

## A Case Study

### *Dialogue Education at Work:*

## *Improving Nutrition Education in California*

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### *Looking for a better approach to teach nutrition classes...*

The **State of California's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program** has over 80 local agencies, 3,000 staff members and 1.2 million participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and speaking nearly 100 different languages. The program participants take part in 30-minute nutrition education programs when they pick up their food coupons.

The WIC staff found that while many classes were engaging and well-received, others relied heavily on lecture and video and did not fully connect the learners to the learning despite their attempts to “cover a lot of information”. As a result, participants may have left without a clear understanding of concepts or of ways they can use the new information.

### *WIC used Dialogue Education to redesign their education program....*

A top priority of WIC's 2001-2006 strategic plan was to embrace Dialogue Education™ as a central component of its education programs. Thus, they:

- provided Dialogue Education™ instruction to all interested staff, beginning with managers and registered dietitians first, and then including paraprofessionals and participants. In the first year, over 200 WIC staff completed the Global Learning Partners' core course, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*;
- incorporated the principles of “safety”, open questions, and relevance into their workshops;
- combined the insights of Dialogue Education™ with other education approaches, **including**: change theory, family feeding dynamics, multiple intelligences, and the touch points stages of physical and emotional growth.

### *...and transformed teaching into learning!*

As the authors note: “Initial results from two pilot agencies indicate that staff members have embraced the process with enthusiasm...staff members report that clients are beginning to show a positive response to the use of the principles in WIC classes. Many staff see people enjoying classes more with this approach, and some find that the dialogue provides them, as teachers, with evidence of learning. At one site, staff were inspired by unprecedented applause from clients at the end of a class. The clients said they liked the change in approach and noted: “It’s different from the old way of teaching.”

Although WIC has only started working with Dialogue Education™, there is a “buzz” of excitement about the new direction. WIC staff members have started to ask that Dialogue Education™ be used at state-wide meetings and that speakers at state-wide conferences follow them. Many staff members say that they enjoy their work more now. They find it more interesting and fun. As some have put it: “You know, the way we did it before, [was] just teaching – just delivering. This way we make it more exciting, truly interactive. When I teach this way, I learn more...”

At WIC, the authors note, “there is a growing commitment to offer meaningful educational experiences that focus on the learning process and the participants’ role in that process. This commitment promises to bring WIC closer to its ultimate goal of healthier WIC families while at the same time bringing individual staff and participants closer to each other.

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From Valerie Uccellani’s “Dialogue Education in California’s Women, Infants and Children Program” pp 213 to 225 in Dr. Jane Vella’s *Dialogue Education at Work: A Case Book*. (Jossey Bass, 2003).

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