



Educators and
Employers:
Providing Education
with a Purpose

Volume 19-7: Report on the 2009 Conference in Atlanta, Georgia

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2009 Atlanta NCPN Conference Offers Great Professional Development Opportunities for Career Pathways and Tech Prep Practitioners

Mark Whitney, Manager of Publication Services, CORD

On September 30 through October 3, NCPN hosted its annual conference at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Atlanta, Georgia.

As always, the conference brought together an impressive roster of keynote speakers and featured presenters. This year's keynotes were delivered by Stedman Graham, Gus Whalen, Bill Daggett, and Ron Clark. (Those sessions are the subjects of separate articles in this issue.) In addition, there were sessions by Lydia Logan and Greg Roth of the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Scott Hess of the U.S. Department of Education; Larry Warford of the League for Innovation in the Community College; and Bonnie Bracey Sutton of the Thornburg Center for Professional Development in Washington, DC. Pedro Esteva, CEO of IMCA (the Caterpillar Inc. dealership for the Dominican Republic and Jamaica), presented information on his company's involvement in an important project at the Dominican Republic's largest vocational school. (For more on that project, see also http://www.cordonline.net/connections/19_7/connections_18_6.pdf.)

Each year the conference provides a broad range of optional preconference events. This year attendees were able to choose from sessions on career coaching, contextual teaching, technology for educators, adult career pathways, green

pathways, and grant writing. The session on grant writing was delivered in part by Michael Brustein, a nationally recognized authority on Perkins legislation and author of *The Tech Prep Guide to Perkins IV* (CORD Communications, 2007).

For the last three years, one of the most popular optional events has been the Career Pathways Leadership Certification Workshop, which involves activities both prior to and during the conference. (This workshop is also presented at locations across the country. For more, contact the workshop's developer and presenter, Deb Mills at dmills@cord.org.)

Several conference attendees took a fifty-mile bus ride to the Featherbone Communiversity of Gainesville. (For more on this destination, see the article on the NCPN member luncheon.)

This is only a sampling of the featured and optional events. For more, see the conference program book, which will be available online throughout the coming year (http://www.cordonline.net/atlanta2009/NCPN_2009_program_book.pdf). For presentation PowerPoints and handouts, go to <http://www.cord.org/presentations-and-handouts-2009/>.

A major focal point of this year's conference was the release of a new joint publication of ICW and NCPN titled *Thriving in Challenging Times*:

Connecting Education to Economic Development through Career Pathways. (The publication was funded in part by the Ford Motor Company Fund and Community Services, whose director, Cheryl Carrier, wrote the foreword.) *Thriving in Challenging Times* presents an overview of career pathways, including adult career pathways (ACP), and describes seventeen exemplary programs from across the country.

The publication makes a special appeal to employers to get involved in education, as they are directly affected when schools fall short of their potential in producing work-ready graduates. “The education-to-career continuum is a kind of pipeline,” the publication explains. “As students progress from secondary to postsecondary and beyond, they exercise choice in determining what directions they will take and how far they will go. *The reason many employers struggle to find qualified workers is that the pipeline has become weak*” (p. 7).

As the publication points out, employers have a vital role to play in the success of career pathways programs: “Each program is governed by an advisory committee that includes representatives of the industry that the program is designed to serve. Employers shape the curriculum and provide other benefits—scholarships, fundraising, public relations, internships, job shadowing, mentoring,

recruitment, professional development for teachers, equipment donations, and adjudication at student competitions, to name a few” (p. 9).

Most of the programs featured in the publication focus on single career areas—aerospace, automotive manufacturing, biotechnology, construction, education, finance, graphic communication, green technologies, healthcare, logistics, manufacturing, nuclear energy, and transportation. Three of the programs are designed to prepare students for multiple career areas. Each program description identifies partners, target populations, challenges, strategies, funding sources, results, how businesses are involved, and lessons learned.

The publication sets an optimistic tone without downplaying the magnitude of the challenges that lie ahead. Indeed, these are challenging times, but through the partnering of educators, businesspersons, and policymakers, America’s free enterprise system can be globally competitive.

Each conference attendee received a complimentary copy. It can also be downloaded as a PDF file from <http://www.cord.org/thriving-in-challenging-times/>.

Opening Conference Session Sets Positive Tone, Challenges Attendees

Mark Whitney, Manager of Publication Services, CORD

The theme of this year’s conference—“Thriving in Challenging Times”—was chosen to encourage our members and other conference attendees to persevere in their dedication to the success of the nation’s students. Many attendees remarked on the positive and encouraging atmosphere that pervaded the event.

Attendees at the opening general session on Thursday afternoon were introduced to a new joint publication by NCPN and the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), an affiliate of the

U.S. Chamber of Commerce. That document, titled *Thriving in Challenging Times: Connecting Education to Economic Development through Career Pathways*, provides an overview of career pathways (including adult career pathways) and describes seventeen programs from across the country. For more on the document, see the opening article of this newsletter. Each attendee received a complimentary copy. A downloadable PDF is also available at <http://www.cord.org/thriving-in-challenging-times/>.

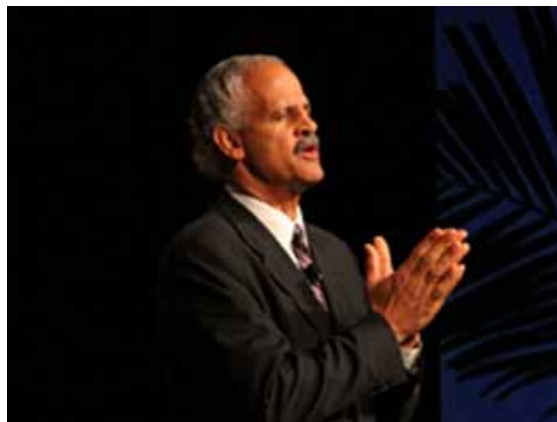
Dick Hinckley, CORD's president and CEO, spoke about the importance of the career pathways concept in providing a means for unemployed and underemployed adults to get a second chance in public education. (This was the topic of a preconference session on Thursday morning. For a copy of the session presentations, go to <http://www.cord.org/presentations-and-handouts-2009/> and scroll to "Partnering with Business to Address 'The Skills Imperative.'") As Hinckley pointed out, the adult career pathways (ACP) concept is different from career pathways in more traditional student settings. ACP programs call for a special effort on the part of employers, who must be willing to hire ACP students for part-time work, provide release time, and/or help in meeting personal needs, to mention only a few of the many factors involved.

Lydia Logan, ICW's Vice President and Executive Director, discussed the importance of career pathways from the businessperson's point of view. ICW is an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which represents thousands of businesses nationwide. Logan made the point that jobs are available but can't be filled because businesses can't find people with the necessary skills. "We have an obligation to train our young people to be globally competitive," she said. "Career pathways provide relevance and give young people a sense of direction."

Deborah Lyons, Director of the Georgia Governor's Office of Workforce Development, spoke about Georgia Work Ready, a new statewide initiative based on skill assessment and certification for job seekers and job profiling for employers. The program has designated six Georgia Work Ready regions, one for each of the state's fastest-growing industries— aerospace, advanced communication, advanced manufacturing, bioscience, energy, and logistics. Each region has assembled an industry network to ensure that its growth plan meets businesses' current and future needs. (For more on this initiative, visit www.gaworkready.org and see page 9 of *Thriving in*

Challenging Times [<http://www.cord.org/thriving-in-challenging-times/>].)

The session's keynote speaker was noted author, educator, and business consultant Stedman Graham, who shared the success process outlined in his *New York Times* bestseller *You Can Make It Happen: A Nine-Step Plan for Success*.



Graham grew up in a poor community where some people said he would never amount to anything. That challenged him to push himself, as a basketball player, college student, and businessperson. Today he speaks throughout the world, helping organizations and individuals improve their performance and leadership skills.

Graham challenged his listeners to be the best at what they do, even in low-profile careers. "If you can't be a tree, be a bush," he said. "But be the best bush you can be." Graham also challenged the attendees to stop doing the same thing every day and pursue their dreams. In his view, most people never really engage their minds. "We limit our potential because we are afraid to step out of our small circles. The challenge is to change the way we think within the 24 hours we all have each day."

Graham concluded with a reading of D.H. Gober's inspirational poem "The Race," which describes a young runner's determination to finish a foot race after falling down. No matter what happens, Graham said, "keep rising."

A special thanks to Atlanta's Carver High School for providing the opening color guard.

NCPN Members Enjoy Wit and Wisdom of Gus Whalen

Mark Whitney, Manager of Publication Services, CORD

The annual member luncheon provides an opportunity for the NCPN leadership to say thank you to the organization's members, especially those who have been members for several years, and to congratulate the winners of the Hull-Parnell Partnership Excellence Award. This year's Hull-Parnell winners (shown below and facing) were (1) a healthcare partnership in Brunswick County, North Carolina; (2) a money, banking, and business program in Winsted, Connecticut; and (3) an aerospace program in Savannah, Georgia.

Congratulations again to our winners, and many thanks to the NCPN advisory board members who served as judges in the competition. (To see descriptions of the programs, see *Connections* 19-4 [http://www.cordonline.net/connections/19_4/] or pages 43–44 of the program book [http://www.cordonline.net/atlanta2009/NCPN_2009_program_book.pdf].)



The luncheon's featured speaker was Gus Whalen, chairman of the Warren Featherbone Foundation, headquartered in Gainesville, Georgia. As expected, Whalen's remarks were touching, funny, and inspiring.

The entrepreneurial spirit runs deep in Whalen's family. The Warren Featherbone Foundation gets its name from two sources—E.K. Warren (Whalen's great grandfather) and the spines of turkey feathers—featherbones. According to Whalen, Warren began his career as a "philanthropist with no money." But with hard work and a keen business sense, he achieved great success in retail, banking, agriculture, newspaper publishing, and, of course, featherbone. Whalen's most recent book explains how the featherbone idea came about:

E.K. [Warren] started his career as a clerk in his father-in-law's dry goods store, and after several years became a partner. Watching one day as a clerk worked to fix a piece of broken whalebone in a ladies' corset, he began to explore ideas to replace whalebone with some other sort of elastic material. On a visit to the Chicago Feather Duster Company, he saw large piles of turkey wing pointers being burned. Upon inquiry, he was told that the company had no use for them. His creative mind put the two dilemmas together and came up with a solution for

both problems. The ‘worthless’ turkey feathers could be used as a stay material to replace whalebone. Thus in 1883 the Warren Featherbone Company was formed.”

(Hooked at the Roots: The Evolution of the Featherbone Communitivity, 2009, p. 3.

Each luncheon attendee received a copy of the book.)



The Warren Featherbone Company thrived for years but was forced to reinvent itself when, in 1938, plastic made featherbone obsolete. In response to changing circumstances, the company turned to the material that had put featherbone out of business—plastic—and became a highly

successful manufacturer of plastic baby pants—until the advent of disposal diapers. From there the company transitioned to Alexis baby clothes, which it manufactured in Gainesville—until financial circumstances forced it to offshore its 10,000 manufacturing jobs to China in 2005. The company weathered each of its transformations because it followed an old Dakota Indian saying: “If the horse is dead, dismount.”

Today the company exists as the Featherbone Communitivity, an educational facility in Gainesville that promotes collaborative, real-time, intergenerational learning. Working in partnership with Brenau University, Lanier Tech, Georgia Tech, and the University of Georgia, the Communitivity houses a business incubator, a nursing school, and a broad range of hands-on learning opportunities for youngsters. On some days the facility has as many as 2000 visitors.

Whalen’s message to the luncheon attendees was that, like the Warren Featherbone Company, we must all look upon crises as opportunities. One of today’s most pressing crises—one to which educators must respond—is that the United States is losing its manufacturing base. We need a new kind of workforce, one that is globally competitive.

And we must work together, Whalen said. Just like communities of California sequoia trees, we are all “hooked at the roots.”

Bill Daggett Calls for Dramatic Change at Special General Session

Mark Whitney, Manager of Publication Services, CORD

This year’s conference hosted a special general session for Bill Daggett, president of the International Center for Leadership in Education (<http://www.leadered.com/>). Daggett is the creator of two widely used educational frameworks, the “Application Model” and the “Rigor/Relevance Framework.” The latter is a practical planning and instructional tool for determining the relevance of curriculum and assessment to real-world situations.

Daggett’s message to his listeners was that career and technical education (CTE) is needed as never before, yet we must get beyond the old voc-ed model of the 1980s and 1990s. We must find ways to integrate CTE with academics as well as art, music, and physical education. If we can do that, he said, these will be “the best of times.” If we hang on to an obsolete model, they will be “the worst of times.”

Daggett pointed out that today's highest-performing schools are the ones that have been willing to change. They do things differently. "They explore why we should change," he said, "not because we're uncomfortable with the past, but because the world is changing."

Daggett's Application Model outlines five stages in the application of knowledge: (1) knowledge in one discipline, (2) application within disciplines, (3) applications across disciplines, (4) application to real-world predictable situations, and (5) application to real-world unpredictable situations. As educators, we want our students to be independent thinkers who are comfortable in stages 4 and 5, but standardized testing (and hence most teaching) focuses on stages 1 and 2. CTE is the only way to get students to stages 4 and 5, but, unfortunately, most people don't recognize that fact. CTE is still held back by a negative image. Most people still think of CTE as "shop class."



Daggett's Rigor/Relevance Framework is a Cartesian grid representing the intersections of the five stages of his Application Model (horizontal axis) with the six stages of Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains (vertical axis): (1) knowledge (or awareness), (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis, and (6) evaluation. (For a graphic of the framework, visit <http://www.leadered.com/rrr.html>.) Educators should strive to enable their students to function at the intersection of high levels of knowledge *and*

application, but this cannot be accomplished through conventional approaches. We can't get there one discipline at a time, Daggett said. We must integrate disciplines in ways that promote rigor and make learning relevant to an increasingly diverse student population.

Daggett stressed the seriousness of the challenges we face. Our young people live in a technology-driven world that many adults only vaguely understand. To make his point, Daggett showed a video of "siftable chips," inexpensive digital building blocks that interact with the user and with one another. In today's world, computers will fit in wrist watches, buttons, and eyeglasses. Separate computer keyboards and monitors will soon be a thing of the past. The American educational process must adapt to these and many other technological developments. Otherwise, it too will soon be stuck in the past.

According to Daggett, the need for dramatic change in education is also driven by economic factors. Three decades ago the United States was the dominant economic power in the world, but that is changing. China has become the world's manufacturer and has a vast population—over 100 cities with more than a million people, compared to ten in the United States. India is even more populous, and is making rapid advancements in technology. Today the world's fastest-growing economies are found in countries that, historically, have lagged far behind the United States: Vietnam, Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, and Panama.

In Daggett's view, the major challenge facing American education today is finding a way to keep pace with an ever-changing global business environment—all the while making the most of diminishing resources. It's doable, though, he explained, if we are more dedicated to improving the lives of our students than we are to preserving the status quo.

Ron Clark Conveys Energy, Passion at Closing Session

Mark Whitney, Manager of Publication Services, CORD

The closing session's keynote speaker was Ron Clark, founder of the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta. As a young teacher in North Carolina, Clark developed a passion for helping disadvantaged students. In 1998, he moved to Harlem to teach at an inner-city school. His success there was the subject of a 2006 made-for-TV movie, *The Ron Clark Story*, starring Matthew Perry.

Clark's innovative, high-energy teaching methods are based on 55 essential rules, which he describes in his 2003 *New York Times* bestseller *The Essential 55: An Award-Winning Educator's Rules for Discovering the Successful Student in Every Child*. As Clark points out, some of the rules are obvious and old-fashioned. (Example: "Do not smack your lips, tsk, roll your eyes, or show disrespect with gestures.") But students respond to them if they are consistently applied in a spirit of mutual respect. (Clark authored a second book in 2004—*The Essential 11: Qualities Teachers and Parents Use to Motivate, Inspire, and Educate Children*.)

Clark grew up in rural North Carolina. Although he had no interest in teaching, he applied to the state's Teaching Fellows Scholarship program and won a scholarship to East Carolina University. Following graduation and travel abroad, he took a teaching position in Aurora, North Carolina. When he was introduced to the class, the words of one particular student touched his heart:

We walked in and there was a little boy, named Rayquan, sitting just a few feet from the door. He looked up at me with his huge, brown, round eyes and said, 'Is you gonna be our new teacher?' I can't explain the feeling that came over me; it was like an epiphany. The instant trust in his voice, the excitement all over his face, and his evident longing for stability called out to me. I knew

that was where I was supposed to be (*The Essential 55*, p. xxv).

In the few short years since that first epiphany, Clark's success as an author and educator has garnered appearances on many national TV shows, including two appearances on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, where Oprah named him as her first "Phenomenal Man." Clark received the 2001 Disney Teacher of the Year award. On October 31, 2008, the students of Ron Clark Academy were named the "ABC Person of the Week" by *ABC World News Tonight*.



Today the Ron Clark Academy, established June 2007 in a renovated warehouse in southwest Atlanta, accommodates a diverse student body of fifth- through eighth-graders. When students enroll, their parents or guardians commit to regular volunteer work at the school.

Clark's message to the NCPN conference attendees was passionate and high-energy. He insisted that every student has the potential to "be somebody" and that it is possible to create lively, hands-on

learning environments without compromising on discipline. Wherever he goes, Clark challenges teachers to “show [students] in every way possible that they are cared for, and make special moments

for them that will add magic to their lives, motivate them to make a difference in the lives of others, and, most important teach them to love life” (*The Essential 55*, p. 196).

Connections

Mark Whitney, Editor

David Bond, Director, NCPN

Connections is published by the National Career Pathways Network, an organization of educators and employers dedicated to the advancement of Career Pathways, Tech Prep, and other CTE initiatives. NCPN assists its members in planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving workforce education programs. NCPN was founded by CORD, a national nonprofit organization that has been leading change in education for over twenty years.

Questions about *Connections*?

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Visit NCPN on the web at www.ncpn.info.

Save the date!

The 2010 conference will be held October 20–23 at the Sheraton Hotel (formerly Adams Mark) in downtown Dallas, Texas. Visit ncpn.info often for the latest information.

