

THE W. CLEMENT & JESSIE V. STONE FOUNDATION

Grantee Spotlight

In this section, we feature interviews with some of our grantee organizations' directors and key staff members, who share their thoughts on their work and the particular fields they're involved in.

An Interview with UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program

Since October 2003, the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation has funded the Center X Stone Scholars Scholarship program at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Each year since then, the Stone Foundation's grants have provided 7 Stone Scholars in the 2-year Teacher Education Master's Program with tuition assistance, leadership development opportunities and the chance to work closely with respected faculty mentors in the program.



Carmen Padilla was among the first cohort of Stone Scholars in UCLA's Center X Teacher Education Program. In the course of her work as a Master's candidate at Center X, she taught second grade and carried out a resident inquiry project with 5 of her intermediate English language learner students. In this workshop, Carmen's students each wrote and illustrated a series of autobiographical books while Carmen measured the impact of this work on their reading fluency levels in the classroom. The outcome was a dramatic improvement in the reading fluency levels in almost all of the students, as well as increased confidence in their classroom work. We recently talked with Carmen about her experiences as a Stone Scholar in the Center X program.

Q: Carmen, where are you teaching now that you've completed your degree?

A: When I was working on my master's thesis, I was teaching second grade at South Park Elementary School, but I really wanted to work with middle school students. Now that I've finished the Teacher Education Program (TEP), I'm teaching at Berendo Middle School, which is in the heart of Pico-Union. The Pico-Union district in Los Angeles derives its name from the intersection of the two major thoroughfares—Pico and Union Boulevards—which are about two miles from the downtown Los Angeles area. Before World War II the Pico-Union community was predominantly White and Jewish. The cultural make-up of the community today is made up of Latinos predominantly from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, and Central-American countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Unfortunately, this is also an area that has been plagued with poverty due to low paying jobs, war-like street violence from the 18th Street Gang and the Mara Salvatrucha gang, and police corruption (the notorious LAPD Rampart Division patrols this area). Despite these socioeconomic and environmental circumstances, my predominantly Latino students come to school every day. I have very few absences. One of the reasons why I think my students come to school on a daily basis is because I believe they like being in school. Berendo is a school where the administration is always visible on the campus, making sure that it is a safe and clean environment where the students can hang out with their friends. Other things that Berendo offers students are extra curricular activities during and after school. For example, students can take elective classes that teach them how to play an instrument, program a computer, or perform a play. After school, there are clubs, sports teams, and art lessons provided by a non-profit called Woodcraft Rangers. I'd also like to think that my class is not boring to my students and they enjoy coming to school to learn. I teach English as a Second Language, or ESL. All of my students are Latino and speak English, however, it is not what may be considered "standard" English, so they are placed in my class as a form of remedial instruction. In light of this, I treat my classes as "regular" English classes where students have the opportunity to do creative

writing, presentations, and read core literature as opposed to focusing on grammar and phonics on a day to day basis.

Q: What are the challenges you are facing?

A: I'm now working with 6th grade students who are between ages 11-12 and are going through that adolescent phase where they behave like children one minute, then want to be treated like adults the next, so that's one challenge I'm facing. Another serious challenge is that I tend to have two types of students: those who are interested in learning and those who are completely apathetic. The challenge for me is in navigating a balance of keeping the former group motivated and excited about learning, while simultaneously working to reach or inspire the latter group.

Q: How did Center X prepare you for those challenges?

A: My philosophy of education plays a crucial role in how I perceive a challenge. I have a background in political science, so I had been exposed to Paulo Freire's theories on pedagogy in my undergraduate work, but I also studied him in my coursework at Center X, as well as bell hooks and Michael Apple. Their works influenced the development of my own educational philosophy and gave me an approach for working with students on a daily basis. In my view, I'm not in charge of "educating" these students and imparting my knowledge to them as passive recipients; but rather, it's a collaborative process in which my students bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom and I serve as a facilitator who brings her own education from Center X to the classroom as part of the process. Classroom education is only one part of my students' developmental process, and I feel it's my responsibility to inspire them to learn more from their environment and the experiences life brings to them, while equipping them with the tools (such as language and ideas) that will help them navigate through, and ultimately surpass, the challenges they will face as they grow. My classes and professors at Center X helped me understand the dynamics of an urban setting and the challenges that may arise as a result. In addition, I was able to develop something more valuable than lesson plans—I developed this educational philosophy.

Q: Who was your mentor, and how did s/he help you?

A: I was paired up with Professors Jeannie Oakes and Daniel Solorzano, who met with me at the beginning of the program to talk with me about what I might like to do. I found that I got so involved with my work in the Teacher Education Program—teaching, going to school full-time, working on my master's project and developing my education philosophy—that it was hard to find time to meet with them. However, both were wonderful in advising me on different professional development opportunities and helping me to map out a plan for my work at Center X.

Q: How has being a Stone Scholar benefited you?

A: One of the more significant opportunities the Stone Scholar program provided me with was the chance to attend conferences and professional development workshops. I would not have been able to afford the expenses associated with travel and registration fees without the funding I received through the Stone Scholar stipend. I got to attend the American Education Research Association's (AERA) annual conference in Montreal, along with three other Stone Scholars, during my first year in Center X's Teacher Education Program. The location was important to me as a scholar of bilingual education and literacy because Montreal is a model for bilingual education. The conference was just great. It was especially valuable to attend with other Stone Scholars because we were able to debrief with each other on the different workshops we attended

and the ideas we gained about social justice, bilingual education and literacy. Several of us also had a separate opportunity to attend a 2-day professional development workshop on social justice issues in education that was primarily held for education professors. This was a great experience because we as young grad students and teachers were able to talk with older professors who have years of experience and expertise on issues of gender, identity, race, etc. Experiencing the conference helped me realize that there are highly regarded venues, other than universities, for teachers/educators to share the knowledge they have gained through practice and experience among each other as colleagues and professionals. Knowing that such opportunities are available for teachers made me comfortable thinking that I could spend the rest of my career as an educator in the classroom, implementing different instructional strategies and sharing my findings in the education field through conferences and journals.

We also recently talked with Eloise Lopez Metcalfe, the director of the Teacher Education Program, and Marjorie Orellana, Associate Professor of Education (and one of the Stone Scholar mentors), about the Stone Scholars program and what it takes to train quality teachers who will succeed in urban schools.

Q: Would you like to comment on what you feel are the 3 main issues new teachers face going into an urban school?

Eloise: The first issue that comes to mind for me is time. There is so much for new teachers to do in terms of learning to negotiate in their new schools, familiarizing themselves with their students and learning the curriculum. In the Center X program, we spend a considerable amount of time getting our students into the schools right away, so that by spring semester, they'll be in the classroom much of the week. The second issue has to do with rigid curricula and national testing. Teachers need to know the requirements on these. At Center X, we're familiar with what the requirements are in the local districts, so we're able to show our students what they are and what's expected of them.

Marjorie: Also, within the context of the No Child Left Behind Act, new teachers struggle with balancing district curriculum and testing requirements with their desire to be leaders and integrate the Center X teachings and education philosophy they've developed.

Eloise: The third issue has to do with how a new teacher connects with so many students—up to 100 per day—so quickly. We work to make sure our students spend the entire day with teachers and in the classrooms. We have a set of partner schools we work with that have Center X alumni, and we connect our students with those alumni. Our program is based on developing relationships and collaboration, so students can learn the skills of networking and partnerships.

I might add that another issue is with year-round schools in urban settings, which are set up to accommodate overcrowding in schools with as many as 5,000 students. Schools like these have 4 tracks per year, with students coming on and off track. This poses a challenge to brand new teachers as well, and they really need to figure out how to negotiate time and place to build community.

To prepare our students to meet all these challenges, the most important thing we do is to stay with them during their first year of teaching and provide support. We have a lot of expertise and experience in working with our first-year teachers because we know the administrators in these schools.

Marjorie: We encourage teachers to form support networks, connect with each other and with community resources, and to reflect continuously on their own learning experiences.

Q: How do you select the Stone Scholars? What is the process? What do you look for?

Eloise: Each year, Center X establishes an admissions committee of distinguished faculty members representing different content areas and grade levels in education. The first cut determines the students we want to admit to the Center X program. Next, we identify who should receive funding assistance. Among these candidates, we look for students who have demonstrated strong leadership skills in some way—people who have begun to look at research questions and who have the potential for reaching a larger audience among their own colleagues as far as expressing conviction and opinions and taking on leadership roles. We then conduct face-to-face interviews with all the applicants and select the seven Stone Scholars from among them.

Q: Do you want to comment on the ambivalence some teachers express about taking on leadership roles—either because such roles have the potential for taking them out of the classroom or because they cause tension in their relationships with fellow teachers?

Marjorie: There *is* a real tension that does exist, and a lot of teachers struggle with that; however, there are many different ways that people can take on leadership roles in their community, and we encourage teachers to work *collaboratively* with other teachers and community members, not as isolated leaders.

Eloise: We've actually been conducting a longitudinal study of our graduates, and what we've found is that many do leave the classroom to take on other kinds of leadership roles in the district—such as mentors, coaches, administrative coordinators, even assistant principals—and this is often attributable to the higher caliber of students we attract at Center X. In recent years, the teaching profession has become increasingly populated by younger people, and as with other professions, there is less expectation that it will be a lifetime position. So it's not unusual that teachers would want to try on other educational roles throughout their careers. Some take on roles such as mentors and coordinators in addition to teaching, or else work in these roles temporarily, then return to the classroom. Teachers can often earn a higher income this way. We're now beginning to look at how teachers can take on a hyphenated role in this respect, while also remaining in the classroom where they're needed.

Marjorie: Nowadays in the workplace there's this phenomenon of “careers in motion,” of changing roles multiple times within a profession. We try to give the Stone Scholars a taste of other work in the education field and of leadership and academic opportunities that exist for them outside the classroom as well, even as our emphasis is on teaching practice.

Q: For the Stone Scholars who are now teaching, what schools are they going to, and who are the students in the schools?

Eloise: In their first year of teaching, the Stone Scholars teach in our partner schools, which are all low-performing, diverse local schools with limited resources and high turnover. I believe 4 or 5 of the first cohort of Stone Scholars are remaining in those same schools this coming year. The students at these schools and in the L.A. Unified School District are predominantly Latino and English language learners. Because Center X focuses on ESL instruction and social justice issues, all of our teachers have to have training and a foundation in how children obtain a second language, because 95-100% of their students will be English language learners.

Marjorie: We can't adequately address the myriad issues new teachers will face, but language is central to their training. They need to think about what they've learned through their work in Center X and how to apply it both pedagogically and systemically within an institutional structure.

Q: Do you keep the Stone Scholars connected during the school year, and then afterward, when they are teaching?

Eloise: In our original grant proposal, we planned to connect the Stone Scholars at Dean's Scholars dinners and have them meet with their mentors. What we found was that it's very difficult to connect them. There's often a hesitation on the part of first-year grad students towards approaching their mentor professors to schedule meetings, and in the second year of the program they're so busy as new teachers that it's very hard to coordinate times that will also work for the mentors' schedules. So Marjorie and I have devised a new plan to bring them together around substantive issues to discuss at a series of three dinners. At these dinners, we'll bring together the first cohort of Stone Scholars to meet and talk with the newer cohorts. The Stone Scholar mentors will also present some of their research at each of these dinners. We really think this has the potential to better connect the scholars with their mentors and other faculty members.