

TOP OF THE LADDER



by Laura Rodriguez

This is a picture of when we went to CSUN to listen to Erin Gruwell speak. My students are my freedom fighters. That's me, in the bottom row, second from the left.

During my middle school years, I was lost and did not have a vision for my future. At the end of my 8th grade year, I found out that some of my friends had been recommended for a new program at San Fernando High School called the Multilingual Teacher Career Academy. Even though we had not been invited to the informational meeting, my mom and I decided to just show up. Fortunately, I was able to enroll in the academy, and if it wasn't for the academy I would not be where I am today. The teachers at San Fernando High School made me want to become a teacher; Miss Madrigal and Mr. Ramos were heroes for not only being great teachers, but also for being there for all of us and running such an inspirational program.

This program gave me the drive to succeed that I lacked in middle school, and it gave me real opportunities to work with children. For example, we would go to local elementary schools and tutor students, and during my vacation time we would be given jobs to work at local schools. Lastly, LAUSD gave me and a few of my friends the Career Ladder Scholarship (formerly known as the CSPTTP Scholarship) for college.

For the Career Ladder Scholarship, I was required to work as a teacher assistant while I attended Cal State Northridge. I loved this job because I got to see early on how children learn, and it served as motivation for me to actually become

a teacher. I worked at Canterbury, Plummer, and Vintage Magnet Elementary Schools. I also worked as a program supervisor for a Beyond the Bell program called "Ready, Set, Go." Working as a paraeducator gave me the upper hand when it came to teaching, because I learned about classroom management, lesson planning, and how to work with students.

Recently at a presentation for a class of high school students interested in careers with children, I mentioned to them that it is nice to have dreams, but what really matters is that they eventually live those dreams. Also, I advised them to take full advantage of opportunities like the Career Ladder Scholarship and get experience working with students. Lastly, I urged them not to forget about where they came from, when they become teachers. "Go back and help other students from your neighborhood succeed."

As for my future, I know that I want to continue teaching high school English. My goal is to open the eyes of my students to the occurrences and issues of the real world. I want them to think about how they can make a difference in their own lives, the lives of others, and maybe even the world. I envision my students as future leaders in this society. All in all, I believe that I am making a positive difference everyday by being a teacher.