

Each One, Teach One: The Young People's Project's Math Literacy Worker Training

In the middle of an abundance of trees is a clearing—a light in the darkness that marks the place where several generations of black people have been educated. Tougaloo College, located in Tougaloo, Mississippi, is the place where history meets the future; and on a hot and muggy cloudless day in June, senior high school students, college and college bound members of the Young People's Project (YPP) met the future of their organization. Their purpose was to propel their legacy of educating middle and high school students in traditionally underserved communities by training nearly 30 first and second year high school students from Jackson and Duckhill, MS in the art of being a math literacy worker.

The training lasted five weeks with the first two being more intense because the group spent all of their time together. Housed in the campus' Berkshire Cottage, the students made this their temporary home. "Although intense, the fact that the training was residential played a big role in shaping the whole training because people bonded quickly. That was one of the most effective aspects of the training," said Maisha Moses, director of the training.

The construction of a new dorm close by was an eye sore to many, but it was symbolic of the development of new math literacy workers (MLWs). Just as Tougaloo met the schools' needs by building a new dorm, YPP responded to its growing needs with a burgeoning group of MLWs tasked with keeping the torch going. "The project has evolved to a point where more math literacy workers are needed", said Maisha. Simply put, "It was time."

During the training, the students gained respect for Maisha. Tall, but not overpowering, she has a presence that

cannot be ignored. With shoulder length dreadlocks, she was almost always smiling. Maybe that is because her pensive brown eyes saw what people outside of the organization could not—the manifestation of young people into leaders through an environment dependent on their individual skills and gifts.

Serene, quiet, tranquil and historic with colossal trees draped in Spanish moss describes Tougaloo, but in Berkshire Cottage, the mission was to fight math illiteracy, and YPP could not be quiet and fulfill this mission. Tougaloo was home to a host of summer camps, and on occasion those students observed the MLW training in progress. One morning a group of kids from another camp walked into the training headquarters and frowned. They were immediately greeted with chart paper adorned with prime numbers and goals and notes hanging from the walls and on the doors, couches and chairs out of place and the whole room rapping— about math. Some of the MLW trainees composed a rap that would aid them in learning their prime numbers. The outsiders began bobbing their heads to the beat of a popular song



and acknowledged the creativeness of the rhyme.

Uh Oh!!!

It almost slopped my mind.

What's the last Prime?

199.



Besides music, YPP uses games to teach math concepts, but what the organization does is anything but child's play. Founded upon the techniques and curriculum developed by Robert (Bob) Moses, YPP knows that teaching the language of mathematics in a creative, graspable manner is of comparable importance to the Civil Rights Movement Bob and others undertook in the 1960s. Just as the Civil Rights Movement sought to highlight and cure social ills, YPP is geared to overcome educational and economic ills by equipping inner city youth with math. "Math is important and we need to get kids to see that, but most of all get them to understand the concepts," explained Kevin Edmondson, a trainer.

The MLW trainers and trainees are close in age, which allowed a level of understanding between the two groups. Kevin's natural sense of humor proved effective during the training, but his ability to balance humor and hard work helped the trainees not only understand him, but respect him as well. "I like to see people be successful and have fun at the same time," he said. "One reason I'm in this organization is because it's fun, and I can honestly say that I would not want to do anything else right now."

Trainees spent most of their time facilitating workshops, making up math games, learning prime numbers and exchanging feedback from peers. With all of this on the plate, sometimes frustration set in, but it did not take over the training. One day, the criticisms got too personal and feelings began to get hurt. A participant, Albert Sykes, saw this and did the unexpected. Suddenly he said loudly, "I feel a song coming on", and began to sing, "Lean on Me". Within minutes the entire camp was singing, hugging and waving their hands in the air. The unspoken theme for this segment of the training was togetherness. The kids worked through the good and bad times together while maintaining focus on the common goal—preparing to teach math to the masses.



After the intense two-week training segment was complete, the group was charged with implementing the skills they learned during their training at Tougaloo. YPP hosts an annual math camp for middle school kids at Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi. This year, the trainees apprenticed at this camp. They spent their mornings teaching and facilitating, under the direction of the MLW trainers. Their afternoons were used to fine-tune their math and facilitation skills.

The kids' dedication is what makes them extraordinary. Although they were paid for their time, they could have been making more money at a job at the mall or a fast food restaurant.

Mississippi is known for its hot and sultry summers. It is not, however, known for a group of inner city kids going to a school in a neighborhood labeled by many as "the ghetto" and working on skills that will benefit them personally and the community at large. Adding to the challenge, often times the air conditioner did not work in many of the

rooms at Lanier. A hot environment is not conducive to learning in most cases, but just as Bob and others involved in the Freedom Summer of 1964 were on a mission to register black voters, the math literacy worker participants were on a mission to keep YPP's work progressing, despite the conditions.

"I wanted the students to have a sense about them where they wouldn't be scared to talk in front of people. They have accomplished this," said Ariel Fleming, a trainer. The participants themselves manifested Ariel's acknowledgement of their successful completion of this training.

"I'm now used to facilitating and talking in front of a large group of people," said Sondra Green, a sophomore at Lanier high school. "Before the training I had never done this before, but I knew that I had to know math well and speak in front of a group to facilitate effectively. I like the responsibility."

So the cycle continues: train the MLW trainees, empower them with viable math concepts and facilitation skills and instill in them a sense of responsibility to spread the knowledge.

Mission complete... almost.



For the past 3 years, Jackson members of YPP have trekked to Cambridge, Massachusetts for the YPP math camp. These kids have become a part of the culture in Cambridge and at the same time, reciprocated the culture lesson. As soon as the work was ended in Jackson, it was just beginning in Cambridge.

"The more involved I get in YPP, the more I learn; and the more I learn the more I can teach others. I teach somebody and they teach somebody else. When I think about it, it's like that 'each one teach one' motto. YPP adopted it and made it our own," said James Roach, a trainer in Jackson and Cambridge. His feelings capture the essence of the goal of this program—to share and demonstrate the value of math literacy in areas where it might not exist, let alone be implemented. Because of this goal and the demand of a quality education among students, YPP also hosted a MLW training in Cambridge. Although a different culture and climate than Jackson, both cities, like all cities in America, have a common denominator—a need to produce young people who are proficient in mathematics.

From a land reknown for its fertile soil and flowering cotton, to a city known for its educational fortitude and multiculturalism, YPP continued their sojourn to perpetuate math literacy. In the middle of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), a forest of tall buildings surrounded by construction and student bustle, there was a meeting of "minds". Not the traditional MIT citizens, but a collage of young people, hailing from neighboring Latino, African American, and Cape Verdian communities. Two classrooms served as the meeting, organizational and learning sanctuary where future MLWs gathered to receive appropriate training in the art of facilitation.

For five weeks 29 high school students from the Cambridge and Boston areas commuted to MIT to participate in the MLW training. Unlike the training in the South, the majority of the MLW trainees in Cambridge have been involved with YPP for the past year, and some for even longer.

"Although this training was initially planned to recruit new math literacy workers we wanted to get the people that were already involved on the same level," said London Hardey, director of YPP in Boston and Cambridge.

Similar to Maisha, London had a presence that could not be ignored. Stylishly dressed, candid in demeanor and often firm with the kids, London's no nonsense attitude relayed that the training was a serious matter. The participants



learned and acted by example and took their new role in YPP as MLWs with a business like intensity. London would have it no other way.

The MLW trainees, under the direction of Maisha and MLWs from Jackson, attended facilitation workshops, learned new math games, perfected the ones they knew and concentrated on the math behind the games. One of the ways the MLW trainees learned about facilitation and what was effective for them personally and as a group, was to reflect on what was and was not effective the previous day. This exercise allowed them to see on paper both facets that needed improvement and ones they could continue to implement.

Just as the summer camp at Lanier was the place for apprenticeship location for MLW trainees in Jackson, the B.E.L.L. Foundation, an organization that hosts after school and summer programs for kids in the Boston area, provided the testing ground for the MLW participants in Cambridge.

Every Thursday the group journeyed by subway to Roxbury Community College in Boston, the meeting place for the B.E.L.L. Foundation's acceleration learning summer program, a 6-week academic camp. The B.E.L.L. Foundation, a community based nonprofit organization founded by Black Harvard Law students in 1992, was designed to increase educational opportunities of children in lower income communities in Boston, Washington, D.C., New York and Philadelphia. It was here that the trainees put what they learned to work, devising teaching strategies and activities for Thursday workshops and educational sessions.

"The most effective part of the Cambridge training was [the trainees] facilitating at the Bell Foundation," said Maisha. "The group as a whole got a real sense of accomplishment because they learned the material and were able to turn around and teach it to these kids."

After their first visit to Roxbury, the sixth graders at the Foundation were eager to learn from the future MLWs, who were not that much older than the kids. According to London, "The students enjoyed seeing someone like them teaching them. The youth and cultural diversity of the trainees

added to the success of the apprenticeship."



"Most kids like to play games," said Chris Adajbonyin, a first year college student who trained in Jackson and Cambridge. "That's how we get kids to understand the math."

At Roxbury, the kids enjoyed the Thursdays when YPP came to teach. The games the trainees taught required knowledge of prime numbers making the first task teaching prime numbers. Surprising to some of the trainees, the kids were eager to learn the basics.

"I'm not surprised", said Chris who has been involved in YPP since 8th grade. "The math that we teach is the same math taught in school. Our approach is different and kids don't see us a threat so the pressure to make mistakes is low. They are comfortable to mess up in front of us because they are relaxed."

A gentle giant, Chris, as well as the other trainers from Mississippi, were assets to the Cambridge training. Although large in size and physically imposing, he possesses the gift of instilling in the trainees confidence



to say their answer, talk in front of a group of people and be themselves.

“It is important that we learn something new each day. I learn more about the participants and they learn more about the math. This is important because what we planned to do is really working,” said Chris.

Post training included an open house that was held to show parents, family and friends that the concepts their kids learned during the summer really worked. Because passivity is uncharacteristic of YPP as it spreads math literacy, the guests rapped their prime numbers and played prime number hunt.

In the middle of the room were a boy and his father. Both father and son held a paper containing prime numbers. The boy quietly explained to his father about prime numbers. One generation teaching another, and the subject was math.

And so the sojourn continues, as the students from Mississippi return home to school and the next generation of Math Literacy Workers begin a formal process of outreach and individual development. And somewhere in a classroom, in a community center, in a home, or in a church, there will be a young boy or girl, singing their prime numbers, walking the flagway, or plotting a graph on a calculator. And some of them will tell their Mom and Dad, brother or sister or teacher, that they want to be in YPP. And some will become part of the next group who are trained to spread math literacy, teaching other kids what they know and improving the community in which they live and beyond.

‘Each one, teach one.’ The Young People’s Project did not conceive this motto, but they put the saying to use as if it had.



The Young People's Project's Summer Math Camp: An Extraordinary Camp with Exceptional Leaders

Summertime is known for weddings, vacations, hanging out with friends, parties and, of course, summer camp. In line with summertime tradition, the Young People's Project (YPP), an organization founded upon the ideas of equipping inner-city youth with necessary math skills, hosts annual summer math camps in Jackson, Mississippi and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Each morning, the scene was typical of most camps: parents driving up to the front of the school to see their kids off with a kiss, a hug and sometimes a high five. All of that is common; however, the similarities cease once one enters the building. Besides the breakfast spread of a variety of cereal, juices and pastries, this camp was different. Besides the hyper kids at 8:30 AM who busy themselves with animated conversations, this camp was far from ordinary. Besides those common elements, this camp was run and directed by members of YPP. In addition to the cutting edge math curriculum, the staffing is what made the YPP summer math camps unique. Although the adults involved in the organization were visible, the camp's classes and recreational activities were planned and executed by members of the organization—all high school and college students. In Jackson and Cambridge, the camps were under the direction of six dedicated young people. This is their story.

As directors, the six young leaders were responsible for the camp participants; and, although parents and staff were present, the weight of making the camp a success was on their youthful shoulders- but that is what they wanted. Involved in YPP for several years, being director was a way they could give back and take on more responsibility. Besides, they had already successfully fulfilled other positions, so why not be a director?

The Jackson camp was held at Lanier High School, a historically black high school in the inner city. Since the camp's inception in 2000, it has run for five weeks. This year, however, Lanier's facilities were not available for the traditional five-week span forcing the camp to run for only three weeks.

At Lanier, Sammie Myers, Calvin Cain and Frankie Johnson greeted the camp participants each morning. They looked as if they could be participants themselves because of their small statures and youthful faces. All under the age of 22, each one agreed to direct the camp because they wanted to support the organization that helped them when they were much younger. Each admitted they felt a personal need to give back to those who helped them and to the community from which they came.

"I grew up in this neighborhood, so I feel that I have to give back to YPP because it has been a positive influence on me and my community", said Myers.

Myers, 21, one of the founders of YPP, looked like a regular neighborhood kid, but in this camp that was an ad-



vantage. The young male participants admired him and demonstrated their admiration with the respect they showed him everyday. When Myers entered a room, he received everyone's full attention. Some may say he has a presence, but Myers attributed his ability to captivate an audience to his appreciation for the importance of the organization.

"I bring an aura of seriousness to the camp. I do this because YPP is a part of me and I try to get people to respect it the same as I do", shared Myers. "But, this can only be done if you are serious about something yourself."

Calvin Cain, a 19-year-old college sophomore and the second person of the dynamic trio of directors, reiterated the importance of the camp. "I bring order to the camp. The kids see that the three of us are serious so they respect us and other members of YPP."

Cain has been involved in YPP since the ninth grade, and since then has held the positions of facilitator, manager and games master. He said his job as co-director was his way of stepping up in the organization and taking on more responsibility. "I remember when YPP was concerned about whether or not I learned math. Now that is my job and I like it a lot."

Just as Myers was able to relate to camp participants because of common experiences, so was Cain. **"This job is important to me because it has been my motivation to become something better than I was before. The people in YPP helped me stay away from negative influences."**

Cain acknowledged that Omo, Taba and Maisha Moses, founders and central figures in YPP, helped him stay focused. He also admitted that he wanted to do the same for the kids in the camp. "I want the kids that I come in contact with to feel that anything is possible, especially if you have people who care about you" expressed Cain. "I think they can see that I really care."

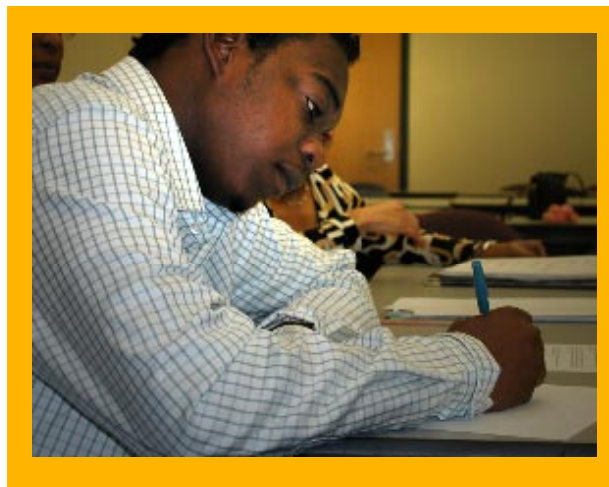
Frankie Johnson, an eighteen year old college freshman, completed the Jackson team. Involved in YPP since the summer of 1997, Johnson expressed, "I joined because I wanted to improve in math and I wanted to help others improve, too." Both Myers and Cain admitted she is one of the most dedicated and hard working people they know. According to her co-directors, Johnson brought the zest that helped made the Jackson leadership team effective.

The seventh of 10 children, Johnson has had a lot of experience working effectively within a group dynamic. It is this ability that has fueled her unfaltering desire to become a teacher and her unyielding dedication to YPP and the camp. **"I think I bring my sense of maturity and eagerness for learning to the camp,"** she said.

Each morning Johnson made sure all of the kids were in their workshops and were participating in all of the scheduled activities. Sometimes, guest speakers and facilitators would cancel appearances with short notice. Each of those times, it was Johnson who made sure the show went on. Whether it was asking a parent to fill in or filling in herself, Johnson and the other directors strived to fulfill their goal—to be the best directors they could.

Myers, Cain and Johnson became directors of the math camp in Jackson because they felt the need to do more to help the organiza-

tion that helped them grow. **Likewise**, nearly 1,500 miles away in **Cambridge**, Lauren Phillips, Karima Cooper and Bruce Martin expressed a similar desire by directing the five-week YPP summer math camp at the Area Four Youth Center, a community center that hosts a variety of youth camps throughout the year. Unlike the directors of the Jackson camp who interviewed for their positions, London Hardy, director of the organization in Boston and Cambridge, chose this group. Hardy's goal was to form a group of directors that balanced each member's weaknesses and highlighted their





strengths.

“**Sometimes I want to do too much and I get overwhelmed**”, said Phillips a co-director of the Cambridge summer camp and a 20 year-old college junior. “That is definitely one of my weaknesses.” But just as Phillips’ independent nature yielded too much work to handle personally, Cooper’s and Martin’s willingness to help her and each other allowed that weakness to be transformed into the ability to effectively delegate tasks to other staff members.

Since her involvement, which began four years ago, Phillips felt that being one of the directors of the camp allowed her to find her place in YPP. “All of this is important to me because I have put so much into it. I feel that part of [YPP] is mine”, said Phillips. “And when there are kids involved, how can it not be important?”

With this question on the table, Karima Cooper, a 19 year-old college junior, found out just how important the organization was through a job placement program for teenagers.

“**I didn’t know much about YPP before I got involved. About a year after I got into it, my eyes were opened to the importance of math literacy.** It was then that I made it my goal to spread knowledge of math to other kids”, said Cooper. “I think that I am a good co-director because I have Lauren’s and Bruce’s help, but I do need to work on being firmer with the kids.”

Her self-proclaimed weakness of not being stern enough with the kids is actually perceived by others as patience, an ingredient needed when working with children. According to Bruce Martin, the third member of the Cambridge directors, Cooper is much stronger than she appears. “She does not see it, but she can really get the kids in line if she needs to.”

The directors circle was completed with Martin, a 29-year old father of two who brings a new perspective to the meaning of hard worker. Both Phillips and Cooper were soft spoken. Martin, on the other hand, complemented his co-workers’ gentle demeanors. With a tone never too loud or too soft, Martin could be compared to an assertive school disciplinarian. He demanded respect, and received it because of his six-foot frame and his firm, but caring way with the kids.

Bruce arrived at 8:30 each morning and stayed until 4:00 each afternoon. This sounds like an ideal work schedule, but in Bruce’s case there was a twist. Each night he reported to a second job and he did not leave until early the following morning, only a few hours before his shift at the camp. When asked why he does all of this, his answer was simple, “**I love working with the kids.**”

Five years ago Martin inquired about YPP and decided to help. “I liked what Taba and London were doing so I decided to work with them,” said Martin, who works with the program throughout the school year. “YPP is my family, and with any family you take care of one another. My job as co-director is a way to do that.”

Some have been in YPP since its inception; some became involved because they needed help in math; and some saw the



organization's positive impact on children and wanted to help. No matter the motivation, these six individuals worked together to make the annual summer math camps a success the best way they knew how—with each other's help... just like family.

