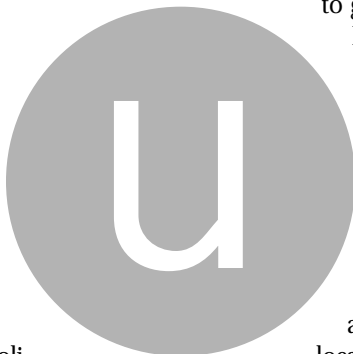


a message from the editor

Universal Pre-K at Bank Street: A Model of Collaboration

Bank Street College of Education is pleased and honored to bring to you NewsFlash at this extraordinary time as we celebrate the first six months of Universal Pre-K implementation. Congratulations to all who collaborated to make it happen. Many thanks to Eli Ukoli, Bill Casey, district superintendents, early childhood coordinators, teachers, administrators, community-based organization staff, policy makers, parents,



advocacy groups, support staff, and so many others for their hard work.

When I look back six—even nine months ago—did I think that collectively we could make Universal Pre-K programs a reality by September of 1998? Yes. As New Yorkers, we never lacked faith in our ability to get the job done.

By working together, what did we accomplish in this time frame? First and foremost, Universal Pre-K offered the opportunity for the community to become involved and collaborate with local school districts to plan and implement an early childhood program. It offered 14,000 four-year-olds in NYC alone an opportunity to engage in active learning experiences in stimulating, language-rich, learner-centered environments. It opened the door for a diverse population of four-year-olds to be served in board of education or community-based sites. Universal Pre-K children were served for a minimum of 2½ hours to a maximum of 10 hours a day in an attempt to meet the needs of parents



and upon the ability to blend funds across programs. Classroom teachers were swiftly hired and professional development activities were provided.

Yes, we did it, but much work lies ahead. Unfortunately, the program's sustainability is in question. Governor Pataki's recent budget proposal for the block granting of Universal Pre-K will not do the program justice. The domino effect of inadequate funding is huge. We must not let our future citizens down. We must give young children what they deserve—a quality preschool experience. Let us all move aggressively against the block grant budget proposal by letting Governor Pataki know that he must make Universal Pre-K a priority in his budget.

Maria Benejan

universal pre-k newsflash

issue 1

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Universal Pre-K Programs Open in New York City

In September of 1998, Universal Pre-K Programs were opened in each of the 32 New York City school districts serving 14,000 four-year-old children. Below are some key provisions of the legislation.

Summary of Universal Pre-K Regulation, Subpart 151-1 Effective December 23, 1997

1) Districts must submit a plan which addresses program goals, class size, budget, staffing patterns, qualifications and classroom designs, advisory board membership, parent involvement, program assessment, and the integration of preschool children with disabilities.

2) At least 10% of the total grant must be set-aside for collaborative efforts with eligible agencies.

3) Universal Pre-K programs must meet the social, linguistic, emotional, cultural, and physical needs of children; promote English literacy; provide continuity with early elementary grades; and be educationally based.

4) Programs must provide support services; meet the needs of parents; serve meals and/or snacks.

5) Programs may vary in hours of service from half to full day or extended day.

6) Universal Pre-K teachers must be certified to teach early childhood grades by the 2001-2002 school year. Eligible agencies can hire an onsite program director who is certified or has a teaching license valid for services in the early childhood grades until 2001-2002.

7) Programs must provide staff development, and evaluate professional staff at least once a year. ●

Highlights of the First Year of Universal Pre-K Programming

Hooray for UPK!

Carol Landau, Special Education Preschool Teacher

I, among many other preschool teachers that I know, am not famous for embracing change. After all, I became a preschool teacher because my first school experience was so positive I wanted to stay there forever. Be that as it may, we were changing from a special education class in an integrated setting with children from the community at large to the same

type of class with Universal Pre-K. That was final.

Given that change is unwelcome to me and many of my colleagues, we immediately began to worry about a host of things: How would our new children get to school? Would we have an endless line of double parked cars with panicked parents unable to get out of their cars to bring their children into the building? Would the UPK students be ready for preschool? Would the parents understand and be

Bank Street's Universal Pre-K Project Activities:

- Provides general information and technical assistance in the planning and implementation process of Universal Pre-K programs in New York City.
- Supports communities in building capacity at local, state, and national levels for Universal Pre-K Programs to become an integral part of an integrated early care and education system.
- Assists Universal Pre-K Programs with professional development seminars, conferences, and technical assistance forums so as to ensure that staff have the critical skills and training they need to serve four-year-olds.
- Coordinates a Universal Pre-K Fellows Program where selected Universal Pre-K teachers receive ongoing professional development, individualized technical assistance and support with regard to state certification, a peer support network and subsidized graduate credits.
- Takes a leadership role in bringing higher education institutions to the table to discuss such issues as building teacher capacity, articulation agreements, the new teacher certification system, and the restructuring of early childhood teacher preparation programs.
- Provides a vehicle to communicate updated information and reciprocal sharing of best practices, models of collaboration and resources through the Website (www.bnkst.edu/universal) and now through NewsFlash.

For more information on Bank Street's Universal Pre-K Project contact Maria Benejan at 212-875-4783 or email mbenejan@bnkst.edu.

Our first NewsFlash edition is full of information with a focus on sharing highlights of the first six months of Universal Pre-K implementation. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did putting it together! ●

interested in our policies? Would the preschool students with a disability who attend our program full time be confused with some of their classmates leaving before lunch and others coming in after lunch? Would we have to change the schedules that we had worked so hard to establish? How would we take field trips? How would we keep attendance records? And, perhaps most important, what would it be like to comply with the demands and needs of yet another NYC Board of Education agency? At our two-day orientation in September, there was some grouchiness and confusion among our usually sunny, nurturing, and cohesive faculty.

Almost all of the parents embraced our philosophy of developmentally appropriate practices and were invested in their children participating in education in an integrated setting.

By the end of the first full week of school, our breathing was less labored, our frown lines disappeared, and the pre-UPK panic had ended. Parents of the UPK students arranged carpools, walking groups, babysitters, and other transportation as needed. The students were indeed ready for school: eager, interested, and responsive. Almost all of the parents embraced our philosophy of developmentally appropriate practices and were invested in their children's participating in education in an integrated

setting. Our preschoolers with disabilities were not the least bit fazed by the comings and goings of their classmates and our schedules were easily adapted. Field trips continue to be a minor problem since we have less time to take trips than when we had only full-day classes, but we've managed to go on some great trips within the time allotted. Representatives from the school district with which we contract seem supportive and positive.

We had some great experiences this year. At our initial meeting with parents, we had great attendance and the parents showed themselves to be very interested in classroom participation. During the Hindu Festival of Divali, many of the parents brought traditional food, costumes, and music to a two-day celebration that enriched all of our lives. We are looking forward to similar participation for the Moslem holiday Eid-ul-fitr and for the Chinese New Year.

The next time we're presented with a change, I'm sure we'll all show an equal measure of resistance as we did to the introduction of UPK. That's the way we are. Most of us are too old to really change. But most of us love this change now. As a group, I think we would say, "Hooray for UPK!" ●

Carol Landau has been a preschool special education teacher at Interdisciplinary Center for Child Development (ICCD) for the past nine years. ICCD serves 48 Universal Pre-K children in an integrated setting with children with special needs. ICCD is a recipient of the 1999 Outstanding Early Childhood Program Award sponsored by the State Education Department. Congratulations to all the staff!

UPK Highlights

Traditions, Celebrations, and Expressions

Marlene Silverman, Pre-K Teacher
P.S. 214Q, District 25

In the Pre-K classes at P.S. 214Q in district 25, we found the perfect formula for fun: family, food, and four-year-olds! On December 17, parents, grandparents, and four-year-olds gathered in the lunchroom of P.S. 214 to create holiday candy houses using milk cartons, graham crackers, frosting, and assorted holiday candies.

After reading Hansel and Gretel, the Gingerbread Man, and the Gingerbread House to the children in early December, we decided to try our hand at making original candy houses. A letter was sent to the parents asking if they would be interested in participating in this venture with their children. After an overwhelming positive response was received, we sent a follow-up letter asking each parent to bring in a specific item necessary to ensure variety. Frosting, candy canes, marshmallows, and gum drops were some good examples. Thanks to the interest and cooperation of our Acting Principal, Mr. Howard Merims, ample time and space were provided for the two Pre-K classes and their family members in the school's lunchroom. On the set date, parents arrived and took a seat next to their child. Each child had a prepared bowl of goodies including six graham crackers, spice drops, mini-marshmallows, M&M's, gummy bears, and an empty, washed, small milk container. Each can of frosting was shared by two families, and there were plates of extra candies placed on the tables. The placing of the graham crackers along the sides

(see "Gingerbread" next page)

(Gingerbread, continued)

and the roof of the container came first. Everyone was reminded that the frosting was the “glue.” Parents and children decided how much candy went on the houses and into the tummies of the four-year-olds. Cooperation, laughter, and fun were boundless as parents and children worked together to create their beautiful and delicious structures. Children who did not have a parent available that day were helped by sixth graders, as well as other parents.

Cooperation, laughter, and fun were boundless as parents and children worked together to create their beautiful and delicious structures.

Mrs. Roberta Brochin, Pre-K Coordinator for District 25, joined in the fun and made herself available to wrap the finished houses. A wrapping station was established, complete with tinted plastic wrap, scissors, and curling ribbon. Parents and teachers wrapped the finished products and feelings of pride and success filled the room. Photos were taken and later given to families as a fond remembrance of a special time shared by the family and school community.

What shall we do as an encore? Why, a family festivity involving the decoration of cupcakes and cookies for Valentine’s Day! We are also planning a multicultural song and dance fest in May—complete with a multicultural luncheon. Food has always been a focal point for families involving traditions, celebrations, and expression. We’ve decided what better way to unite the school and home than to plan some delectable excursions along the way of the school year. ●

UPK Highlights

An Administrator Speaks Out

Patricia M. Brown, Education Director, Goose Bay Nursery School II

As a teacher and an administrator in a community nursery school for 14 years, I was delighted to see that the New York City Board of Education has decided to initiate a Universal Pre-K program for all four-year-old children, giving them the opportunity to attend pre-school at no cost to their parents. The benefits of such a program are overwhelming. Many of these children would not have had the opportunity to attend school prior to entering kindergarten. Thanks to the Board of Education, all parents can give their children the opportunity to get a jump-start on their education.

When beginning this program in September, we were reminded of the importance of the link between parents and school. Many of these children were in school for the first time, and we soon came to realize that many of the parents were not used to a curriculum that was centered around the development of the young child. Many of the parents were under the impression that because the Board of Education installed a Universal Pre-K program, it meant that kindergarten in the future was going to be much more competitive in nature. We soon became aware that the parents wanted to see worksheets, homework, and a much more structured day. Most of us grew up on worksheets and dittos. It is difficult to explain to parents that the way we learned as children is not necessarily the only way or the right way to learn. We found it extremely important to educate our parents on how children learn best. We have invited our parents to spend time in our classrooms and use the materials and activities, and we tried our best to explain what each activity was teaching the children.

Regardless of the short hours and the co-mingling of educational philosophies, the children in our program are

flourishing. They are learning how to share, as well as how to solve problems independently, as they embark on a life-long love of education. They are falling in love with literature, whether they are quietly reading on their own or having a great story read to them. They are even becoming authors, as they dictate their stories to the teachers. They are learning about their community as they walk to local stores, the library, and the firehouse.

In the fall, our school ventured outside the community and visited places such as a country pumpkin patch and a college theater. The most heart-warming event took place this year shortly after Thanksgiving. The children had been discussing thankfulness and were asked if they would like to participate in an effort to raise pennies for a less fortunate family. The pennies began pouring in and were used to purchase

We found it extremely important to educate our parents on how children learn best.

clothing, diapers, and other necessities for a newborn child whose family was going through some difficult times. This effort instilled an understanding of helping others that stayed with the children long after the holidays were over. To continue their efforts, this spring the children will be participating in a project for Muscular Dystrophy.

On behalf of the staff, parents, and especially the children, I would like to express our gratitude to the Board of Education for believing in the importance of Universal Pre-K. We can all feel secure in the fact that we have given these children an educational foundation that will stay with them throughout their lives. ●

UPK Highlights

When Will Grandpa Go to Kindergarten?

Jennifer Robbins, Universal Pre-K Teacher, P.S. 165Q

As a teacher of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten class, I have seen tremendous growth in my students since September. What a joy it has been to see thirty-six children blossom through the experiences they have had in just a half-year of school. For some who had previous experience in day care or nursery school, entering the program was a smooth process without much fanfare. However, for others this process had the potential to be traumatic, as it was for one four-year-old in my afternoon class.

Yet, now, in January, I look at this child and cannot believe that there were ever any tears, any resistance to coming, or any days spent in class with grandpa by his side to help ease the transition. I see a confident, happy child willing to take risks, to make independent choices, to ask questions, and above all, to sing, laugh, and be merry. After all, shouldn't life be that simple? I attribute this child's success in making the ultimate transition into school to himself, his classmates, and the structure I have created within the classroom. With Universal Pre-K, children are being provided with an opportunity to have a range of experiences, as well as to explore interpersonal relationships.

It was these interpersonal relationships that made the difference for my once fearful student. After weeks of wiping his tears, encouraging him to get involved, I still saw little change in his desire to brave Pre-K alone. His grandpa has become a staple in our classroom, taking walks to the bathroom, and learning English himself as we sing our songs every morning at meeting time. A classmate even joked one day, "When will grandpa go to kindergarten?"

One day, a classmate of this child began to take on the role not only of friend, but of mother. She would hold his hand, asking him to sit next to her on the carpet and encourage him to play at centers, jokingly telling him that he should let grandpa go. She had the perfect balance of being both a

With Universal Pre-Kindergarten, children are being provided with an opportunity to have a range of experiences as well as to explore interpersonal relationships with others.

playmate and a caregiver to him. Others caught onto the need for him to succeed. There was a determination among his classmates to not let him fail and to let him see that Pre-K was fun, an enjoyable place to come to each day. Thankfully, there was a happy ending. This once scared, overwhelmed four-year-old is now a leader in the class. His struggle to find comfort in the classroom environment validates how important the socialization component of Universal Pre-K actually is.

Finally, my summation of the success my class has had with the program would not be complete without a little insight from the children themselves. I asked them what they had enjoyed best about being in pre-kindergarten. David and Kelly stressed how much they loved singing during meeting time. Mensur enjoyed the chances he got to sit and read books. There was an overwhelming love for center time, with painting at the easel and playing in the kitchen getting top votes. Finally, it was Marie's answer that I felt summed it up best. She said, "I love everything about school. I really love making friends." ●

Words from...

Archdiocese Little Angels Head Start/UPK staff

"The best aspect of being involved in UPK has been the training. I was exposed to different ways of using math and literacy in my classroom, and sharing ideas from our meeting with teachers from other day care schools. The children have been developing gross and fine motor skills and are learning to socialize with their peers as well as adults. Upstate apple and pumpkin picking was a great experience for our children, especially those who do not get the opportunity to leave the city."

—Marcia Melendez

"The workshops have helped me with implementing math and literacy in my daily lessons. By applying these elements, the children are showing a great interest in these areas. They are developing fine and gross motor skills through art and games as well as socializing skills during playtime. The parents have been very helpful by volunteering and attending trips and other activities."

—Ivette Cruz

"I have found the Universal Pre-K training to be very informative, and it has provided me with the materials to facilitate a learning experience for the children. I have rearranged my classroom to reflect literacy even more. The Three, Four, Open the Door development guide helps me to implement an effective program throughout the day."

—Denise Ramsey

From a Fellow

Vassilla Cassens, Universal Pre-K Teacher, P.S. 39, District 15

A little about my curriculum:

My curriculum is thematically based with topics taken from the children and introduced through literature, songs, or activities. I provide a basket with a Master Works in Progress sign so children can store and continue projects that would take a few days or weeks to complete. I introduce the project and then I follow their clues. I let them lead the way to what we discover. I am concentrating on purchasing books that would spark the individual interests of all the children in my class; for example, books on dinosaurs, planets (outer space), and animals. I believe a well-stocked library would further encourage the children to work on individual projects as well as class projects.

At this time, many of the children have shown an interest in outer space, so I am initiating a study on outer space through books, songs, and activities. We will build and paint rockets out of boxes from the dramatic play area large enough for them to crawl in and out of, space helmets, and oxygen tanks. The block area will contain books on rockets to encourage block building. If interest in a project wanes, I discontinue or alter the project.

My two-and-one-half hour Universal Pre-K Schedule:

8:30 to 8:50—Arrival

Children settle in, hang up coats, and have a choice either to draw, read a book, or play with puzzles. Parents stay to play with children during this time. Children have the opportunity to show their work to their parents.

8:50 to 9:10—Meeting

Singing, finger plays, and talking about the day's events. We sometimes introduce new concepts, activities, and songs. Our singing is linked to literacy through laminated sentence strips. In the beginning of the year, I spent time singing the different songs and finger plays with the children. Once the children internalized the songs, I introduced the sentence strips. Two children are given the opportunity to select two songs each and place them in the sentence chart.

9:10 to 9:55—Choice Time

Children choose where they will play. A work board with the same symbols as the signs over the different play areas is used for children to pick the area they want to work in. They can go from area to area by moving their name tag on the work board. I also use this time to extend the theme or project that we are working on.

9:55 to 10:05—Clean Up

Children work together to put away all toys, clean off tables and sweep up the sand. The children who have lunch set-up jobs begin setting the tables. Children settle into the meeting area and the washing of hands begins.

10:05 to 10:25—Story Time

A story is read to the class. This is also a time for sharing the books children have brought in or projects they have done.

10:25 to 10:40—Lunch

Served home style where children pass bowls and serve themselves. Conversations are also encouraged during this time.

10:40 to 10:55—Indoor/Outdoor Play

For outdoor activity I sometimes set up an obstacle course or we play outdoor games. We also use balls, jump ropes, hula hoops, and a wagon during this time.

On rainy days we do creative movement. For example, during our winter theme, we became snowflakes that drifted and whirled with the wind. The music determined how we moved.

11:00—Dismissal

It starts all over again in the afternoon. The only change is we begin with lunch. ●

Vassilla Cassins has worked with pre-school children since last year. Vassilla is also one of Bank Street's Universal Pre-K Fellows and has participated in several professional development activities provided through the Fellows Program.

Resources

Carnegie Corporation of New York (1996).

Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children
New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York

Recommends expanding high quality preschool programs to combat educational underachievement. Provides a comprehensive learning strategy for children ages 3-5. To order report call 301-645-2742 or 212-207-6285.

The Early Childhood Strategic Group (1998)

Planning for Community-Based Early Childhood Education: A Guide For New York City's Universal Pre-K Advisory Boards and

Implementing Universal Pre-K in New York City: Blended Funding and Other Financial Considerations (1998)

Both guides provide information on the planning process for Universal Pre-K programs with particular attention to advisory board development and blended funding. To order call ECSG at 212-686-4672.

Bredcamp, S. and Copple, C. (Eds) (1997).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (rev. ed.)
Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children

Reflects what current research suggests to be best practices with young children. To order call NYC-AEYC at 212-807-0144.

The New York State Board of Regents and The New York State Education Department (1998)

New York's Commitment: Teaching to Higher Standards

Provides recommendations for action that ensures that all teachers reach higher standards of excellence. Includes information on teacher standards, the new teacher certification system and certificates. To order contact SED Publications Sales Desk, Rm 309, Education Building, Albany, NY

Words from...

Archdiocese St. Anthony's Head Start/UPK Staff

"Children in preschool are most interested in the environment around them, and what is taught in the classroom comes from the language and interest of the children. This program is designed to let the children teach each other. The children are free to experience the various centers throughout the classroom, i.e. library, writing, art, discovery, water/sand, table toys, and block/music. At the end of the day, the children share songs and discuss the events of the day. In following the process, the children build positive self-esteem and they learn at their own pace. As teachers, we implement individual educational plans for all children, thus creating a natural balance in the learning world."

—Melanie Smith, Marisol Acosta, Maritiza Colon, Diana Solorzano

Mark Your Calendars:

Teacher Certification Forum Teaching to Higher Standards

When: April 23, 1999, 9am-12noon
Where: Bank Street College
For more information call 212-875-4783.

Attention Writers:

Our next issue of NewsFlash will focus on models of collaboration.

Are you implementing a innovative UPK collaboration model or involved in a special initiative?

We want to know. Send all articles to the attention of Maria Benejan at Bank Street College, 610 West 112th Street, New York NY 10025, or fax them to 212-875-4547.

Many Thanks:

Thanks to all the writers who contributed to this issue of NewsFlash. Your work is greatly appreciated!

universal pre-k
newsflash

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UPK NewsFlash is distributed three times a year to UPK programs and staff, policy-makers, foundations, higher education faculty, advocacy groups, and the early childhood educational community.

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