

Advancing Cultural Understanding through a “Celebrate Diversity!” Event

Perspectives from Three Voices

Rhoda Frumkin, Michael Baver, & Christopher Mustakas

This is the story of *Celebrate Diversity!*—the signature event of the Mosaic Coalition, a campus-community partnership created by Wagner College and the New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID) to further the appreciation of diverse cultures on Staten Island. As a celebration of the unique characteristics and contributions of the Island’s ethnic communities, the Mosaic Coalition sponsors the annual *Celebrate Diversity!* festival. In this article, we chronicle our journey in creating *Celebrate Diversity! 2007*, and share what we learned from three perspectives—that of a college professor, a coalition coordinator, and an undergraduate student leader.

The Genesis of the Mosaic Coalition

Michael Baver: After the Towers fell in 2001, Staten Island was a borough in pain. So many of those lost were ours. There were feelings of despair, patriotism, anger, misunderstanding, fear, and bigotry.

The staff of the NYCID knew that these feelings needed to be addressed. We believed that we could help create a dialogue within our community. The NYCID is a non-profit organization on Staten Island and we have been around for 38 years. Bringing people together is what we do best. We work with at-risk high school youth, running multiple after-school programs in high schools. We run the Mediation Center on the Island and educate people on how to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts non-violently.

Through our contacts we brought together many Islanders with incredibly different backgrounds for an intercultural and interactive pot-luck dinner. We had

civic, religious, and political leaders, who along with interested Islanders, came to share their feelings and concerns about our present situation. We were all scared.

At the beginning of the evening the tension in the room was overwhelming. At the table we had neighbors sitting next to each other who were not friends. Some of those in attendance had been friends in the past and now had reasons to feel tension between them. Our Island had no sense of community. Through facilitated dialogue some connections came forward. We all wanted peace and understanding. We all wanted to see a better Staten Island. We were breaking barriers while breaking bread. When the evening was over everyone was amazed at the progress we had made. There was an excitement in the room and a yearning to continue the conversations that we’d started.

The NYCID agreed to facilitate a year-long series of interactive study circles. The group met once a month to participate in an interactive evening where we learned more about each other and ourselves. We found something very positive in the midst of a dark time. To nurture a culture of dialogue and a respect for diversity on our Island we needed to create more and varied opportunities for people to explore and reflect on their differences. At the year’s end participants again felt the desire to continue what we had started. The foundation had been laid and it was time to become official. The outcome was the Mosaic Coalition.

We wanted to have a festival to showcase our accomplishments. We needed a location. Some venues on the Island looked appealing but there was one site that displayed interest in not only housing the event but also in signing on as a true partner.

Wagner College, the Mosaic Coalition, and the Beginning of Celebrate Diversity!

Michael: Wagner College on Staten Island shared our mission and our passion for the project. Together we established a base for the coalition to stand on and grow. The Mosaic Coalition is a collaboration between NYCID, Wagner College, and representatives from many of the ethnic communities which are part of Staten Island. For the past six years we have highlighted groups on our Island by providing them with the opportunity to showcase their cultures at our FREE annual *Celebrate Diversity!* event. *Celebrate Diversity!* is an organized strategy to overcome ignorance and intolerance by promoting intercultural awareness.

Our mission is education through interaction. Our overall goal is to build relationships and strengthen communities. Last year over 1,000 people participated on a wonderful Sunday in the Spiro Sports Center at Wagner College, exploring the culture and cuisine from their neighbors. Each cultural group set up a marketplace, complete with a tent, covered tables, and signs.

The Marketplace was decorated with artwork, and filled with artifacts and interactive activities. Community members from each culture, assisted by Wagner College student ambassadors, were on hand to discuss the community’s history and engage visitors in examining artifacts and participating in the activities. We had music, dancing, awards, and games for the children, and plenty of food. There were civic leaders, dedicated politicians and guests from some of the consulates of our highlighted cultures.

Celebrate Diversity! is an incredible event, but it is within the journey that we take to get there that the magic lies. We work closely with the highlighted cultures

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for a year's time. We are strengthening relationships and building communities. The New York Center for Interpersonal Development and Wagner College are creating the foundation for great possibilities. I am amazed at what we have been able to accomplish together.

Reaching Out— Cultural Groups Get Involved

Michael: We knew that we needed to reach out to the diverse groups that help make Staten Island what it is. To get cultures involved we found out what the local civic organizations are in Staten Island. We went to cultural centers, to temples, to mosques, to any location where community groups and their leaders met. We went prepared—armed with packets of information, brochures, videos—and made our pitch. We talked about how amazing the event is.

We explained how people learned about cultures in so many ways—through food, dance, art, and marketplaces (where cultures shared artifacts, activities, and pictures). We talked about how everyone benefits: we forge better understanding, people share about themselves, the young people learn about their own cultures—we become better neighbors. We said, “Look! Over 1,000 people come together to create this day. Young people learn about you. Your young people learn about their own culture.”

We let them know about our credibility. We talked about all the cultures that had been part of *Celebrate Diversity!* so far. We talked about the many opportunities each culture had to strengthen the relationships within the larger Staten Island community—through food, art, music, dance, and activities for the young people. We talked about the scholarship available for one youngster through participation in the Mosaic Coalition. We focused on the idea of breaking barriers through breaking bread, of education through interaction.

At the end of the day, we thought of ourselves like Honda—the car that sells itself. We shared the past successes of *Celebrate Diversity!* and let them sell themselves. And it was so worth it!

Wagner College Faculty, Staff, and Students Get Involved

Rhoda Frumkin: My involvement with the Mosaic Coalition and *Celebrate Diversity!* began rather innocently. A colleague who had been the co-chair of *Celebrate Diversity! 2006* was discuss-

ing the children's activities for *Celebrate Diversity!* with a graduate assistant, and I asked for an overview. As she talked, I thought of several activities in which my undergraduate students could participate. These students, who were enrolled in a course entitled “Language Acquisition and Literacy Development for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Children” were engaged in learning literacy techniques appropriate for diverse learners. This was a perfect opportunity to provide them with authentic experience.

During the next two months, we planned the schedule of children's activities for the Children's Area of *Celebrate Diversity!*—read-alouds of children's books, a puppet show representing one culture, and a Readers' Theater representing another. We found patterns for the puppets and created props for the Readers' Theater. One student created a puppet stage, complete with tie-back curtains. We planned art projects so that children could make the various puppets. We made a prototype of the hats that children could construct, decorate, and wear during the Readers' Theater performance.

I was hooked. As I worked with the members of the Mosaic Coalition and with the many people who volunteered to assist, I learned more and more about the mission of the Coalition. I knew, too, that I wanted to participate in a larger way.

Fast-forward to August 2007. Discussions about the next *Celebrate Diversity!* event began. An executive committee was formed. I was invited to participate, and agreed. More meetings occurred. I missed one meeting, and discovered that my name had been submitted as co-chair. I accepted, and quickly learned about my role. I would spearhead the Wagner College part of *Celebrate Diversity!* As I considered what this might require, I began to ask, repeatedly, one overriding question: To what had I agreed? Well, I was ready for the challenge, or so I thought.

Challenge of Planning *Celebrate Diversity!*

Rhoda: My recognition of the challenge of co-chairing *Celebrate Diversity!* generated another type of recognition: that this was a situation that demanded a collaborative approach. There was no way, I repeat, NO WAY, to do this without a tremendous amount of support. That concern meshed with the mission of the Mosaic Coalition of “education through interaction.” We needed to educate each other about the task

that lay ahead, and we needed to create opportunities for the interactions that would make *Celebrate Diversity!* happen. This recognition was coupled with the realization that we would need to identify individuals and groups who would volunteer their time, effort, and creativity to work on planning and implementing this event.

We began to identify groups of stakeholders: college faculty and staff, college students, community school administrators and faculty, and community agencies. We sent out a campus-wide mailing inviting faculty, staff, and students to join us for our FIRST PLANNING SESSION for the new school year. We included the “carrot” of “REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED!” We bought donuts and coffee—enough to feed the many volunteers we expected. We knew about the old adage—“If you feed them, they will come!” Well, apparently they weren't hungry, because a total of four of us wound up talking among ourselves.

We quickly acknowledged our lack of success, and went back to the drawing board, or shall I say, to personal communication! We discovered that person-to-person contact was needed. We made phone calls, emailed specific individuals, stopped people on campus, and visited classes. We invited, sweet-talked, and cajoled. The number of interested people increased.

We knew that there were more Wagner students out there who just might be encouraged to join us. Initially, I thought of enlisting student assistance in gathering advertisements from local businesses to be placed in the *Celebrate Diversity!* journal. I hoped these advertisements would provide a sizeable portion of the funding for the event. The process of making personal contacts to all of these students seemed daunting (that is, impossible).

A strategy emerged. I realized that while I knew just so many students, these students knew students, who knew students, who knew students. I contacted two former students who were organized, outgoing, and participatory. I thought they could network with others. I came to the meeting to chat about *Celebrate Diversity!* and ways to encourage the local businesspeople to become sponsors. They didn't hesitate.

However, as we talked, their excitement and commitment developed and expanded, and fundraising became only a part of what they volunteered to do. The concept of “student leaders” was born. I hoped that the student leaders would assist with contacting potential volunteers, and I knew I could count on them to follow

through. What I didn't know was how they would use their executive skills and affinities to recreate the role in ways I hadn't imagined, and to "divide and conquer."

Developing the Student Arm for Celebrate Diversity!

Christopher Mustakas: When Dr. Frumkin emailed me I did not know what to expect. This group, the Mosaic Coalition, was new to me and I had only just heard of the event, *Celebrate Diversity!* In her email she was asking for some students to help with seeking out advertisements from local businesses to be placed in the event's program. The donations collected would be used in part to create this publication as well as a portion towards Mosaic activities. Another student and I set up an initial meeting.

At this initial meeting we discussed the event in detail. We talked also about the Mosaic Coalition and its mission to spread diversity awareness and understanding through education. My job was to sell ads, or so I initially thought.

As we began to develop a strategic plan for selling the advertisements, Dr. Frumkin discussed other parts of the event she may need help with planning and developing. After this initial planning meeting for advertisement sales, I left with a few more responsibilities. This included brainstorming ideas on how to get the Wagner College community of students involved.

As the planning process continued, I gained more and more responsibilities. As the process moved on I became more and more excited to be involved with this group and spread diversity awareness through education. It became a passion rather than just a job selling advertisements. I decided I would help in any way possible to make this event effective in the local community, but especially effective in reaching the Wagner Student community who needed to understand how diversity awareness can positively affect our lives and the community in which we live.

Rhoda: I learned about, and from, the power of students. I revised my leadership style as a result of the student leaders' efforts. I knew that I liked to have an overview of all aspects of a project. For me, an overview included a certain level of detail. I discovered, however, that my desire to know a particular level of detail really meant that I needed to know all details. This was not possible. As I attempted to know everything about everything, I realized that it was time to relinquish the

control of the entire puzzle and begin to allow others to pick up their own pieces, and to grow with the project. The student leaders proved to be masters of this task.

No Student is an Island

Chris: The teamwork began when Dr. Frumkin decided that the students should be more involved in the event. I was originally working with a friend on selling advertisements. Then the job changed. The Mosaic Coalition decided we should be in charge of looking at all the events of *Celebrate Diversity!* and identifying where and when students could get involved. At that point, my friend and I began to divide up responsibilities. Still, this was a lot of work. We discovered that a graduate student was working on other aspects of planning for the event. I took the initiative and called a meeting for three of us students to get together and discuss the event. This is when the collaboration of three student leaders began.

At our first meeting I realized how much individuality and creativeness each one of us could bring to the event. We all had certain expertise that could be vital in specific areas. The first thing we did was create a list of all areas and programming of the event. This included student ambassadors, journal advertisements, wait staff for the food area, diversity engagement planning, organizing judges for various cultural competitions, the children's area, and all the items that go into the logistics of planning the event (decorations, set-up, and clean-up). All these areas and programs made up the Mosaic Coalition's *Celebrate Diversity!* event, and our mission was to get students involved in each area. The reason for this was to charge students to be a part of the diversity education movement in our community and on our campus.

The three of us decided that we should divide the events and programming responsibilities. I decided that this divide-and-conquer system would allow us to have great leadership through teamwork. I felt in order to be a successful leader you needed to be a part of a successful team. All three of us had our expertise in specific areas, which we could plan and program separately. What we accomplished as a team was the creation of a support center and a check system that allowed all three of us to plan successfully.

I was in charge of getting a group of student ambassadors together to aid each culture being represented at the event in their individual activities. My goal,

which I feel was accomplished, was to get together a team of students, two per culture, that was either interested in that specific culture or interested in bridging the cultural gap in our community. These students were integral to the event and were beneficial to each culture.

I also created a team of students who would help the cultures in presenting an array of cultural food in the food area. The second student leader's large planning activity was putting together a schedule and programming for the children's area of the event. This was integral to the event because we were able to reach the youth. The third student leader was in charge of getting students together to decorate and set-up the event. She also aided a group in the logistics of the event. Her groups helped the event flow and present itself as a meaningful tool to spread diversity education.

Overall, this system of having three leaders was very successful and was a new component of the planning process for the event. We worked hand-in-hand with an open line of communication with all the board members of the Mosaic Coalition. We helped the event flow and provided all the student volunteers to work the event. In addition to creating a team to volunteer to work the event, we charged the student body at Wagner College to become culturally active in spreading the message of diversity education in our local and national community.

Rhoda: We discovered that within the student body of Wagner College are individuals who are proven leaders. Once apprised of the task at hand, these students showed an ability to rally others and to accomplish considerably more than they were asked to do. They proved that the next generation has drive and knowledge, and, most of all, the belief that communities can support one another.

Fundraising—We Need Money!

Rhoda: We needed capital to produce an event of the magnitude of *Celebrate Diversity!* This money must come from sources outside the Mosaic Coalition. Historically, the Executive Board assumed part of the responsibility for contacting local businesses to ask for support. This year, the Wagner College students were recruited, initially, for the purpose of assisting with fundraising.

Michael: Funding for *Celebrate Diversity!* was needed, and this was a problem. It takes approximately \$15,000 dollars to

make the *Celebrate Diversity!* event happen. This sounds like a lot of money, but out of that money comes the journal, tee shirts, salaries, tents, tables, tablecloths, sound system rental, materials, and more. Each year, we were left scrambling for funds. In addition, we wanted to fund not just *Celebrate Diversity!*, but also other community events throughout the year. All of these events cost money. Over the past few years, the financial outcome varied; sometimes we made money which we could use for other events, but sometimes we lost money.

We get part of our funding from payment received from journal advertisements. This helps, but first of all, it isn't always enough, and second, we get a portion of this money after the *Celebrate Diversity!* event. Additionally, some sources are unwilling to fund a single event. This year, we obtained a grant from one foundation. That was great, but more was needed.

Rhoda: We needed a more systematic effort. We needed a discrete group to concentrate on obtaining funding. We requested the participation of Wagner's business department. We needed to tap the expertise of people who know how to research and apply successfully for grants aimed at encouraging community-school partnerships. We needed to carefully develop a long range plan for funding not only *Celebrate Diversity!*, but also aimed at year-long funding of community-based events open to the public.

Looking Forward: Creating and Recreating an Executive Board

Michael: We needed an Executive Board for the Mosaic Coalition to ensure that it became less of a collaboration between NYCID and Wagner College alone, and more of an inclusive entity. The Mosaic Coalition has worked hard to bring more people in. This is essential if we are to figure out what we can do and how we can do more. To date, we are still a group in flux, but that may actually be a good thing. We have many of the "right" people now—and are reaching out to others from varied cultural groups. Maybe we need to think, too, about who is in what "seat" (role) and rework from the inside as well.

Clearly, we are moving in these directions, as best shown by the fact that the members of the Executive Board voted unanimously to move forward with a strategic planning meeting.

Rhoda: Even the strategic planning

meeting structure was influenced significantly by the members of the Executive Board. After the Executive Board voted affirmatively to proceed with the planning meeting, Michael contacted an experienced facilitator who had successfully worked with the Mosaic Coalition in the past, and who, not too coincidentally, was a Mosaic Coalition board member.

The Schools Join in— The Art and Essay Contests

Rhoda: *Celebrate Diversity!* is a community-based event, and as such, we needed community involvement. While Michael worked with representatives from the highlighted cultures to identify ways in which each could involve members of his culture, I needed to enlist the participation and support of the local community schools. The participation of the local public and private schools was crucial for two reasons. First of all, we wanted children and their families, as well as educators and school staff, to attend. In addition, as a core part of *Celebrate Diversity!*, we sponsored two contests for students.

Michael: Every high school and middle school student on Staten Island was given the opportunity to enter the essay contest. The question every year is a simple one: "How is your family's culture special?" In addition, elementary school classes could enter the art competition, where they expressed their perceptions of their heritage and culture in a collaborative or individual way.

Rhoda: For the art contest, elementary school students created projects to highlight their own cultural backgrounds. Students constructed models, posters, collages, and picture books to illustrate key features which influenced their family life. They competed in one of two grade groups—kindergarten through second grade, or third through fifth grade.

Michael: Both the essays and art projects were displayed at *Celebrate Diversity!* All youth from every school on the Island were encouraged to attend, since it was there that the winners were announced.

Rhoda: We awarded monetary prizes and certificates for artistic projects and for written contributions as well.

We, of course, hoped for fabulous entries from many schools. We sent out flyers. We sent out emails. The outcome was mixed. We received fabulous entries from a small number of schools.

As I investigated to find out the reason for this outcome, I discovered that much of our publicity had been lost among the myriad of mailings and emails schools received daily.

We realized that this occurred partly because our communications were not directed to any particular individual. Once again, the need for personal communication was evident.

I tried another approach. As an experiment, I met with the Executive Board and the membership of the Staten Island Reading Association (SIRA). The members of this organization, a local affiliate of the New York State Reading Association and the International Reading Association, are all educators working in or retired from the local school district. All were interested and enthusiastic, but knew absolutely nothing about any communications to the schools about *Celebrate Diversity!* Clearly, this organization could be a strong partner.

The outcome of this single visit was positive. While the date for submission of projects and entries had passed, and therefore no additional student contest entries could be accepted, the SIRA still offered support. The organization purchased a journal advertisement, many members attended the event, and still more expressed great interest and promised participation at next year's *Celebrate Diversity!* event.

A major realization about the benefit of personal contact emerged from our efforts at involving the schools. We know that school administrators and teachers believe in celebrating the diversity of their student body. We know, too, that within the busy, day-to-day school activities, mailed communications can get overlooked. We will ask the members of the Wagner community and the NYCID who visit public school to "get the word out." We have a great number of people—coordinators of after-school programs, student observers, student teachers, graduate students who hold teaching positions, student teaching supervisors, and members of educational organizations—who have direct contact with school personnel. One-to-one contact, in addition to emailed and snail-mailed announcements and invitations, will increase student involvement in future *Celebrate Diversity!* competitions.

We learned, too, that we failed to contact a group of major shareholders—the parents of our community. We realized that access to this group was readily available. We identified strategies to increase community interaction through enlisting the support of the local community su-

perintendent to facilitate attendance by members of the Mosaic Coalition at school board meetings. We can attend the school board meetings and introduce the mission of the Mosaic Coalition. We can present a brief slide show to highlight the event and introduce the school-based activities in which students can participate.

We noticed, too, that we had neglected to include our youngest children, and realized that young children are ready and able to embrace positive attitudes toward their own and others' cultures. Accordingly, we can broaden the art projects competition to include pre-kindergarten entries. These can be class rather than individual projects, and can serve as a jump-start for units focusing on the family and community.

We can also encourage participation from after-school groups, many of which are coordinated jointly by the community schools and the NYCID. Depending upon the emphasis of particular after-school programs, students can contribute individual or group art projects, or personal essays about their cultures. In addition to increasing the number and breadth of student entries, this would increase student familiarity with the event itself, and, perhaps, generate more family participation at the event.

Lastly, our Wagner College student teachers can serve as liaisons between the Mosaic Coalition and the local schools. They can involve their cooperating teachers and students in creating projects and essays to submit to the Mosaic Coalition competitions. In addition to providing students with an authentic experience in exploring their own cultures, this affords student teachers an opportunity to develop the professional disposition targeting knowledge of diverse populations.

Learning through Interaction Via Wagner College Courses

Rhoda: The mission of the Mosaic Coalition is consistent with the Wagner College belief in the value of connecting academic courses and experiential learning. Through the use of experiential learning, students are provided with meaningful practical experiences which enhance their understanding of more abstract concepts through authentic engagement with real-life situations and people. Several Wagner College professors applied this principle to community service-learning activities in which students learned about members of the highlighted cultures through direct interaction. Students shared their

knowledge and perspectives first with their classmates, and then with the larger Staten Island community at *Celebrate Diversity!*

Cooking Project

Rhoda: One Wagner College history professor's cooking project took a group of Wagner College foodies into the homes and restaurants of families from the highlighted cultures to learn about, cook and, of course, eat traditional delicacies. (I wish I had been with them!) Students planned websites to share recipes and display photographs of their experiences.

Documentary Project

Rhoda: Two Wagner College professors jointly taught a course which combined "Graphic Art" and "Introduction to Film." In this course, students studied and wrote about visual effects and perceptions of self and other, and experimented with these concepts by making documentaries about their various communities—family, campus, and diverse neighbors in Staten Island. The documentaries focused on the cultures highlighted at the *Celebrate Diversity* event, and were shown at each Marketplace.

The documentaries told the stories, in film, music, and words, of the backgrounds and daily lives of families representing the cultures highlighted this year. These captivating slices-of-life introduced visitors to intergenerational interactions of some of their Staten Island neighbors who trace their roots to countries different than their own. Following the *Celebrate Diversity!* event, cultural representatives took home copies of the DVDs to share with members of their communities.

Bilingual Read-Alouds

Rhoda: Students learning Spanish worked with their Wagner College professor to select children's books to read aloud in Spanish. Families from all cultures—whether or not they spoke Spanish—thoroughly enjoyed hearing favorite stories in a familiar, or not-so-familiar, language. In addition, the Wagner College students had a great opportunity to practice oral reading and conversation in their new language.

Judging the Essay Contest

Rhoda: After we collected essays from Staten Island middle schools and high schools, we decided to involve our teacher candidates in the process of choosing contest winners. We turned the selection

process into an authentic experience of looking at students' written work holistically. Teacher candidates established evaluation criteria, effectively identified strong papers with well-developed content and structure, and supported their choices. The essay contest grew into a learning experience for both school-age students and future teachers.

Diversity Engagement Week

Chris: *Celebrate Diversity!* is not a one day affair; it is the culmination project of a year's worth of planning and prior diversity events that lead up to this one major event. As part of the student leadership we decided to create a week's worth of campus activities prior to the event. These activities were presented for the whole college and involved games and competitions on culturally diverse history, ethnic dance classes, and singing bees.

The activities were presented at a space near the dining hall on campus to attract a variety of students and pull in their attention as they walked by. Throughout this week, the catering services on campus served a variety of ethnic food for lunch to represent the cultures being presented at the *Celebrate Diversity!* event. We also had advertisements on campus and facts on cultures for all students, staff, and faculty to see.

This week of collaborative events increased cultural knowledge as well as awareness of the main event. Plans for next year include making this diversity engagement project the focus of a larger portion of the *Celebrate Diversity!* advertising of the event and of diversity education on campus.

Set-up for Celebrate Diversity!

Rhoda: Michael and the NYCID staff ordered tents, tables, and table cloths (in colors matched to the colors of each culture's flag). Mosaic Coalition Executive Board members, NYCID staff, student leaders, student ambassadors, and a great many other student volunteers gathered on Saturday evening before the event to work on the set-up in the Wagner College Spiro Center. We brought over materials, arranged and covered tables for the main room, children's area, and outside displays, raised tents, and hung banners. We left Spiro Center feeling both tired and pleased with our work. We had completed the major part of the set-up.

Then, it was early Sunday morning,

and we started again. We placed the balloon arch so visitors would enter by walking through. We decorated the halls with more balloons and twisted crepe-paper streamers. When we were finished, we stepped back to admire our efforts. The general consensus can be summed up in one word: "WOW!"

The Children's Area

Michael: At *Celebrate Diversity!* we had a children's area. Here, young people were given "passports" that they brought with them to each of our highlighted culture's marketplace areas. After participating in an interactive activity designed by that particular community, they had a portion of their passport stamped. After obtaining stamps from all cultures, the young people returned to the children's area where they presented their filled passport. They then received a free t-shirt that said *Celebrate Diversity!* that, with markers, paints and the help of staff, they decorated any way they liked.

Rhoda: This was not all! Led by a host of Wagner College students, the children became involved in craft and performance activities related to the cultures highlighted during *Celebrate Diversity!* They made enormous paper flowers, hats and drums, and used their creations as props for Reader's Theater performances of folk-tales. They made puppets, and then presented a puppet show at a child-sized stage.

The Marketplace— Our Cultural Meeting Center

Chris: In every culture, we see forms of marketplaces where people from all nations can meet, do business, or just socialize. Each culture represented at *Celebrate Diversity!* had its own area to display artwork, artifacts, and other items of cultural importance. As guests arrived they walked from marketplace to marketplace, and experienced different cultural practices. As people flowed into one marketplace and out another, it was as if all the marketplaces had fused together to create a shared community.

Performances—a Celebration

Rhoda: Performances that showcase each culture in story, song, and dance were an exciting feature of *Celebrate Diversity!* Representatives of each culture worked with members of their communities to plan, stage, and execute a 10 minute presentation to convey a slice of the artistic

life of the community. These traditional presentations captured aspects of the cultures which were previously unfamiliar to many spectators. As we watched, the sights and sounds of storytelling, music, instruments, costumes, songs, and dance combined into breathtaking spectacle.

The Food Court—Eating to Learn

Chris: Everybody is always hungry so we decided to create an area in the event that would allow cultures to bring their ethnic foods and sell them to the community. When you ask people about their heritage or cultural background nine out of ten times they will mention an old recipe from their grandmother or their favorite dish. The Mosaic Coalition decided that it would be a great idea for us to have a food area, where people can grow culturally by sharing ethnic foods. I had set up a team of students to help serve the food and aid the cultural leaders in their station.

Each culture was asked to sell their food for no more than three dollars per plate. The idea was that this was to share culture, not make a profit. This was one of the busiest areas of the event and I have never seen people come together to share cultural experiences like this before.

Each culture used up all of their food, and what was most rewarding to see was that most cultures started handing food away for free. Everybody was a friend of their neighbor in that area; there were no cultural barriers.

Food opened the door for conversation and broke down cultural barriers. Though this was a simple area and only a part of the whole day, it was integral to spreading the message of diversity education. Food can lead the way for conversations, which can lead to friendships across cultures.

Collecting Data

Rhoda: Historically, the Mosaic Coalition judged the success of *Celebrate Diversity!* through anecdotal data gleaned from observations and conversations. This past year, in response to a request from one funding source for data which measured the impact of *Celebrate Diversity!* on the Staten Island community, we created an informal exit survey to be administered randomly. Conducting this survey afforded us an opportunity to identify visitors who enjoyed and learned from the *Celebrate Diversity!* event, as well as to create a data base of community members who wanted to know about and planned to attend future community events involving cultures different from

their own. I viewed this as a two-fold win: we gained data useful to our funders, and obtained contact information which would enable us to broaden our constituency.

Chris: Data were collected by smiling and happy students. As a student leader, I created a team of students to collect the exit data and contact information from the guests at the event. Data were collected for grant research purposes as well as for the Mosaic Coalition. I decided that students should collect the data because they were outgoing and could connect with people of all ages and nationalities. The students were stationed at the doorway and throughout the crowd to collect data. They went up to people kindly and asked them a few questions. This opened the doorway for discussion about the Mosaic Coalition, its goals, and its future plans. The data showed that the event was a success overall and people wanted to become more involved for next year.

Advertising—or Sailing, Sailing— All Aboard for Diversity

Rhoda: At our mid-October planning meeting, Michael reiterated the need to expand our target group for advertising. He presented an innovative idea.

Michael: I went down to the Staten Island ferry terminal at the very early hour of 5:30 a.m. I took with me a few thousand flyers, and thought I'd distribute them to a few thousand people. I figured that since I have a loud voice and was perfectly willing to use it, I could "sell" the idea of attending the *Celebrate Diversity!* event. I shouted about the fun, the inexpensive food, the family-friendly environment, and the many activities for young people. I talked about learning through interaction. I knew that this was an untraditional way of advertising, but I figured that even if half the people threw out the flyers that, hopefully, the other half would read them.

Chris: I was a part of this and the reaction I saw from people was amazing. Some people just took the flyers and others asked questions. We handed out hundreds of flyers and reached many community members through this simple effort.

Rhoda: Michael hoped to be accompanied on his early morning publicity campaign by young people decked in the traditional garb of their cultures. Sadly, this didn't pan out. However, if we talk about this earlier with the members of the Mosaic Coalition and the leaders of

next year's highlighted cultures, we should achieve better results. In addition, we will add a slant to our saying of "breaking barriers through breaking bread"; we will buy breakfast for anyone who volunteers!

Media Coverage—Yes!

Rhoda: We were fortunate to have pre-event advertising from the *New York Daily News*, the *Staten Island Advance*, *Time Out for New York Kids*, and the *Staten Island Parent*. In addition to advertising *Celebrate Diversity!*, these newspapers ran stories of the cooking project, conducted interviews with Mosaic Coalition members, and acknowledged our honorees. We learned about how important that media coverage was for informing and motivating the community. In addition, we realized that we could expand the media coverage readily by, for example, involving local parent/teacher organizations in highlighting students' contributions to essay and art contests in school newsletters.

Debriefing

Rhoda: We discovered that small group debriefing with specific constituencies was extremely effective. The former co-chair and I sat and talked with our three student leaders during our post-event debriefing. We were tremendously impressed by the level of reflection demonstrated by these future teachers. They spoke in turn of the accomplishments of and challenges faced by their committees, and shared thoughtful, focused ideas to strengthen next year's *Celebrate Diversity!* event.

Chris: After every good event you wonder, how did that work out? This was the question that we speculated on for days after the event. As student leaders, we found success in the event and our planning and implementation, but we wanted to know how others felt about our efforts. Positive and constructive criticism is important to the repetition of any great event.

After the event Dr. Frumkin and the previous chairperson met with the three student leaders to discuss what worked, what did not work, and what can be done for future events. Overall, we decided that both the event and the idea of utilizing three student leaders were successful.

What Did We Learn for the Next Year?

Rhoda: As we plan for the next *Cel-*

brate Diversity! we will keep in mind these guidelines:

1. Start early. During our *Celebrate Diversity!* debriefing session, we decided that planning for next year would begin in January; this starting date would give us nine months to plan. In fact, we did start early and our conversations led to recognition of the need for a long-range plan strategic plan which would guide future efforts.

2. Begin with broad strokes and refine them later. Set up the overarching structure of *Celebrate Diversity!* and each component before working on developing specific ideas.

3. Recognize *Celebrate Diversity!* as a part of an ongoing effort to achieve a Staten Island enriched by and appreciative of our diversity: a place where we live comfortably with our differences and nurture respect and understanding among people of every faith, creed, and color. *Celebrate Diversity!* is not an end in and of itself. It is part of a process through which the members of the Mosaic Coalition bring together their respective constituencies to learn more about each other, and to provide an opportunity for members of the larger community to learn about the constituencies as well.

4. Delegate authority to those who can get the job done, and stay out of their way during their day-to-day work.

5. Hold leader meetings where team leaders can share ideas. This enables the co-chairs to keep informed of all committee activities. This also provides a forum for leaders to share ideas and often results in new possibilities and/or clarification and expansion of existing plans.

6. Look for natural affinities and use them efficiently. For example, enlist the artistic students in creating stages and scenery, and the verbally outgoing students in master-of-ceremonies roles for Diversity Engagement Week.

7. Create a data management system with a computer-savvy graduate assistant at the helm. This will ensure that all involved have access to the same information whenever necessary.

8. Identify the specific data required by funders to support their contributions. Improve the collection of exit data by enlisting the assistance of faculty who are well-versed in research and who have expertise in data collection and analysis.

9. Expand the pool of possible funding sources to include local and non-local agencies, and enlist their support. Find and enlist an expert in grant-finding and grant writing. Identify grant sources and apply early and often.

10. Identify and "recruit" leaders with connections to specific groups—student organizations, public and private community schools, parent groups, agencies, professional organizations, and community organizations—who can help rally others to become involved.

11. Increase our awareness and understanding of cultural differences in communication techniques. Keep these differences in mind during cross-cultural interactions. Realize that different communication styles—preferences for written or oral communication forms, desire for formal instead of informal manner of address, or group decision-making instead of individual authority—may influence results. Realize, too, that differences in access to resources, whether people or material, different concepts of time, and variations in emphasis on task completion may affect each group's contributions to the planning process.

12. Build a bridge between performers and spectators. Consider using the floor rather than the stage for performances as appropriate to increase visitors' proximity.

13. Build on one-to-one relationships. Remember that the level of comfort and willingness to contribute comes from knowing the others in the group.

Our Accomplishments

Rhoda: Our goal was to heighten Staten Islanders' appreciation and understanding of diverse cultures. We hoped to increase participants' willingness to engage in other events and interactions with members of cultures different from their own. The results of our exit survey suggested that we had succeeded. Our conversations with participants from each group confirmed this.

However, as we talked and analyzed the event during our own debrief sessions, we discovered that it was we who worked to make the day happen who benefited the most. We learned about people's beliefs and customs and differences. We learned about what makes us want to work together. We discovered what we can do.

It's about Relationships

Rhoda: For me, the richness of celebrating our diversity is not only about the *Celebrate Diversity!* event. It's about the people I met while planning and organizing. It's about the stories I heard, and the stories I told, and those I've yet to tell. It's about the stories that show how people of varied cultures are woven together, and how relationships emerge through getting to know people as individuals.

A True Commitment to Change

Michael: Staten Island is a community in change. Of all the boroughs of New York City, it is ours that is currently experiencing the largest influx of immigrants. The Mosaic Project focuses on the everyday aspects of our growing diversity, the issues and concerns that challenge the quality of our personal and institutional everyday lives. Community change takes a long term commitment. We, and many others, are making that commitment.

Rhoda: As we write this article, we are formulating the agenda and attendee list for our first Strategic Planning Session

for the next year's event. Our conversations led us to the realization that we needed a framework from which to plan the direction for Mosaic Coalition for the next several years, rather than exclusively for one year at a time. We are drawing participants from those groups previously involved in *Celebrate Diversity!*, and from those we hope will be part of our broader initiatives. We've used telephone calls as a more personal approach to contact stakeholders. We have invited representatives from many cultural organizations.

We ask people we contact to come and to bring an interested colleague or friend. To begin the session, we will gather stakeholders for a "meet and greet" hour of conversation (with refreshments, of course), and initiate a "getting to know you" process. This informal social setting will help to build the familiarity among individuals that is needed for creating the respect and trust integral to a collaborative partnership.

For our initial strategic planning session, we will draw from five groups of people: agency staff, including staff members from the NYCID, administrators from the local community school district,

representatives of the various cultural groups who live and work on Staten Island, Wagner College staff and faculty, and Wagner College students.

We will begin for some, and continue for others, the one-to-one interactions that are crucial for building trust. We will continue our meetings and work together to formulate Mosaic Coalitions' overarching goals for the years to come.

We will work together, and we will listen to each voice.