

Word & Hope

Esperanza Rising



Top, l-r: Mary Lou Wilke, Mary Ann Wagner, tutors
Bottom, l-r: Araceli Ferrer, Rebeca Martinez

Literature circles are a popular form of instruction in many schools. Teachers and students meet to share their thoughts about a book they have chosen to read together. Two Dominican Literacy Center tutors, Mary Ann Wagner and Mary Lou Wilke, with their students, Araceli

Ferrer and Rebeca Martinez, chose to form a literature circle around Pam Munoz Ryan's book, *Esperanza Rising*.

The story has a very personal connection for the author. While a work of fiction, Ms. Ryan bases the main character, Esperanza, on the experiences of her own grandmother. Esperanza is a young girl from a wealthy Mexican family in the 1930s. Political circumstances force Esperanza and her mother to flee their home and migrate to California. Field work is the only employment to be had. Soon time is measured, not by the calendar, but by the crops to be harvested.

Many factors contributed to make the book study a successful, positive experience for both of the students and their teachers. Because Mary Ann and Mary Lou had used the book to teach high school students, they knew it was readable with manageable vocabulary. Mary Lou and Mary Ann knew that their highly motivated students had acquired enough English to read and enjoy the story. They enjoyed helping the students to challenge one another. Araceli and Rebeca learned many new words and used the new vocabulary in their discussions. They learned to find similes and metaphors and to compare and contrast events.

Araceli and Rebeca identified with the struggles of the migrant characters. They saw many of Esperanza's

experiences to be much like their own growing up. The book also inspired insightful conversation among the group about current immigration issues.

The tutors were pleased to see the students express high-level abstract thinking in English. Such expression can be a challenge even in one's native language! It was no small accomplishment for Araceli and Rebeca to express their personal thoughts and reflections in English.

Both students enjoyed the book even though, at first, the task seemed overwhelming. "I didn't think I could read all the new vocabulary in the story," shared Rebeca. "But as I read, I found the story so interesting that I couldn't stop reading." Araceli said, "It was a beautiful, sad story. I wanted to continue reading to find out what was going to happen."

Time seemed to fly by as the four women read and discussed each chapter. It was a pleasure for both tutors and students to learn different perceptions and ways of thinking. Rebecca reflected, "The story was like eating the Mexican soup, pozole. I tasted all the different delicious story ingredients, just as I enjoy all the tastes of the soup."

Tutors are always looking for good teaching ideas. The literature circle was a fun and enriching experience for this foursome.



Araceli Ferrer and Rebeca Martinez work as partners

In Their Words...

For students at the Dominican Literacy Center, writing is part of their curriculum. Here are some of the students' favorite summer memories.

When I was nine or ten years old, I remember, my best friend and I played in the trees. Always in the afternoon, we played in the trees with dolls and tea sets. Sometimes we played in the rain. We just put umbrellas or something to not get wet. We played for hours. I really remember that!

I like my favorite memory. I think that is maybe why I like the trees so much!

~ Sandra Acevedo

In the summer, my father grew fruit trees, peaches, plums, pears and apples. When they were ready in July and August, we picked them and ate them. They were delicious. My father cultivated corn and he roasted them for us.

Sunday mornings we would go and watch my dad play baseball. I remember every evening my mom sat down outside my house and weaved cloth and my siblings and I played games. When it rained, we had boat races in that street with paper boats we made. Sometimes I won.

~ Yeimi Morquecho

Focus on Funders

Altrusa International of the Fox Valley is a vibrant supporter of issues that focus on literacy and on the needs of women. Our partnership with Altrusa has been a steady bond for almost 15 years. In recent years, Altrusa provided the Center with a multitude of beautiful, bilingual storybooks. These engaging storybooks are quickly checked out week after week, capturing the attention of both our students and their children. Altrusa International of the Fox Valley also donates annually to the Center to support our mission. We are deeply grateful to every Altrusan. We hope and pray that this connection of friendship and mission continues for many years ahead.

Learning for the Family

Gloria Hernandez is a January, 2013 graduate of the Dominican Literacy Center. She and her tutor, Rachel Motto, recently reflected together on their experience at the Center. Most apparent in meeting these vivacious young women is their mutual regard and respect. They greet each other with obvious fondness. Even though their time together at the Center is over, they intend to stay connected.



In September 2009, Gloria and Rachel began their experience together. For Rachel, this was her first tutoring experience and she felt anxious about her lack of expertise. Gloria had two daughters under the age of three and worked at McDonalds. Gloria's husband was concerned about her beginning another time commitment.

Despite the demands of family and work, Gloria came weekly to tutoring. She laughed as she recalled, "The first year was very hard. I did not understand any English. I always had a headache (after a session)." However, Gloria and Rachel persisted in their efforts together. Gloria recalled thinking, "if I don't take this opportunity, there might not be another."

During the first year, they became more comfortable with each other and their initial concerns eased. Over that summer, Rachel and Gloria met several times, in spite of the challenges of finding childcare.

In the fall of 2010, Gloria took a break from tutoring when she had her third daughter. Rachel and Gloria resumed their weekly tutoring in January 2011. Gloria's second year was easier, "I felt safe under her (Rachel's) protection". Rachel noted, "A bond formed between us." Rachel's consistent support and encouragement strengthened Gloria's strong commitment.

When asked for suggestions for current students and tutors, they freely offered advice. Rachel said that consistency was important during sessions and while preparing for lessons. For anyone considering being a tutor, "There is always support available, so no one needs to be nervous."

Gloria thought it was important for students "not to feel embarrassed – to come with an open mind and focus on English. It is important to stay positive. I need English for my children. Learning English is for the whole family, not just me!"

Gloria and Rachel are proof that a strong student-tutor relationship leads to success at the Center.

Sharing Her Gifts

Ten years ago, while looking for a volunteer opportunity, Amy Schlumpf Manion saw a notice in her church bulletin about the Dominican Literacy Center's need for tutors. She became a tutor and fell in love with the Center.



Amy Schlumpf Manion

"Maria was my first (student) and was very special to me," said Amy. "I tutored her for two years, until her work schedule changed. I think my favorite memory was when she said that her best day of the week was Thursday because it was the day she came to the Center." Amy tutored for five years and had three different students. She stopped tutoring when she started working full-time. She misses tutoring and hopes to return to it someday.

In the meantime, Amy supports the Center in another role. Amy is chairperson of the Center's Advisory Board. Board members support the Center by spreading the word of its mission, by soliciting contributions during the annual Sponsor-a-Student program and by taking on special projects such as the basement remodel or the 20th Anniversary Celebration.

Amy is committed to getting the good news about the Center out through traditional and social media. Through her efforts, an intern from Aurora University will start at the Center in the fall.

Amy Manion shares her gifts with the women of the Center in many, varied ways. Thank you, Amy!

Save the Date

Tutor training for this fall is at the Dominican Literacy Center from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. August 20, 22, 27, and 29, 2013. Please plan to attend all sessions. To register or for more information, call or email Sr. Ann at 630-898-4636 or annclennon@sbcglobal.net.

Twentieth Anniversary

It all started with Charles Kuralt. Twenty years ago, in February 1993, Sister Kathleen Ryan saw Charles Kuralt's TV show *Sunday Morning*, featuring a segment about two Sisters of Mercy in Bridgeport, CT who were teaching English to women of different cultures. Sister Kathleen felt there was a great need for an English as a Second Language tutoring center in Aurora. She received enthusiastic support from the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL to pursue her idea.

After speaking with various social service workers and church groups, the decision was made to target the under-served immigrant women on the east side of Aurora. In September 1993, the Dominican Literacy Center opened with Sister Kathleen and her students meeting at a card table in the lower level of the Centro Cristo Rey at St. Nicholas Parish.

Four special events are planned to celebrate the Center's 20th anniversary. In September, the Center will collaborate with the Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry to invite the Mobile Food Pantry, stocked with meat and fresh fruits and vegetables, to our community. In November, Sister Kathleen, Sister Ann, and Sister Jane will attend the Pro-Literacy National Convention in Washington, DC.

In January 2014, the Center will join with the Feed My Starving Children organization to hand pack and ship meals that are designed to assist malnourished children around the world. Finally, on March 8, 2014, the Center will sponsor an International Women's Day Walk in Aurora.

It all started with Charles Kuralt. Who said that watching TV was a waste of time?

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance and support for the many initiatives of the Dominican Literacy Center.

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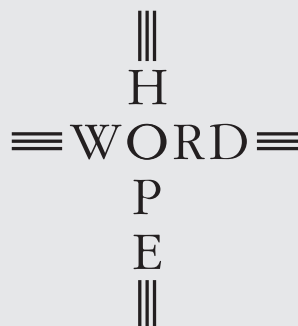




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The mission of the Dominican Literacy Center is to provide opportunities for women to receive individual tutoring in reading, writing and speaking English. We provide these opportunities through individual tutoring by trained volunteers within the neighborhood setting. The Dominican Literacy Center believes in empowerment through education, and in the dignity of each individual person.

The Dominican Literacy Center provides ...



- **free 90-minute weekly individual tutoring sessions for women in reading, writing and speaking English as a second language.**
- **customized curriculum of English-only instruction appropriate to each student's level.**
- **sessions that run from September through May, with day and evening formats.**
- **the opportunity for a student to remain in the program for three years, usually working with the same tutor during the entire time.**
- **conversation classes open to current students and "graduates".**
- **citizenship classes for both men and women.**

***For more information, call 630-898-4636, M-F 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
or see our website at www.dominicanliteracycenter.org***