



Superintendent's Honor Roll – Feb. 26, 2008

University Hill English Language Learning Coach Josefa Rascón, known to the University Hill community and her BVSD colleagues as “Pepa” since she joined the school’s faculty in 2004, was nominated by BVSD Director of Curriculum, Reading and Title I Judy Slinger. Pepa is a high-achieving faculty member who has combined a scholarly pursuit of her subject area – English Language Learning – with a passionate dedication to each of her students’ academic success.

“I love the fact that I work with a diverse population and with a group of dedicated teachers that go an extra mile to serve our students,” said Pepa. “This makes my job more enjoyable.”

As much as Pepa embraces the rich and positive school climate that University Hill is known for, she is also committed to continually researching improvements that aid her ELL students in creating and gaining meaning from their reading.

Pepa recently co-authored a research paper that was published in the December/January edition of *The Reading Teacher*, the journal of the International Reading Association. It is entitled “Modified Guided Reading: Gateway to English as a Second Language and Literacy Learning.” This thought-provoking research closely examines the current “Guided Reading” literacy program that provides small-group reading instruction to students within a specific protocol. Modified Guided Reading strategies include providing culturally relevant texts, oral reading by ELL coaches to model fluency, and generating class discussions regarding comprehension and vocabulary.

Along with her professor from the University of Miami, Mary Avalos, Pepa wanted to look at ways in which second language learners would best be served in reading groups. They knew the benefits of Guided Reading for monolingual students; however, they wanted to explore the benefits for second language learners and the specific modifications that would need to be made to help ESL students develop reading skills and strategies in their second languages.

Initially, Ms. Avalos and Pepa wrote their paper using primary students’ data. However, it was recommended that they look into possible benefits for intermediate students as well. Two other ESL coordinators from Miami Dade joined the study and put the modified Guided Reading program into practice. The results were as favorable for intermediate ESL students as they were for elementary students.

Pepa is enriching and accelerating the learning of her students while modeling the kind of professional development that will be needed to achieve our goals over the next five years and beyond.