

# 2008-2009 Casa de Esperanza

## Teacher Interview Data

Throughout the 2008-2009 school year Talking Talons Youth Leadership presented its wildlife and conservation education program to students at elementary and middle schools in Albuquerque, Edgewood and Moriarty, New Mexico. The program sought to improve student knowledge and attitudes towards the study of science and to increase student awareness of substance abuse issues. The program curriculum focused on teaching communication skills, fostering positive attitudes towards wildlife and environmental issues, building self-esteem, and increasing science knowledge.

Qualitative data for the evaluation from one school was collected from individual interviews of two teachers at a participating school site for special education students. In May of 2009 these interviews were conducted with the teachers who taught grades at Casa de Esperanza school in Albuquerque, NM. Each teacher was interviewed separately. The teacher interviews sought to gather information about the program from the teacher's perspective in the following areas:

- Impact of the program on the learning experience of the students
- Results from the students participating in the Talking Talons curriculum
- Expectations teachers had of the program
- Effectiveness of the program for students to apply concepts learned
- Opportunity for teachers to voice suggestions for improvement in the program

Each individual interview was recorded and transcribed. The results of the interviews and the interpretation process are in the sections that follow. To protect teacher confidentiality transcripts of the interviews are not appended. However, quotes that typify the teachers' responses are used to illuminate the analysis.

- **How do you think the Talking Talons class has impacted the learning experience in your students?**

Both teachers interviewed felt there was a significant impact on the students learning experience from participating in the program. The students demonstrated a higher level of information retention than usual and better behavior on the days Talking Talons was scheduled in anticipation of the program.

“I really saw the impact of Talking Talons showing up when the students were talking about it after the classes were over. They would talk about it throughout the day and when we were discussing other subjects. They would carry the information they learned from Talking Talons and connect it to other things they were learning. That was really unusual because normally they would not do this.”

“The biggest way this showed up was in the level of participation in class from the students. I don't normally get that from them. Some participate, some don't, and usually the same ones don't. But with Talking Talons they all wanted to participate and seemed interested in what the class was about, in learning about the animals and in learning about

what kind of effects the environment had on the animals or how the animals interacted with humans and the environment.”

- **What results do you see from your students participating in the Talking Talons class?**

Teacher responses indicated that participating in the Talking Talons program brought out students’ levels of motivation and engagement in the learning process. Students were able to relate to the Talking Talons animals’ injuries in a way that paralleled their own view of their disabilities:

“The engagement they had in the Talking Talons class was a first and that was really exciting to see. You could see it in their faces and how much they wanted to participate. I have a group of kids that some are hard to reach but they all seemed to want to be involved in the Talking Talons class. And they didn’t miss class on those days either.”

“I think the one thing that really struck me was how my students connected with the Talking Talons animals that weren’t perfect. The animals were injured, kind of like my students see themselves. That’s how they saw it and a couple of them mentioned that in class. And they saw the educator treating the animals with respect and kindness, and treating them with respect and kindness, and that is how my students

want to be treated by everyone else. They could really relate to the animals on that level.”

Both teachers indicated that levels of absenteeism dropped on days of the program as students did not want to miss being involved:

“A lower level of absenteeism was very evident. I noticed more dialogue from the students, and memory of what they learned. They would mention things they learned from Talking Talons several days later.”

- **What suggestions do you have to make the Talking Talons class a better learning experience for your students?**

Both teachers responded that the one change they would make would be with the assessments the students were asked to take to participate in the program. Both felt they were far too difficult for the students to fill out and might pre-dispose the students to a negative perception towards the program:

“It is hard to say what I would change because I felt that the Talking Talons educator was learning right along with the kids. Not about the information she had to teach, but more about how to deal with special ed. students. So watching the

growth in her was kind of neat for me to see. If there is any downside to having my students participate in the program it is with the pre-tests they had to take that the students just can't handle or fill out. After a while they just give up and I think it's too much for them. I was thinking that they might think this was an indication of what the program might be like for them."

"Without a doubt, I would change the assessments the kids had to take. They were very difficult for them to complete and I don't think they can be used as an accurate measure. The level of comprehension for my students is at a K - grade 1 level and the assessments were just too difficult for them. I would definitely ask for that that to be changed if possible."

- **Would you participate in the Talking Talons class again in the future? Why or why not?**

Both teachers interviewed agreed that the program was well worth having and they would want to participate again in the future:

"Absolutely, yes, I have already requested it. It was a very positive experience for my students and for me and I hope we have it for many years to come."

“Yes, most definitely. The students got a lot out of it and so did I. A couple of my students mentioned that they would like to volunteer work at the Talking Talons center in the future. Just having them express wanting to be around that environment was really hopeful to me.”

- **After participating in the Talking Talons program, was the class MORE or LESS than what you expected? Please elaborate.**

The teachers interviewed did not have a preconceived idea about the program, however, the program ended up exceeding their expectations:

“I didn’t know what to expect. But honestly, it was a lot more. I guess I’m just so used to some new program here and there and when I was told about this program I didn’t want to get too excited about it because I didn’t want to be disappointed. But the program is really interesting and as a teacher I was engaged and I learned a lot too. The activities were wonderful and I incorporated some of the techniques used by the educator into other areas of teaching with my students so I want to thank Talking Talons for that!”

“I really didn’t know what to expect, but it was really a lot more than I thought it would be. Everything was positive about it and even I was excited to have them come on their special days. I think it was because my students looked forward so much to having the Talking Talons educator come so they really behaved well those days.”

- **What surprised you the most from having your students participate in the class?**

The teachers felt most surprised by the level of engagement from the students, and the unusual minimal level of disruptions that occurred during the class:

“It was the level of engagement that the students actually had with the educator, the animals, and the information. So many times what we teach seems to go right over their heads, but with Talking Talons they wanted to understand different concepts.”

“We had so few disruptions during the Talking Talons class. We normally experience a high level of disruptions from certain students, but on Talking Talons days, they were minimal. These students tend to become overly stimulated very easily, but they seemed to handle the animals and the whole Talking Talons experience very well.”

- **How have your students currently been able to apply the concepts learned in the Talking Talons class?**

“I think I mentioned that they would take the information they learned from Talking Talons and apply it to other subjects. The fact that they remembered a lot of what was discussed (during the Talking Talons class) was impressive to me. Having the live animals really makes a difference with these students.”

“A good example is when we took a field trip through the Santa Fe Mountain Center and finished at Tent Rocks. We had a scavenger hunt and I could hear the kids applying the knowledge they had learned from Talking Talons throughout the trip. I was surprised that a lot of the information they were able to retain, and then they made great connections with it. I was very proud of them at that moment and I realized what a difference the Talking Talons program was really making.”

- **How do you feel the Talking Talons program has impacted you as a teacher?**

The teachers interviewed felt that the program had made a positive impact on them as teachers:

“I loved it. I learned a lot and I got to be a student too. That was nice.”

“I’m not from NM so I’ve learned a lot about these animals. And to tell you the truth, I’m not really an animal person so this gave me the courage to try new things with my students. I’ve probably learned as much, or more than they did.”

- **What results do you see from you, as a teacher, participating in the Talking Talons class?**

Both teachers interviewed felt positive towards the program and the results they experienced:

“I learned different techniques to work with my students and the information reminded me about the importance of being aware of wildlife and the environment – which I sometimes forget.”

“I think this is a very good class. I saw the Talking Talons educator get better and better at handling these students and I trust the program to really help them. That was a nice benefit for me. I really appreciate them coming to my class and making an educational experience for my students a positive one.”