

Las Americas Child Development Center Teacher Research Initiative
San Francisco Unified School District and San Francisco State University Collaborative

After a year of working in close collaboration with Professor Dr. Daniel Meier from San Francisco State University, the Teacher Research Inquiry Group in our preschool program has accomplished several objectives in accordance with the goals we set in the beginning.

Our Inquiry Group is composed of two Head Teachers, one Support Teacher, two Associate Teachers and two Assistant Teachers. All the teachers are bilingual and speak Spanish, Cantonese or Mandarin. They have different levels of expertise in the field, —some of them have been working a minimum of four years in the classroom, while others have been teaching for almost two decades.

We have met twice a month for two hours to discuss the progress of our class projects and the content of self-assigned readings. In order to create a common experience, we decided to read the book *Learning from Young Children in the Classroom: The Art and Science of Teacher Research* (Meier & Henderson, 2007) as a way to reflect about our job as educators, develop a common professional language, learn specific data collection strategies, and further our understanding of classroom-based research.

From the outset each one of the teachers received

- a copy of the book,
- a teaching journal where we keep the development of our class projects, our observations and pedagogical reflections
- a notebook for note-taking during meetings
- a calendar
- file folders
- one digital camera per classroom
- a tape recorder
- a computer.

An important aspect of our Inquiry Group is the relaxed atmosphere and flexible formality of our meetings with teacher researchers. Isauro Michael Escamilla serves as group coordinator. While meetings are not mandatory for the staff, they have become a forum where we can present to colleagues about our ongoing projects, samples of children's work, emerging documentation panels, and the challenges we face to move the projects forward. During these meetings we get constructive feedback, ideas, or strategies. We also set new goals for the next meeting. More than anything else, these meetings have given us the framework to acquire a common language, and the opportunity to learn or redefine the meaning of terms such as *observations*, *reflective practice*, *pedagogical reflections*, *teaching journal*, *documentation of children's learning experiences*, *classroom-based inquiry*, and *active listening*, to name a few.

Although most of the staff has embraced the principles of teacher research and the role of the teacher as observer, recorder and interpreter of children's learning experiences, its premise still remains thought-provoking; perhaps because it breaks the stereotype of teachers as not being deep thinkers and theory-makers. In many ways, Teacher Research breaks the stereotype of teachers as holders of knowledge and the students as recipients of information. It encourages critical thinking along with self-reflections as common teaching practice. In any case, one of the themes that has emerged from our discussions is how to listen to the children and to ourselves, which has led us to the exploration of a *pedagogy of listening* within the Teacher Research context. The more we explore this topic, the more we discover that the traditional roles of teacher and learner as opposites tend to blend, and the inquiry process helps us understand that these roles can and should be interchangeable.

Being a part of this group makes us feel a responsibility not only towards the children, but also towards each one of the members; and when we commit to carry out a specific task, we follow through with it and come fully prepared to the next meeting. Moreover, these gatherings may also count as professional growth hours and we could gain one unit of college credit for every 15 hours of professional development through SFSU or CCSF as an additional incentive.