

## Getting Connected to Community Resources

Alice Nelson, Haitian Multi-Service Center, Dorchester, MA

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As part of the Managing Stress to Improve Learning project, ESOL students at the Haitian Multi-Service Center were discussing how stressed they felt about the situation in Haiti. One of the problems resulting from the devastating 2010 earthquake was the outbreak of a cholera epidemic. Students worried about their families. They wanted to learn more about cholera so they could understand it themselves and also explain it to their families in Haiti.

We invited the director of the Haitian Multi-Service Center's Health Services division, Guy Apollon, to speak to the class. We conducted it in Haitian-Creole, the students' first language, because we wanted to make sure they understand the complex information, and we wanted them to feel they could ask questions freely in their native tongue. Guy Appolon is Haitian, so he could discuss the medical information within an appropriate cultural context.

After introductions and learning the students' names, Guy asked the students to generate questions they wanted to talk about. He wrote these questions on the board.

The main points covered, using the questions as guidelines included:

- physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental health;
- microscopic germs, bacteria, virus;
- stress, panic, epidemic, transmission of disease;
- being sick and not knowing it/thinking you are sick but being well;
- cholera: how to avoid;
- relaxation, balance, and equilibrium.

### Follow-up:

After the session I reviewed the content in English and developed English vocabulary work. The class brainstormed sub-topics under the four health categories (physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental health) and recorded them in a chart on the board. They discussed the difference between a bacteria and a virus including how each can or cannot be treated with antibiotics. We also did role-plays by demonstrating how to wash hands correctly as a way to prevent cholera. Based on the role play we generated a language experience piece of writing about hand washing. I then developed a cloze exercise based on the writing as a way to reinforce comprehension and vocabulary.

The next day the students completed a reading on hand washing in a health textbook. They also dictated to a partner, in English, the steps for washing hands thoroughly.

By asking students to choose one of their common stressors—in this case, a shared worry about their families' health in Haiti, we could build valuable content knowledge and then do English language and literacy practice using something students felt was very important to them.