Corre La Voz Program Overview

thinking into the gaps

SUMMARY

The Corre La Voz Digital Mentoring After-School Program places Latino undergraduates from UCSC in two middle schools to work on digital media production with 6th-8th graders. It meets Tuesdays and Thursdays at Mission Hill and Branciforte Middle Schools, and focuses primarily on two kinds of digital projects: multi-media narratives built in iMovie, and blogging.

Our goals are to support the educational and life success of these students by:
1) working on their language arts, analytical skills and computer skills in ways that strengthen their family connections and cultural pride, and make them more "multi-literate," confident young people;
2) demonstrating the required steps, relevance and purpose of continued educational success; and 3) creating a caring and productive educational community.

We posit that all of these things will help them do well in school, form a strong, resilient self-image, and envision themselves on a life path that includes higher education.

Corre La Voz has some lofty goals, some complex projects, and is just beginning to get off the ground. This document is intended to introduce the historical and theoretical premises for the program, to explain our goals, and to show how the program is developing toward them.

Leslie López, Spring 2010

Latino Population Expansion and Distribution in Santa Cruz City Schools

In the last 15 years or so, the Latino student population in the Santa Cruz City School District (North County) has been increasing steadily. For example, out of the total number of students enrolled in Santa Cruz Elementary Schools in 1994, 25% were Latino. In 2009, 37% were Latino (RAND California –California Public Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade).

That Santa Cruz has a significant Latino population may come as a surprise to some. For one thing, the university community is sadly divided from the Santa Cruz community, and those without children in their families rarely see who Santa Cruz families are, and how we live. Certainly none of us see the expansion of the Latino community reflected in our local media to any great extent (though lately there have been a few hints). The civic representation of Latinos in Santa Cruz—in politics, business, professional sectors, and NGO leadership—has not been keeping pace with the growth of the population. This is also the case in schools: the United Way's annual Community Assessment Project shows that in 2008-09, about 11.6% of all teachers in Santa Cruz Elementary Schools were Latino/a, up from 10.2%

in 2000-01 (CAP15:82). (Note that this percentage does not guarantee that all Latino students will ever work directly with a Latino teacher.) As in other areas of professional and civic life in Santa Cruz, there has been slow improvement in diversity at this level.

There are still other reasons that the expansion—and community profile—of the Latino educational community in Santa Cruz is not widely perceived. One of the most significant reasons that Latino school populations in North County have not yet registered on everyone's "Richter scale" has to do with the way people are counted. As everyone in Santa Cruz County knows, Latinos are unevenly distributed within the county; the Watsonville area is something like 80% Latino. But when data for ethnicity are generated on a county-wide basis (often used in local news reporting), percentages are simply averaged throughout the county boundaries (which includes Watsonville, Mid-County—that is, Soquel, Aptos, and Live Oak—the San Lorenzo Valley, Santa Cruz and North County).

These data don't measure the specificities of cities, much less neighborhoods

Something similar happens within the Santa Cruz City Schools (SCCS) District. District-wide data, which also sometimes reported on in the news, also combines and averages information from all schools within that district. Although Santa Cruz feels like a "small town," the majority of Latino families are clustered geographically in distinct parts of town, due to the great disparities of wealth and high cost of housing in Santa Cruz. In addition, several years ago, the District was forced to close two elementary schools; too many families had left Santa Cruz to be able to sustain these. The redistricting of school populations resulted in new populations at schools. Most notably affected by this change was Gault Elementary, which was not prepared for the sudden increase of Latino families, many of them recent immigrants with pressing economic problems and little English. (At the same time, elementary schools shifted all the 6th grades to the middle schools, creating new social and curricular challenges.) In any case, there are important differences in schools throughout the District, differences that are erased by some of the typical data-gathering tools.

Below are some current (2008) basic data on ethnicity, language learning and income for the schools we work with. (Corre La Voz is based at Branciforte and Mission Hill Middle Schools, but hopes to expand our program to do "mentored mentoring" at Bay View and Gault Elementary.) There are two important things to notice here: 1) that Branciforte and Mission Hill are different (Branciforte is in general less wealthy and has a higher population of Latino students); and 2) the two pairs of elementary schools that feed each middle school are very different.

Branciforte Middle School:

44% Latino   12% English Learners   45% receive free or reduced lunch
http://www.greatschools.org/california/santa-cruz/5758-Branciforte-Middle-School/

Gault Elementary:

66% Latino 60% English Learners   71% receive free or reduced lunch
http://www.greatschools.org/cgi-bin/ca/other/5760#students

De Laveaga Elementary:

37% Latino   25% English Learners   36% receive free or reduced lunch
http://www.greatschools.org/cgi-bin/ca/other/5759#students

Mission Hill Middle School:

26% Latino   7 % English Learners   29% receive free or reduced lunch
http://www.greatschools.org/california/santa-cruz/5761-Mission-Hill-Middle-School/

Bay View Elementary:

49% Latino   39% English Learners   56% free or reduced lunch
http://www.greatschools.org/cgi-bin/ca/other/5756#students

Westlake Elementary:

18% Latino   N/A English Learners   19% free or reduced lunch
http://california.schooltree.org/public/Westlake-Elementary-012886.html

In daily practice, different students have different educational needs and challenges; teachers and schools have to figure out how to meet those needs; and the kids and families attending those schools have overall different educational experiences.

One of the basic premises of Corre La Voz is that Latino populations at these different schools will have different needs. For instance, although Latino student needs in schools with large Latino communities are pressing, and must be addressed, these should not erase the needs of Latino students who find themselves in the minority, and who are (in the logic of our educational system) competing with more affluent students from homes with highly educated parents.

On the other hand, another of the basic premises (and objectives) of Corre La Voz is almost the opposite. That is, despite differences, many Latino students who have gone through an English Learning program have quite a bit in common with each other, and could benefit quite a bit by seeing themselves as members of a strong, supportive learning community; by being able to tell their stories in increasingly complex and powerful ways; and by seeing themselves as gifted contributors to their families, their schools, and their communities.

Santa Cruz City Schools
It is important to point out that this demographic shift has occurred during the same time frame as devastating budget cuts, along with the rejection of bilingual education in California schools (Proposition 227), and with the No Child Left Behind program, which has compelled schools and teachers to move to a strictly standardized curriculum.

To the extent to which schools have been able to figure out how to meet new educational needs for a changing population, to hire new personnel, and to develop new strategies, they have done so by working "against the current," and in the margins of their "assigned" work.

It is also important to note that despite marked income inequality and political strife over how educational resources should be handled (e.g., the case of Pacific Collegiate Charter School, which is ranked the #1 preparatory junior high/high school in the country and has poor diversity), Santa Cruz City Schools is not only progressive as a district but has been a good place for creative approaches. In general, teachers and principals in these schools are talented, skilled, and dedicated, and they as well as district administrators are also open to new ideas.

Funding for After-School Support (or "Targeted Intervention")
After-school programs are among those new ideas that educators are trying out—and would love to supply more of, if they had the funding. As the Metlife Afterschool Alliance puts it, the school-community connections in after-school programs can supply the following:

- greater relevance of curriculum for students
- increased student responsibility for learning
- improved linkages between school and community
- improved problem-solving, teaming, higher order thinking, time management, and other
- vital skills that benefit students' school achievement and workplace readiness
- expanded learning environments

- greater motivation of reluctant learners
- enhanced problem solving and conflict management skills
- reduced behavior and truancy problems (11/07 Issue Brief #30)

In addition, some educators are enthusiastic about the potential for learning they see in digital technology. They argue that cell phones, iPods, social networking, and graphic design and editing programs available on computers actually open doors for new kinds of learning which will make it possible for diverse kinds of learners to bridge gaps and be creative, proactive and successful. They talk about "*multiliteracies*," and emphasize that in the 21st century, it is critical to teach kids how to analyze and express themselves fluidly in a range of symbolic systems (or risk being victimized by them). They argue that these days, kids not only need to learn to be comfortable moving around in digital atmospheres—they need to learn to be "strategic" in them:

> "Multiliteracies means being cognitively and socially literate with paper, live, and electronic texts. It also means being strategic, that is, being able to recognize what is required in a given context, examine what is already known, and then, if necessary, modify that knowledge to develop a strategy that suits the context and situation. A multiliterate person must therefore be a problem solver and strategic thinker, that is, an active and informed citizen. (Anstey & Bull, 2006:23; cf Hodgson 2009:62)

Educators and social analysts have also encouraged schools and other programs to work on bridging the "*digital divide*." This is a term coined to describe the

new inequities that emerge because these great technologies (as well as the leisure time and playful, empowered approach to life that helps people access them) are not equally available to everyone in society.

UC Links
Corre La Voz helps bring digital tools and opportunities to expand "multiliteracies" to Latino/a students in SCCS. Our program is funded through UC Links, which is a University of California program designed specifically to place UC students and resources in after-school programs in California schools and community centers. There are dozens of interesting UC Links projects all around California, including another UCSC-Middle School project right here in town, linking the Psychology Department and Maplewood Middle School in Live Oak. In our case, the two institutional partners are the Department of Education at UCSC and Santa Cruz City Schools. UC Links funds *digital* projects—that is, after-school projects might be in math, poetry, or civic engagement, but must all occur in a digital learning environment. The program also stipulates that projects should enhance "*literacy*," but allows local partnerships to define literacy according to their purposes. However, projects are selected for funding because they serve under-served student populations, and because they seem likely to encourage or support students in developing the academic skills, the grades and the self-image they will need to pursue a college track. UC Links funds partnered programs on a two-year grant basis (potentially renewable).

Who We Serve
We are a "targeted intervention" program in the sense that we

seek to serve a specific population of students who might otherwise fall through the cracks: *Latinos who are on the verge of reclassifying as English proficient, and who might, with additional support, be successful.* That said, if not enough of these kinds of students are coming to the program, we might expand our scope and try to reconfigure the daily program design to attract and include related groups—for instance, EL students who need help with language arts homework for part of the time and who could also work on creative digital projects for part of the time.

Program Structure
Ultimately, the success of the program depends on three things working well together: mentors, students, and curriculum. 1) The energy, thoughtfulness, activities, and good relationships the mentors create in the classroom are a major driving force of the program—they attract and retain students, and just by contributing their time to a positive relationship can change students' lives. 2) We also need enough students to make the program work, which depends partly on the profile of the students we are looking for, partly on outreach strategies, and partly on the attractiveness of the program, which is competing with many other possibilities after school. 3) Finally, program content is important. After-school programs work hard at coming up with the right balance of short- and long-term activities, of fun and challenge, of structure and fluidity. These three factors work in conjunction (if one doesn't work, then the others don't), and in Corre La Voz all three areas have been developing in conjunction this year.

Mentors
Each of the two middle schools, Branciforte and Mission Hill, has

a team of mentors—four of them. Each team is responsible for coming up with a careful lesson plan and making sure each member knows what he or she is supposed to be doing ahead of time (See "Mentor Team Structure and Weekly Cycle"). We are about to begin a new phase of more elaborate planning, skill-building, and observation/assessment.

Site Advisers
Each school has a Site Adviser who is a member of the regular school staff, and is paid a stipend through Corre La Voz to assist with the program. One of the Site Adviser's most important roles is to work with teachers to identify and recruit students for the program, and to help remind them to come after school. They also help work with the school so that there is space and materials available; they make sure program materials don't get lost during the regular school week. When we go on field trips, they send permission slips home with kids, and work with parents, school administrators and teachers. They are also on-site during Corre La Voz program hours, and can help with some activities *if you give them plenty of advance notice, or ask in a respectful way*.

Program Coordinator
The Coordinator is responsible for recruiting and placing mentors in the schools, for working with mentors and Site Advisers to assist with digital projects, and for developing after-school curriculum as well as the overall program.

Instructors
The Instructors are responsible for ongoing development of the Education 199 course, for training the mentors, and supporting them on philosophical and practical issues related to their teaching.

Tapping Student Strengths—Avoiding Risk

There is some very recent literature that is applicable to our project, which is exciting, but because these are emergent fields of education (second-language literacies, digital literacies, after-school programs), the pieces that we will read will be sometimes only glancingly relevant; it is up to us to be creative and think about how other projects and insights might be adapted to our situation. To sum up the arguments of the authors we will read this quarter, they feel that working with language arts in digital modalities and in after-school programs can help students who are usually left behind by standard classroom approaches. They stress that projects should start with students' areas of strength, knowledge, and interest, and bridge from there into new areas of skill and growth. Some insist, for instance, that students who work with audio and video editing projects enhance their ability to write, even when they are not doing actual text production.

Rubinstein-Avila and Martínez-Roldán & Fránquiz (see readings) offer plenty of detailed examples of how Latino/a learners are often misunderstood, and suggest some helpful ways to begin instead with a recognition of their strengths. If we fail to do this, they warn, we put these students at risk not only of academic delay, but of exclusion and alienation. Just like any other student who, for whatever reason, does not fit the "average" profile, many Latino/a students have to work harder to learn in standardized ways, and to be recognized as successful. This puts them at increased risk of misunderstanding and being misunderstood, of staying silent, of becoming fatally bored, of becoming angry and staying that way.

A-G Rates and Reclassification in SCCS

Although few students in SCCS actually physically drop out, the students who don't have proper support or motivation become educationally disenfranchised, and mentally drop out. They are often "socially promoted" through their classes and graduate, but at what cost?

In comparison with statewide dropout rates, SCCS fares very well. In 2007-08, in comparison to the statewide average dropout rate of 20%, the County's rate overall was 14%. However, most of those dropouts occur in the Pajaro Valley District; in 2007-08 only 4% of Santa Cruz City high school students dropped out. Those district numbers are not broken down by ethnicity, but in 2007-08 about 17% of Latino high school students dropped out of Santa Cruz City high schools (down from 27% in 2006-07). This might be compared to 25.5% for Latinos statewide, according to the California Department of Education (O'Connell 5/12/09).

However, there are persistent concerns in relation to Latino student success in SCCS. One is that there is a relatively low percentage of Latinos who take a four-year college-preparatory path in high school (this is known as the "a-g path"). Only approximately 45% (*get data from District) of Latino students take this path of studies, and are thus eligible to go on to a four-year university when they graduate. This is very low in comparison to other ethnic groups in Santa Cruz.

Another, related concern is that when students do not "reclassify" as English-proficient by the time they leave elementary school, they might get "stuck" in EL classes in middle school, and might not get caught up in time to take that a-g path.

How Corre La Voz Can Support These Students' Success

Here again are the main goals of the program. We seek to support students' success by:

1) working on their language arts, analytical skills and computer skills in ways that strengthen their family connections and cultural pride, and make them more "multi-literate," confident young people;
2) demonstrating the required steps, relevance and purpose of continued educational success; and
3) creating a caring and productive educational community.

We posit that all of these things will help them do well in school, form a strong, resilient self-image, and envision themselves on a life path that includes higher education.

These goals are advanced simultaneously through different aspects of the program. The following are the primary ones:

Mentor Placements and Field Trips

The opportunity to work with Latino/a college students in and of itself is major in these students' lives, given the relative lack of Latino/a teaching staff. Young people need to know that people who look like them can grow up, go to college, and pursue their dreams. Corre La Voz mentors are very aware of their responsibility to these students, and of the impact their comments or behavior can have on them. They are modeling not just educational success, but community service and good communication among themselves. In addition, the program sponsors a field trip each quarter; these trips are designed to emphasize paths of educational continuity and/or professional relevance of the skills learned in the program.

Universities, colleges, or other locations become, in the kids' experience, literally "reachable destinations."

Storytelling, Researching, Reporting, and Analyzing
Opportunities for kids to frame, narrate and analyze their own experiences—to tell stories about their daily lives, and to talk about the people and issues that are important to them, can be transformative. These opportunities can help young people avoid stuffing down, individualizing and internalizing doubts or messages of inadequacy. We would like to provide students with an enhanced social and emotional vocabulary to discuss and think about themselves, their families, and society, and to help them develop their voices, in any medium or language they choose. We would like to help them become aware of how they are using communicative tools (language, media, writing, etc) in relation to particular audiences and purposes. All of these elements of storytelling contribute to a stronger sense of self, to a sense of one's power to write one's own life.

Continual Writing, Reading, Discussion, New Digital Applications
All of our projects have involved language-arts skill-building, image analysis, and writing; two have involved voice recording. Experts in literacy argue that the kinds of logical operations that students use when they develop digital projects enhance their capacities to read and write in print as well. Primary among these are sequencing operations (e.g., cause and effect, narrative arc, illustration of concept), organization of materials, keyboarding, elements of timing, spatial/graphic design, and principles and mechanics of revision. Students in Corre La

Voz have also begun to learn two new major programs: iMovie and WordPress. These programs are relevant training for a range of other digital editing, graphics and web design programs they will encounter in the future.

A Supported Community of Scholars and Artists
One of the big advantages we have with our small mentor/student ratio is that we can devote a lot of attention to particular students, their stories, their struggles, and their triumphs. This is something that they don't get in crowded classrooms, or at home. In addition, an after-school environment is conducive to collaborative peer learning and teacher-learner relationships that are less hierarchical than they are in school. These opportunities can produce enhanced social skills with peers and young adults. One of the primary goals of the program that we have yet to move toward is to develop stronger, more comfortable and functional communication bridges between home and school. We hope that some parents might look at their kids' work at home on the blog, and that others will come to a year-end celebration. In order to make this connection work, the bilingual potential of the program should be emphasized.
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Program Development—Trajectory
The program is just finishing its first pilot year, a year that was incomplete due to late funding. We started in Mission Hill in November, and in Branciforte in February. Spring Quarter, 2010 will be the first full quarter we are operating in both sites, with returning mentors in both. Program development priorities at the moment include stabilizing the planning structure and curriculum; enriching curriculum with an eye on specific skill-building areas and assessment; and increasing enrollment.

We hope to move toward a more public representation of the program this quarter with a new, bilingual blogsite directed toward parents and younger kids. We also hope to lay the groundwork for expanding into a tiered mentoring program next year, so that experienced middle school participants could accompany a UCSC mentor to Bay View or Gault and teach 4th and 5th graders how to create digital stories in iMovie, and how to create blog posts to contribute to the public blog.