Moving Forward to Address Diversity at Albuquerque High School

by Greg Hansen and Nancy Lawrence

With its inner-city location and multicultural student population, Albuquerque High School has many challenges and opportunities to serve learners and the community. To this end, the school has several well-established programs and initiatives such as the Black Student Union, a broad and varied curriculum, ENLACE, comprehensive counseling services, specialized academies with career pathways, MECHA, and a range of extra-curricular activities. But there is more. AHS staff and community members have been refining and focusing efforts even more to make school “work” for its dynamic and diverse student body.

Beginning a dual language program...

AHS has offered a strong bilingual education program for many years, but with the growth of dual language programs in the feeder cluster schools, a new need arose. Assistant Principal Ruben Perez has identified at least eighty-seven students this year who have experienced a dual language setting before high school. With the help of staff, Mr. Perez wants to build the AHS dual language program through expanding Spanish language course offerings, promoting the value of bilingualism, and providing additional support to students through monthly advisory group meetings.

The advisory sessions will focus on academic needs and achievement, mapping high school course choices, and discussions about student concerns. “Any adolescent needs to find a person they can trust who can show them that it takes time and effort to be successful, and we need to celebrate that success,” explains Mr. Perez. One way of celebrating success for these students will be the attainment of the Bilingual Seal on diplomas.

There are several challenges to maintaining the dual language program. Mr. Perez acknowledges that sometimes students don’t want to continue bilingual study since they have been immersed in dual language in elementary and middle school. But, he notes, “We have to show

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“Ryan, Julie and Andrew gather in a corner of their classroom to complete work on a group project. Ryan pantomimes stretching in his seat, and then, grinning, grabs Julie’s pencil out of her hand.

JULIE: It baffles me why you’re such a buffoon.
RYAN: Oh, don’t be so antagonistic.
ANDREW: Cut out the bantering, you two.”

(Beck et al., p. 72)

This example demonstrates that when robust vocabulary instruction is a routine part of the daily classroom practice, students begin to use the sophisticated words they are learning as a matter of course. They start to take true ownership of the words. Robust vocabulary instruction is frequent, rich, and extended.

**Frequent**—Multiple encounters are required before a word is really known. Frequent encounters with words are needed to affect a student’s comprehension and to become a useful and permanent part of the student’s vocabulary repertoire.

**Rich**—When teachers expect more than definitional information and actively involve students in using and thinking about facets of word meanings and relationships among words, they are portraying rich instruction.

**Extended**—A component of robust vocabulary instruction is to challenge students to extend word learning outside the classroom. Beck and other researchers set up a system called "Word Wizard" in which students gain points by bringing in evidence of hearing, seeing, or using target words outside the classroom.

**Rationale for Robust Vocabulary Instruction**

Educators hardly need to be reminded about the importance of teaching vocabulary. It has been shown that students’ vocabulary knowledge is directly related to reading ability and academic success. Hart and Risley reported in *The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap* that by age three there were enormous differences in vocabulary knowledge across income groups. Children of professionals clearly knew more vocabulary at that age than children of working class parents. Children from families on welfare had the smallest vocabulary. These same students were investigated when they were in third grade. The best readers were those whose vocabularies were the highest. The differences in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension divided in the same way across income groups as they did when the students were three years old.

We can’t assume that students are learning vocabulary through reading. Words learned in reading will require multiple encounters before learning is accomplished. Studies estimate that between five and fifteen of 100 unfamiliar words met in reading will be learned and students must read widely enough to encounter a substantial number of unfamiliar words. The problem is that many students in need of vocabulary development do not engage in wide reading. Relying on wide reading alone
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Because this vocabulary instruction requires students to distinguish shades of meaning in words, the assessment needs to be more than simple recall or matching. Using the words from *The Giver*, have students complete items such as these:

1. Describe how someone acts if they are defiant.
2. Tell about a time when you were apprehensive.
3. Describe some things that could make a person feel awed.

Another way to assess would be to ask students to distinguish between an example of a word and a non-example of a word. Both the example and the non-example should have similar features and require students to think carefully about the meaning of the target word. For example: "Frightened"

- As they were standing on the beach, they saw a shark’s fin circling in the distance.
- A tsunami struck the small island as they were standing on the beach.

By using words often and in a variety of contexts, researchers found that students began to use a richer and more colorful vocabulary almost effortlessly. No longer did they feel awkward in using high-level language.


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*Sixth grade Los Padillas teacher, Keith Johnson, guides his students in a word study exercise he calls “Amazing Words.”*
As the new school year began way back in August, I started to take stock of my students. I began, just as all teachers do, to get a feeling for my students’ general learning levels, interest in learning, and level of social development. Because I teach in the Lowell Elementary rotation system, I had nearly 90 students to take stock of. This year, however, I was also examining my students in a way that I never really had before.

This year was different because I was keenly aware of the various levels of English language proficiency that I was guaranteed to see in my students. Within days, if not hours, I had identified students along the full range of language development. From Non-English proficient (NEP) students to students who were fully proficient English writers and readers (and everything in between), I had them all. This great range of proficiency levels concerned me. From the LEP class I took last spring, I had some ideas about how to support these different proficiency levels as well as some strategies for sheltering the language that I would be using in my science class. But I didn’t feel that was enough.

Shortly after school began, I sought the help of Annette Maestas, a Language and Cultural Equity resource teacher. I had seen her around my school before, and I knew that she was a person I could ask for help. After meeting with her and having her in my class a couple of times, she presented me with some ideas that I liked and knew I could implement in my class with a little extra effort. My first concern was that I meet the needs of the five NEP students in one of my classes. I knew that if I didn’t make the language accessible to these students, learning would be very difficult for them and they would likely “tune out” as a result.

Annette presented me with some ideas for sheltering the language through the use of pictures by creating picture/word bingo games, “Go Fish” games, and assessments that involved pictures. At first, I didn’t know how these ideas would work and I knew that they would require a fair amount of effort on my part. However, I immediately set out to create manipulatives and games for my first science unit, life science. Within two weeks, I was trying out these new modifications under Annette’s guidance.

Although the physical work of making the new materials was done, learning how to best use the new materials in my classroom was still a challenge. Over time, I began to see the benefits of the changes I made. All of my students, LEP or not, loved playing the science bingo game and learned from it. The pictures, I soon found out, served as an excellent springboard

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from which to teach the concepts they represent. These materials also proved to be very adaptable. They could be used in teacher-directed activities, set up as independent learning centers, or used for on-going review of concepts previously taught. Best of all, they were fun!

After seeing the successes of the first unit, I created these picture materials to accompany all of my science units, including weather, earth science, space science, and physical science. After doing this, I’ve come to see another benefit: consistency. My students know that they will receive the same support from unit to unit and they are already comfortable using the materials. The basic format for these units remains the same, but I am still learning how to improve them. For example, I now include both the English and Spanish words on the word bingo and “Go Fish games” (the first unit was English only), and I am using the picture and word bingo games side by side to improve language acquisition. I am also using these materials to introduce new units as well as to review after the unit has been taught. In time, I’m sure I will have to make further changes to improve the effectiveness of the units.

After putting a lot of work into this, I naturally expected to see some positive results. Besides observing the way that these units have engaged my students, I was longing to see some data showing that they were actually learning the material. After all, isn’t that the whole point? The good news is that after I compared my traditional, less-sheltered assessments to the new, sheltered vocabulary assessments, the data suggest that the achievement gap between my LEP students and my non-LEP students is virtually non-existent—and both groups of students seem to have benefitted. Approximately 90% of both groups of students were designated proficient or advanced on these assessments.

Although improving my teaching through the development of these sheltered units has taken some additional effort on my part, it has been worth it. Had I not taken the initiative by asking others for help and ideas, I likely would not have come across these strategies that have had a positive impact on my teaching. One of the reasons why I became attracted to teaching three years ago is that it is a deep profession where the need for learning never stops. The types of jobs I’ve had in the past were shallow enough that after two or three years there was little to improve on. This is not so with teaching.

What I find difficult about improving as a teacher is finding the time and taking the opportunity to change my daily practice. Teachers are very busy, and we have no end to the things that demand our energy on a daily basis. What makes improvement easier, I have found, is to be willing to try something before putting all of your energy toward trying to fully understand it. As Doug Reeves put it at the fall inservice, “behavior must precede belief.”
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students that the more fluently bilingual you are, the more transfer there is of academic skills.”
In addition, there is often a perception among legislators and others that bilingual education diminishes academic proficiency in English. Mr. Perez feels that Albuquerque High School “has so much potential for cultivating excellent academic achievement” in both Spanish and English. Lastly, due to more rigorous requirements in core content for graduation, many students must take basic or preparatory courses. This limits their opportunities for electives and, therefore, for a well-rounded high school education. In spite of these hurdles, Mr. Perez happily admits, “I am looking forward to the challenges!”

Opening up options for the future...

Freshman year, with its new setting, can be a confusing transition for students. Yet, from the very start, it is important that students plan their high school career so that many options after graduation remain open to them. Principal Linda Sink is especially interested in encouraging all students to be prepared for college by enrolling in Advanced Placement courses. Many students feel that these courses are for a select group, and so, in the fall, Ms. Sink addressed the entire freshmen class about post-secondary options. Her goal was to be sure that any freshmen who were interested would acquire the necessary skills to feel successful and able to go on to further education. “I also felt that I could learn a lot from the kids,” she said, indicating that students can identify what help they need.

The voluntary group, a core of forty freshmen representative of the diverse AHS student population, attends sessions presented by AHS teachers and counselors as well as community members. On January 11, for example, Dr. Ricardo Maestas, University of New Mexico Associate Vice President for Student Services, addressed student questions about applications and admissions, financial aid, work/study on campus, SAT exams, AP course credit, NM lottery scholarship, and skills needed for college and life. He emphasized “ganás” (will power and motivation), hard work (“always do the best you can in everything”), and “read, read, read, write, write, and learn math!” Dr. Maestas and Principal Sink are arranging a UNM campus visit for the freshman group later this spring.

Since this is a new initiative, Ms. Sink plans to survey the students to determine if the “work/study AP” activities were beneficial. If so, she would like to provide extra tutoring, especially in writing skills, for these students as sophomores. And next fall, incoming freshmen will be meeting with Principal Sink to start their own journey toward preparing for the future.

Adapting instruction...

JOHN LOPEZ, SOCIAL STUDIES

For thirty-two years, John Lopez has been seeking to enrich the lives of Albuquerque High School students by teaching the broadest view of history possible. Mr. Lopez’s room overlooks the Commons, at the very heart of the school. This is appropriate for an instructor who believes that teaching the history and experience of all Americans should be at the core of all content areas. “I’ve seen people improve their self-esteem and become better students when they see themselves in the curriculum and learn about their history in depth.”

This belief has inspired him to take an active, intentional approach to multicultural education. He finds that students are more motivated and engaged when they have an opportunity to explore their cultural identities, and he observes them develop mutual respect and admiration for cultural groups different than theirs. His

Dr. Ricardo Maestas discusses educational issues with AHS freshmen.
Mexican-American studies classes, which he has been teaching for twenty years, are open to and include students from all cultural backgrounds. “Everybody benefits when we recognize how all ethnic groups built and contributed to this wonderful country.” Mr. Lopez believes that including the perspectives of all Americans is possible in all content areas and must occur in order to provide equal education opportunities.

**Zachary Walker, Physical Education**

Like almost every teacher at Albuquerque High School, Coach Zachary Walker instructs students who are learning the English language. Although he knows that it will take some time to become fully adept at teaching these students, Coach Walker welcomes them to his PE class and uses strategies that enable them to learn.

“These are great kids,” says Walker, with an emphasis on “great.” “I love having them in class, but it can be difficult to express my expectations in terms they can understand.” Coach Walker sometimes encounters students who are less motivated because they do not understand what is being said, a frustrating situation for any teacher. “It helps to connect with each one at some point, even if it’s just during roll call, and I try to keep the class format well organized and consistent, which makes for a more comfortable learning environment.”

He also teaches specific language structures that are common to his classroom and encourages students to use them daily. Because movement and language acquisition are linked, he is able to capitalize on the kinesthetic learning, pointing out and repeating new words and phrases as the students immediately put them to use. He also sees his class as providing a much-needed break for language learners who are able to express themselves through movement instead of just language where they may be more restricted.

**Wendy Myers, Science**

“The biggest challenge in working with English language learners and students from diverse backgrounds is the increase in amplitude of differing learning styles.” Wendy Myers believes science is a hands-on subject and she uses several techniques to help her students “feel” the information. Along with visuals and realia, she has found that computer research is especially helpful as students access information in their home languages, a useful bridge to English.

Students in Ms. Myers’s classes “actively participate (in learning) through physical interaction with each other and the environment. In other words, they have to get up, move around, and participate.” On one occasion, students stood shoulder to shoulder and leaned on the next person in line to simulate a P-wave from an earthquake. Then, adding the stadium “wave” to the leaning, the students illustrated an S-wave.

Ms. Myers encourages students to work in small, diverse groups on unit projects. This lowers the anxiety level and helps students learn academic language from one another. Students may convert vocabulary lists into pictures, increase the amount or difficulty of their reading, and present their projects through a choice of formats.

**Enhancing multicultural education...**

Principal Linda Sink recognizes that a diverse school population is only the beginning of a truly multicultural learning environment. This year, LCE Multicultural Education Coordinator Joycelyn Jackson and resource teachers from Language and Cultural Equity have been invited to help teachers at Albuquerque High expand ways to incorporate a transformational multicultural education model into all areas of school culture and curricula. “It actually began with a student,” explains AHS counselor Barbara Fries. “A young woman commented to us that we have students here of many different ethnic backgrounds, but we are not always comfortable talking about it.”

By enriching bilingual language programs, supporting students in their academic efforts and future plans, adapting instruction, and fostering multicultural education, AHS is moving forward to meet students’ needs and interests. This multifaceted approach toward realizing a productive and equitable learning environment for all students will benefit the community as a whole.
Este año ha habido una celebración en cuanto al “español de herencia” en Nuevo México. En la escuela secundaria Benjamín Harrison empezamos la primera clase de Español de Herencia. Hemos tenido éxito en el desarrollo de la lectura, la escritura y la comprensión auditiva, y esperamos ver buenos resultados en el español oral para finales del año escolar. Los estudiantes ahora tienen la oportunidad de aprender el idioma a través de los temas de la cultura de Nuevo México. No aprenden sólo de la maestra sino también de los miembros de la comunidad, los padres, y sobre todo aprenden los unos de los otros.

Los estudiantes en Harrison

Los estudiantes en Harrison exhiben una gran variedad de niveles en cuanto a sus conocimientos lingüísticos. Hay alumnos que leen y escriben tanto el inglés como el español. Existe también otro grupo de alumnos que al entrar a la escuela hablaban español, pero una vez que empezaron a recibir enseñanza en inglés, el desarrollo de su español cesó. Por lo tanto, dichos estudiantes perdieron su lengua materna. Tenemos también estudiantes que no aprendieron español en casa, a pesar de que ésa era la lengua que sus padres y abuelos hablaban. Se dice que estos estudiantes tienen un conocimiento “pasivo” del español. Por último, hay también hispanohablantes que, aunque hablan el español muy bien, no han aprendido a leerlo ni escribirlo. A menudo todos estos estudiantes obtienen resultados bajos en las evaluaciones escolares.

En Harrison actualmente se ofrece una clase llamada Español para Bilingües con la idea de beneficiar a los estudiantes que ya dominan el español. Hay otra clase llamada Español para Extranjeros que se ofrece a los estudiantes que saben muy poco o nada de español. Ninguna de estas dos clases beneficia al alumno que solamente tiene un conocimiento pasivo del español o al que lo habla pero no lo lee ni lo escribe. La clase de Español para Bilingües es con frecuencia demasiado avanzada para ellos, y, por otro lado, la clase de Español para Extranjeros les resulta ser demasiado básica.

La clase de español de herencia

Por estos motivos decidimos ofrecer la clase de Español de Herencia, la cual ha sido ideada para los estudiantes que han oído el español en casa, pero tal vez no lo hablen, así como para los estudiantes que lo hablan pero no lo lean ni lo escriben. Esta clase reconoce los diferentes niveles de bilingüismo de los estudiantes nuevo mexicanos y desea infundirles orgullo en torno a su lengua de herencia y su cultura. El curso les ayuda a los estudiantes a establecer una conexión entre el aula y el hogar, ya que frecuentemente sus abuelos hablan español muy bien y sus padres tal vez lo hablen o solamente lo entiendan. Algunos de estos estudiantes tienen cierta facilidad con el español pero tienden a no usarlo.

Por otra parte, la clase también puede beneficiar a aquellos estudiantes que tienen el deseo de recuperar el español perdido. Suelen ser estudiantes provenientes de hogares donde los padres o los abuelos, a consecuencia de haber sido castigados en la escuela por hablar español,
México. Espero que tengamos éxito en recuperar el español. La cultura es un tesoro el cual cada alumno debe disfrutar.

LAS TRES METAS

El objetivo de la clase es fomentar en el estudiante el descubrimiento de su propia identidad a través de la recuperación de su lengua. La clase tiene tres metas principales:

1. Hacer al estudiante sentirse como un estudiante próspero, bicultural, bilingüe y orgulloso de su propia cultura y lenguaje.
2. Enseñarle a hablar, leer, escribir y comprender su lengua de herencia.
3. Aprender sobre la historia de la pérdida de la cultura y el idioma en Nuevo México.

Es un gran placer enseñar esta clase y cada día aprendo más de mi propia herencia de Nuevo México.

La Sra. Orozco hace un diálogo con una estudiante en su clase de Español de Herencia.
State Assessment Update—
the new state standards-based assessment

It's true that we have lots of unanswered questions about the new state assessment, but at the same time, we do have information to help prepare for the testing window that's coming up. An important aspect of that preparation is the decisions we make about which language students test in during the testing window and the accommodations that we do or don't offer. The information below is taken from RDA's latest release on changes and new developments in the standards-based assessment for grades 3-9.

Our primary goal continues to be that, within the state's guidelines, we assess students in a way that best lets them use and demonstrate their literacy and content knowledge. ELL students may participate by testing in English, with or without accommodations, or in Spanish (if in U.S. schools for less than three years or has a waiver to test in the home language). Students not proficient in Spanish or with a home language other than Spanish (who are unable to test in English with accommodations) may take the alternative portfolio assessment, but it will not count toward the schools' participation rate. Students in their first year of school in the U.S. may substitute LAS scores for the Reading subtest.

Specific changes for English Language Learners

- Students schooled in the U.S. for three years must test in English or receive a waiver to test in Spanish. Kindergarten is not counted as one year of U.S. schooling—a change from last year. So, students who started school in the US do not have to have a waiver to test in Spanish until 4th grade. If a 3rd grader had a waiver last year, the student may use that waiver for 4th grade and 5th grade testing (this year and next year).

- Students who have been in the U.S. less than one year do not have to take the reading portion of the test. Their English proficiency score (LAS score) will count as reading. Mark this on the student bio-grid.

- An English-to-other-language dictionary—without definitions—may be used on the test. This must be a word-to-word translation only.

- Math, Writing, and Science are nearly direct translations of the English test. Therefore, dual language testing in these content areas may not be as useful as before.

- FEP-M students (students who were LEP and have been reclassified as FEP for two years or less) may be included in the ELL group for AYP calculations.

- Accommodated participation does count toward both AYP and the participation rate.

- All students may have changes made to the presentation of the test and to how the students may respond (accommodations or adaptations). If you have provided an instructional adaptation for the last three months and that adaptation is an allowable test accommodation, then the student may have those changes for the test regardless of his special education or ELL status. For example: If a student is a struggling reader and you typically read the math problems to the student, then you may provide that support to the student during the math testing. Be certain to mark the accommodations box for each sub-test on the bio-grid.

- This test is un-timed. The times indicated in the teacher's guide are recommendations or estimates of how long the test should take.

- No calculators are allowed for students in grades 3 through 7. Even special education students may not use a calculator on this test. Students in grades 8 and 9 will be required to use a calculator on certain parts of the test.

- Allowable accommodations have changed. For example, on the Reading subtest, only the directions may be read aloud to the student. The PED has provided a new Procedures Guide that explains accommodations by subtest. Check this document before providing an accommodation for the student, and consider whether or not the accommodation will truly benefit the student.

This was adapted from "What's New on the SBA," RDA (January 31, 2005), and additional RDA and PED materials. For complete information on the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment, please visit RDA's website at www.rda.aps.edu, call RDA at 848.8710, and/or see your school's test rep.
This year Language and Cultural Equity will again be providing ESL summer school to students in grades K-12 who are identified as having a primary or home language other than English (PHLOTE) and have been assessed with the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) language proficiency test. Based on their English LAS scores, students who are NEP, LEP, LEPa, or LEPc would benefit from additional support during the summer.

Enrollment procedures for the ESL classes will be the same as for the other literacy and traditional classes and will be initiated at the school sites. The enrollment period will be announced soon. Parents and students will be required to bring their enrollment forms to registration on May 21 at the summer school site or on May 28 to Stronghurst Complex from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

ESL summer school sites include West Mesa High School, and Jimmy Carter and Van Buren middle schools. Elementary ESL school sites are Alamosa, Adobe Acres, La Luz, La Mesa, Cochiti, Eugene Field, and Eubank. We are still working on making ESL classes available in different quadrants of the city.

There is no charge for ESL summer school and classes are generally much smaller than during the regular school year. For elementary schools, there are approximately eight to ten students in each class and in secondary, no more than fifteen students. Classes for elementary and middle school students will be in session from Thursday, June 9 to Thursday, July 14. High school classes will run from Monday, June 6 to Wednesday, July 20 for two semesters. There will be no summer school classes on July 4.

Teaching ESL summer school is a worthwhile professional development opportunity for many reasons. Teachers can hone their ESL teaching strategies or try teaching at a different grade level, as well as earn a little extra money during the summer. Applications to teach ESL summer school will be available in early March at the APS Human Resources office, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation union office, and Stronghurst Complex; completed forms should be submitted to the Summer School Office at Stronghurst Complex. There will be an orientation on June 2 for all summer school employees, as well as two other days of professional development for ESL summer school teachers.

During the summer school session, teachers participate in weekly professional development focusing on curriculum to address the national TESOL standards. These standards include using English to communicate in social settings, using English to achieve academically in all content areas, and using English in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Teachers are given time to meet with grade level colleagues to discuss curriculum design, ESL strategies, instructional activities, and appropriate assessment for English language learners.

ESL summer school provides many learning opportunities not only for our students, but also for teachers. If you would like more information or if you have any questions regarding ESL summer school, please call Doddie Espinosa at Language and Cultural Equity, 881-9429, ext. 80077.
Making more connections!

**Coming Events**

❖ Language Expo—University of New Mexico: March 5. There will be exhibits, food, dancing, crafts. For more information, contact Marina Peters-Newell at mpnewell@unm.edu.

❖ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages—TESOL—Teaching Learning, Learning Teaching: A Nexus in Texas: March 30-April 2, San Antonio, TX. For more information, visit the TESOL website at www.tesol.org/tesol/2005.

❖ Southwest Conference on Language Teaching —Teaching and Learning: A Salute to Foreign Language Educators: April 7-10, Irving, TX. For more information, go to www.swcotl.org.

❖ New Mexico Association of Bilingual Educators—Accountability in Bilingual Education Drives Academic Excellence: April 14-16, Albuquerque, NM. For more information, visit their website at www.nmabe.net.

❖ International Reading Association 50th anniversary annual convention: May 1-5, San Antonio, TX. For more information, visit www.reading.org.

**FYI...**

Information about Bilingual Program Applications for 2005-2006 will be forthcoming soon from the Public Education Department. Language and Cultural Equity will be hosting workshops for principals and bilingual coordinators as soon as this information and the forms are received and reviewed—and the March testing window closes. We know that the "turn-around time" will be short, so please watch for e-mails and notices from LCE.

**Just a reminder...** Making Connections can be downloaded at lcequity.com!