

# The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

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## Fall 2013 Newsletter

### Trial Balloon Launched

Up and away it went in early July—the Learning Center's first foray into a for-profit, socially responsible business aimed at moving the Center forward on the road to self-sustainability. It was a risky venture entailing considerable start-up expenses, the diversion of three senior staff away from the Center itself to manage the fledgling enterprise, and all this on a playing field crowded with stiff competition.

The nature of the business was carefully thought out and solidly based on The Learning Center's proven expertise: tutoring students in need of extra academic support. This time, though, it would be students from families with the resources to pay for tutoring services—a different demographic altogether from the Center's population and one with different attitudes and expectations. The trio who planned and launched it were three of the Center's top staff: Sonia Bautista, Armando Carmona and Mirel Duarte.



*Students arrive at the new for-profit "Espacio" center located in Colonia Reforma.*

They named it *Espacio de Apoyo a la Educación Comunitaria*—Community Education Support Space, rented a house for it in an upscale neighborhood north of the Center, created signage and publicity, painted the walls, hung pictures and began accepting inscriptions in June for an intense July summer course. Their budget projections dictated a daunting minimum of 15 paying students to cover the costs of rent, tutor stipends and materials.

It was a tense and breathless time even for three such experienced people as Sonia, Armando and Mirel, but when the doors opened on July 3, there were 24 students signed up and the *Espacio* was off and running. When the course ended in early August, there was reason to celebrate what had been an unquestionable success.

Pleased, though still a bit dazed by the experience, Sonia points to a student population that ranged from seven years old to seventeen but nonetheless managed to form a collegial community in the Learning Center tradition. Written evaluations by the students were uniformly positive, though there were requests for additional activities and workshops (including one request for access to swimming) in addition to academic study. "That's something we'll have to think about," Sonia acknowledges. "But a swimming pool? I don't think so!" It was particularly gratifying, Sonia notes, that the parents of the students seemed pleased, because they, of course, are the ones who foot the bill.

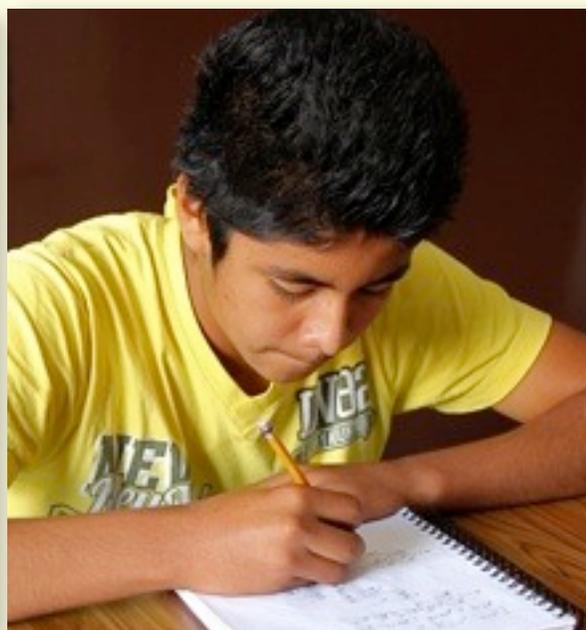
What makes the *Espacio* stand out from the competition? Sonia points immediately to the same methodology that sets The Learning Center apart: rigor and rules, firm schedules, a thoughtful and consistent approach to each student's individual needs, and a strong emphasis on good study habits. "In most places," Sonia explains, "a student will buy, say, 30 hours of tutoring and can use those hours any

way he or she chooses. And students will find themselves being tutored in groups of different ages, levels and needs. That's not what goes on here. Not at all!"

The *Espacio* will run year 'round. It started up again in late August after a period of tutor training, adjusting its schedules now that schools are back in session. The trial balloon, it seems, is soaring aloft!



*Students with tutor at the new "Espacio" center.*



*Working on math equations.*

## Writing And Speaking For Public Presentations

*This is a another installment in a series of articles about how some supporters of the Learning Center give of their time and talent to help our students excel.*

Some people are inherently incapable of letting dust collect beneath their feet. Such a person is Nora Jacquez, a retired lawyer and world traveler from Denver, Colorado, who has wintered in Oaxaca for many years. Still a veritable whirlwind of energy and ideas, Nora maintains an incredibly busy schedule. But while in Oaxaca she makes time to conduct a weekly class in public speaking for the university students in the Center's stipend program. As Nora tells it, "I tutor the kids at the Learning Center on written and oral expression. I try to give them confidence in public speaking by helping them to write with clarity in Spanish and then tell the rest of the group about their topic with effective oral presentation stressing good eye contact, voice modulation, body posture and gestures." In these light-hearted but very earnest sessions the students learn to organize their thoughts, write out and memorize their speeches and master audio-visual material. Then they give their presentations to their peers -- and do it all with great self-confidence and poise.

Nora practices what she preaches. Last year she wrote, produced and acted in a dramatic monologue recounting the exploits of her grandmother, who endured incredible hardships and deprivations in the great American West in the 1800's. She presented the monologue in both Spanish and English.

Her charges at the Learning Center look to Nora as a cherished *abuela* (grandmother). They respect her experience and wisdom and gratefully take her advice to heart.



*Nora Jacquez*

## Building The Backbone

If tutoring is the principal - but by no means only - endeavor of The Oaxaca Learning Center, then it stands to reason that strengthening that program will benefit the organization overall. Looking for ways to expand the tutoring program and make it better is a constant, ongoing task. But before the nuts and bolts of the program can be honed to perfection, tutors themselves must be recruited and trained. As past success has brought increasing numbers of students to the Center and the new for-profit *Espacio* center becomes operational, there is need to increase the number of tutors. Last year the Center supported ten tutors. With the new *Espacio* center ramping up operations, we will need fifteen tutors this year. And next year? Likely even more.

The tutors at the Learning Center are all university students who come from poor families. They are all bright, energetic and committed, knowing first-hand the struggles involved in pursuing a higher education in the face of social, familial and financial difficulties. As tutors, they work 18 hours at the Center each week -- 15 hours devoted to actual instruction and 3 hours spent in a team evaluation session each Saturday.

Our tutors each receive a monthly stipend equivalent to \$160 USD for their services - funds that enable them to pay their own college and living expenses. **If you would like to sponsor a tutor, either in full or in part, your donation would be most appreciated! You can get in touch with Gary Titus, the founder of The Oaxaca Learning Center, to learn more by sending an e-mail to [gary@tolc.org.mx](mailto:gary@tolc.org.mx).**

## Scholarship Agreements Grow

Jauri Sánchez, the Learning Center's coordinator of the "Designing the Future" program, reports continuing success in negotiating formal agreements for tuition scholarships with Oaxaca's private universities for our outstanding students. Our most recent agreement with **Universidad del Golfo de Mexico (Oaxaca)** offers four 50% tuition scholarships in any of the school's majors to qualified Center students. Furthermore, the agreement offers the university's students the opportunity to carry out their six-month social service project (a requirement for graduation) at The Oaxaca Learning Center. Additionally, the university has offered the Learning Center use of its facilities for events for our students.

On a related note, David Sánchez Osorio began studies in physical therapy this fall under our agreement with **UNIVERSIDAD LA SALLE (OAXACA)** with an 80% tuition scholarship. This academic year finds a total of six Center-sponsored students at La Salle -- one a sophomore in high school; two pursuing undergraduate college degrees; and three working toward Master's degrees. At other universities, Shaday Alvarez won an increase to 75% of his tuition at the **Universidad Meso-americana** in recognition of his academic performance, commitment to the university's social outreach and his own very real economic need. Estefania Martínez recently received a 25% tuition award from the **Universidad Vasconcelos** for her superior grades pursuing a degree in International Relations.

## Academic Achievements

Both Learning Center staff and students are constantly pursuing academic achievement. Senior staffers can identify with the rigors of going to class and doing homework because they are pursuing higher degrees at the same time they supervise the tutoring program aimed at younger students. Jaasiel Quero, Sonia Bautista and Mirel Duarte are in their second year of Master's programs at La Salle University, where Betsaida Aragno is in her sophomore year on the undergraduate level. This year Armando Carmona has enrolled in a scholarship program at Universidad Anáhuac (Oaxaca), where he is aiming for a Master's degree in Marketing.

We want to congratulate the four university students, all recipients of scholarship assistance from the

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Learning Center, who graduated last spring. They are: Maria Gallegos (Bi-lingual Education), Efraín Pérez (Nursing), Anel Sánchez (Communication) and Omar Rito (Civil Engineering).

Meanwhile, of the 16 Center students who graduated from high school last spring, 13 decided to go on to university and were accepted in undergraduate programs. We are proud to announce that the following young scholars (most of whom will receive financial assistance from the Learning Center) were admitted to various colleges. We wish them well on their journey toward higher education!

David Sanches Osorio  
Rosalina Ayuzo García  
Karen Juárez Pelcastre  
Elizabeth Pérez Zárate  
Maribel Pérez Zárate  
Luis Fernando Quero  
Beatriz Ramírez Arreola  
Rafael Rito Cortes  
María Torres Pérez  
Abel Ortiz Pastrana  
Francisco Martínez  
Yezenia García Bautista  
Diana Santos Ramírez

Universidad La Salle Oaxaca  
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Universidad del Golfo de México  
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Derecho  
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Gastronomía  
Gastronomía

## Taking A Break

If you have read through the newsletter to this point, you know that the staff and students of the Learning Center have been very active and productive the past few months. In keeping with tradition, the last weekend of October was set aside for a well-deserved break. So it was that weary staff and eager students boarded buses last Saturday for a weekend getaway at the ecotourism center in Llano Grande, one of the villages in the Pueblos Mancomunados in the Sierra Norte about 40 miles northeast of Oaxaca. In the course of the day-to-day operation of the Center, students meet in groups of two or three for tutoring sessions and rarely have a chance to see or interact with all the other young people studying here. Events such as this give



*Building bonds of friendship.*

*The highlight of the weekend was a four hour hike in the dense woods around Llano Grande -- great exercise and an opportunity to explore nature which our students seldom have.*



the whole Center community a chance to relax, get to know one another better, listen to staff presentations and take part in various group exercises to build supportive relationships

This annual retreat is one of the ways the Center manages to instill an infectious camaraderie among its diverse student population and inspire the kind of enthusiasm and dedication that keeps the young people focused on their studies. As in the past, while students themselves paid 250 pesos apiece to take part, the outing was financed mainly through a grant from SEDESOL, the Mexican Secretariat for Social Development, which over several years has been very supportive of the work of the Learning Center.