=144

⁹ Tiffany Henkel Interview, December 6, 2011.