

From: Piegonski, Fred Public Relations Officer LA City College
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Subject: Students Learn English by Doing in Rosalyn Kahn's Speech Class
“My Husband Never Let me Out of the House!”



Speech teacher Rosalyn Kahn (in red dress 5th from right) and her students who hail from all over the world.
(Photo by Chuck Ake)

Students Learn English by Doing in Rosalyn Kahn’s Speech Class

In halting English, but with great passion, they told of how they helped pre-school children learn how to count, or of ladling out the soup for the homeless at a soup kitchen, or of putting together lunches for a meals program. As they spoke of their experiences, the students in LA City College’s Speech 71 class gained more self-confidence. In fact, their words came more easily and their desire to communicate to the rest of the class erased all inhibitions.

Intended to help foreign-born students improve their speaking skills, the speech class employs a unique curriculum that has students work one or two hours each week at volunteer assignments at community agencies. This so-called “service learning” has been integral in speech instructor Rosalyn Kahn’s class for the past four years.

“I’ve seen a marked improvement in students’ English skills during the course of the semester,” said Ms. Kahn, who is experienced in working with students of various ethnic backgrounds. As a student, she herself traveled and stayed with families throughout the world as part of the “Up with People” singing group program which promoted cultural understanding.

In one of her recent speech classes, students enthusiastically reported on their volunteer experiences in such places as pre-schools, convalescent centers, the Covenant House,

AIDS Walk LA, the Union Rescue Mission, the Armory, and the LACC Child Development Center.

Their experiences not only helped them improve their English, they said, but it opened their eyes to the possibility of working in a variety of fields.

“My husband never let me out of the house,” said one of the students, “because he wanted me to stay home to take care of our young son. But I was able to take our 6-year-old to the kindergarten where I volunteered and we both had a very positive experience.”

Another student recounted how she bought little multi-colored stickers to teach young students the names of colors and animals. “And they taught me the names of giraffes and lambs,” she said.

Still another reported that it was the first “job” she had ever held. “At first I was afraid to speak to others,” she said, “but eventually I lost my fear and it turned out to be a very interesting job.”

The students participating in the recent class were immigrants who hailed from El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Egypt, China, Korea, Armenia, and the Ukraine. Many students reported that they would be back to continue their studies of English at LA City College.

“They’re not only learning English,” said Ms. Kahn, “but they’re becoming themselves.” Indeed, one student said, “If I have more time I want to do it again. During my work I felt like I became an American.”