

**D&D Initiative: PS165**  
**Second Year Report 1999/2000 from the AR Team**  
**May 30, 2000**  
**Written by Prof. María E. Torres-Guzmán**

**A Brief Description of PS165**

PS165 in Community School District 3 is situated on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The school building sits on West 109<sup>th</sup> street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. PS165 is the center of a vibrant community that is in the process of change. While the savage inequality between PS165 and the Manhattan School for Children and Crossroads, two middle-class schools that are housed in the building was evident a few years ago, the physical and learning environment of the school has changed dramatically in ways that favor the PS165. The classrooms, the hallways, the library, and the computer rooms are full of color, furniture, and equipment, whereas a few years ago they were barren and gray.

The student makeup of the school is 82.5% Hispanic, 13.3% African-American, 3.1% Asian, and 1.1% White. Arrivals to the U.S. in the last 3 years are approximately 11.4% and the mobility rate is 4%.

Signs of the many families, predominantly Dominican and Puerto Rican, can be seen all around the community and in the school. On any given morning, streams of children with parents and other family members are seen entering the building. The many welcoming faces that make up this multilingual, multicultural school, which provides a creative and cooperative learning environment for all learners, greet them.

The Dual Language Program has been recognized locally, regionally, and nationally for improving the quality of education of English Language Learners (ELLs). Its success can be attributed to the high level of parental support and volunteerism, the multitude of programs offered in partnership with city-wide initiatives (Studio in the School, the Philharmonic, and more), and the strong collaboration with area universities (Teachers College, Columbia University, and Bank Street), which adds to the ever-increasing professional standards of the staff.

Parents and other family members of the children are present at every level of the school's functioning. There is a very active PTA. Parents volunteer in classrooms and as lunchroom monitors and library aides. In addition to various fundraising projects, parents provide their thinking and time as members of the Schoolwide Projects Committee.

Added to the expertise of these "first teachers" of the children, PS165 has continued to build partnerships with various citywide initiatives. Paintings, sculptures, drawings and structures created by children with the guidance of Studio in a School artists can be seen from the moment you enter the building. Other enrichment programs include music with the New York Philharmonic, dance with the New York Ballet, and social studies activities with the American Museum of Natural History.

Teacher development and growth is ongoing in this school. Eighty-seven percent of the teaching staff holds a Masters Degree or higher. The Professional Development School partnership with Teachers College, Columbia University, provides teachers with many opportunities to participate in study groups, to engage in teacher research, to attend conferences, and to take credit-bearing courses. The school's collective knowledge base is continuously strengthened and enlarged by teachers' willingness to give of themselves and of their time. Furthermore, as a member of the Writing Project at Teachers College, many teachers at PS165 agree to try new methods and to meet to discuss what they learn.

## **The Action Research Team**

Continuing members of the PS165 D&D Action Research team are: Amanda Hartman (3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher), Evelyn Marzan (AP), Dr. María Torres-Guzmán (Teachers College), Dr. Carmen Mercado from Hunter College, and Victor Cole from the Education Alliance at Brown University. The team has changed from last year to include Irma Marzan, the school's new principal, Merrill Aaron, the assistant to the principal, and Gloria Scorse, the monolingual representative who attended the mid-year conference of the DDSI.

## **The Action Research Questions**

The D&D at PS165 was engaged in the study of two research questions during AY1999-2000.

- (1) How were spaces created for teachers' professional growth in the school?
- (2) What are the exemplary practices in literacy?

The goal with respect to the first question was to finish analyzing the teacher interviews that were conducted during the first year. While the task was primarily the responsibility of the IHE's involved, the analysis process was discussed by the entire D&D group.

For the second question, it was decided that the D&D would document what PS165 teachers were doing during their 90-minute literacy block and identify literacy practices that may be exemplary. The D&D worked with the PS165 Literacy Study Group which is composed of twelve teachers who meet regularly to discuss the literacy practices they engage in or would like to set up in their classrooms; they also discuss literacy items that are under discussion or mandate at the school level.

## **The Action Research Process**

The 1999 fall semester began with purpose; the goals were set for the year and meetings were scheduled. However, there were some difficulties in accomplishing what was set forth initially. One of the consultants was not available until December because of work schedule conflicts; one of the members was ill; and there were some misunderstandings and miscommunications on the schedule for visits. Nonetheless, the

group discussed some of the difficulties and during the winter and spring made reasonable progress on both documentation and dissemination objectives.

### **Documentation**

Objective One: Analyze the teacher interviews conducted during the first year.

Sixteen of the audio taped interviews were transcribed by September. These sixteen and two more were cleaned up to ensure anonymity. A system for locating and managing the rest of the interview tapes was also established. Three of the team members were trained at Teachers College, Columbia University, to use NVIVO, a computerized program for qualitative analysis, and they began categorizing the data. Three interviews were read by each of the three members taking the class in order to establish inter-rater reliability. At the time of writing this report, the following are activities to be completed:

- Locating the remaining 12 tapes/notes of interview for transcription and preparation for analysis;
- Establishing inter-rater reliability in the categorizations; and
- Reporting the results.

Objective Two: Identify and document exemplary literacy practices occurring in the school.

In December, the D&D at PS165 established a schedule for visits (during January and February) to the classrooms of teachers involved in the Literacy Study Group. If the members were team teaching, their partners were also included. All but two teachers from the study group were visited. Initially, the plan was to have an IHE and a teacher visit together since the intervisitation of teachers was in keeping with already existing practices in the school. However, the teacher intervisitation did not take place.

In order to establish reliability in the observation, the IHE representatives chose one teacher for all the members of the observation subgroup to visit. Two members were able to do this and established a process for the observations. First, team members would visit the classrooms. Then they would meet with the teacher, either in a group, as a team, or individually, depending on what could be arranged. The questions for the teachers were reflective - primarily about the planning and implementation of the instruction that had been observed. The last step before leaving the building was meeting with one of the school team members to identify exemplary practices. The third member of the IHE subgroup was informed of the process.

Meetings were held to establish the process of analysis and to dialogue collectively about the exemplary practices. Finally, the group met in May to review the draft of the final report.

### **Dissemination**

Objectives related to dissemination were met for the first time this year. In April, two teachers from the school and one IHE member presented at the American Educational Research Association annual conference in New Orleans. Their focus was on the findings of PS165's collective work with respect to teacher education. In May, another team (the teacher liaison and the principal) presented on teacher research and the education of ELLs at the local conference of the American Federation of Teachers.

## Exemplary Practices for ELLs

The two focus areas of the D&D were professional development and literacy. The first is a continuation of the topic of research selected during the first year; and the second is an interest of at least three members of the group. In the following section, the D&D of PS165 will present the results and insights of both areas of focus.

### **Professional Development: Affirming Collective Leadership**

Upon return from their presentation in New Orleans, one teacher walked into the D&D meeting and said, “Leadership, that’s it; that’s what its about. We are leaders.” The other teacher who had attended AERA had emailed the IHE liaison stating the same idea. Their message: the school has developed a culture that promotes leadership in a variety of ways.

Locating spaces for teacher growth and creating a culture of professionalism at PS165 was the theme of the first year. While the first year data has yet to be organized in a systematic way, the D&D has witnessed what many teachers feel in this school. They participate in decisions with respect to the directions their school takes. They know they can take leadership within the school. The evidence that D&D has collected is just a sample of what occurs in the school as a whole. For example, the literacy group the D&D focused on during the second year was formed at the initiative of the teachers; they are a voluntary group that decided to undertake the challenges of being accountable to each other with respect to the literacy practices in their classrooms. Study groups on different subjects, the Professional Development School, and other school/university relationships have transformed the school into a learning institution, a center of pedagogy.

An initial look at the first year data tells us that not all teachers participate as leaders, but they all acknowledge the changes in instruction which have occurred as a result of the entry of the previous administration and how they have grown as a result. They are all examining the quality of their practices. The school's participation in the public display of teacher work in an end-of-the-year celebration of the Professional Development School (May 24<sup>th</sup>) is an example of how the entire school established an audience for teacher reflection on the quality of their work.

There are other examples of how leadership has become an element of the culture of the school. Given the D&D-IHE liaison’s connection with the school through the PDS and as a member of an institution that services the school district, she is able to see how parents have also established their role in the leadership of their school. This year one of the parents led a TC team in the development of a document their school would submit to NABE’s *Profiles of Success in Bilingual Education*. Two teachers, two former teachers, one former student teacher, and a parent are working on publishing papers of their work in and with the school and/or are developing research proposals for future work.

What the teachers who went to New Orleans said, however, had greater significance. They were acknowledging the importance of their work in the context of the nation as a whole and they were recognizing their leadership beyond the school. When they attended other research presentations at AERA, they were seeking to learn from what other schools were doing. Instead, they came to understand how valuable the

work they were doing was and how solidly they were advancing the work of educating ELLs. They affirmed the collective leadership that exists in the school and of the school's leadership with respect to the nation as a whole.

### **Literacy: Read Alouds in L1 and L2**

Two teaching teams were observed planning the Read Aloud collaboratively. They chose a book available in both languages that was age appropriate, and thematically connected to the curriculum. According to the teachers, books were selected throughout the year so that they varied in difficulty and genre. The teachers studied the texts and planned for how the reading would occur, by chapter, teacher, group, and language. Each teacher read the same chapter on the same day, but in different languages to one of their two student groups. On a given day a chapter would be in Spanish for one group of students; the same day, the same chapter is read to the second group in English. The next chapter would be read in English to group A and in Spanish to group B. The teachers planned their language objectives as well. They think the one-day English, one-day Spanish model helps students develop their imaginations. In addition, students learn how to listen to the subtleties of the different languages, they expand their vocabulary in both languages, and they learn how to take notes and respond to partners.

A comparison of the Spanish and English read-alouds led the group to discuss contrasts between them. For example, the Spanish teachers tended to pause to explain the text and/or the language of the text more frequent than the English teachers. The nature of the pauses was also different. The pauses in Spanish were either in the form of guiding questions or explanations. The explanations were not the kind that dragged on, just enough was said in order to sustain attention and interest in the text. In the English classrooms, the pauses were significantly different. In one class, there was only one pause in which the teacher asked the students to write whatever they were thinking about. She continued reading when she saw they were finished, and at the end the students shared what they wrote. These interactions around the text are of a different quality: one was less social and public while the other was more personal and private.

Whether a guiding question or an explanation, the Spanish teachers felt that what they did was geared towards ensuring understanding. In English, the pauses were cues for note taking practice or partner dialogue. When the teachers were asked about it, one of them stated that the choice of the book was made because it was solid in English, but that the translation required that the teacher give constant explanations of the text in order to ensure that the students understood what was being read. Another said that her decisions about when to stop depended on what she thought was important to understand about the meaning or the language of the text. One of the English teachers thought her pauses were associated with her desire to teach students how to use the tone of voice as a cue. A pause could indicate that the ideas expressed in the text might be important and provided a cue for note taking.

The D&D team explored the differences between the Spanish and English read-alouds. Various explanations for the pauses were deemed reasonable, but the group felt that we would need more observations to speak more conclusively about a pattern. The ideas entertained as plausible were the following:

- The difference between the two could be due to the nature of translated texts. This form of organizing read-alouds necessitates translations. There was discussion around how the two languages differ from each other, how narrative might be more linear in English than in Spanish, and what this means for translations. An associated factor was where in the story the instruction occurred. In one of the Spanish read-alouds, one of the observers had noticed that there was a lengthy introduction of the text. It was speculated that there might be more explanations from the teacher as a preparation device at the beginning than in the middle or end of a text.
- Another explanation could be that the differences were related to the language being taught. Both the English and the Spanish teachers have to read the text prior to instruction via read-alouds. The Spanish teacher has to also monitor the quality of translation, if the original is in English, and/or language variations, depending on what variety the children speak. Moreover, when teaching in Spanish, even though the majority of the students are ELLs, the gap between the language spoken by the child and the sophistication of the academic written language appears to be greater than in English. It was speculated that students had greater access to more sophisticated English, especially in writing, than they had to academic language in Spanish. Thus, the teacher has to bridge not just the code (English vs. Spanish), the language variety (Mexican vs. Dominican), the language/linguistic complexity (levels of academic language), and narrative styles (linear vs. digressive), but also has to work with cultural subtleties embedded in the texts.
- A third explanation was associated with the reading of student knowledge. It was speculated that more seasoned teachers would be able to adjust the text to student understanding and be more attentive to student engagement with the text than more novice teachers. Thus, the strategic use of pauses can be related to the knowledge the teacher has of the students. Or the inverse, it was speculated that these were different "models" of literacy involved.
- A fourth explanation of the differences was associated with the pressures of testing in English. There is a teacher belief that building the student's capacity to sustain silent reading for longer periods of time has an impact on their attentiveness and understanding of the read-alouds. The literacy group expressed a desire to study stamina in reading in preparation for the lengthy passages students have to wade through in test situations. Thus, it was speculated that the difference between the English and the Spanish read-alouds was associated with this belief.

The D&D felt that during the third year, the differences in the English and Spanish literacy periods should be studied. The read-alouds were one of the practices to examine more closely. The bilingual process needs to be described - the details that teachers need to know in order to implement a similar process and the types of decisions they have to make. Since a necessary component of the model is teacher collaboration, in addition to looking closely at the dual language teams, the addition of a monolingual

team would be advisable. The read-alouds would be videotaped - at least three teams three times during the year at different stages - the beginning, middle and end of the text. Because they are different languages and different histories in teaching, the videotaping could explore the different plausible explanations. Such a study will require 12 days of videotaping (which includes studying the teacher, setting up trials, and actual videotaping), and 3 hours of transcription for each hour of videotaping (9 hours times three teams), and an hour and a half of categorizing time per hour of videotaping.

### **Contextualizing language instruction**

There were various occasions during which IHE members observed teachers contextualizing language learning: teaching writing, grammar, and editing during the agenda for the day activity; digressing to connect a cultural practice to a concept emerging from the text, using book illustrations to identify characters and construct a plot prior to dealing with the language of the text, and more. Three examples of how teachers tried to make connections between students and learning objectives are provided in the Appendix.

All of the examples demonstrate how skills around literacy can be taught in contextualized ways. Taking time to notice language issues during classroom routines helps create a positive attitude toward the richness of language and makes the students participants in the construction and reconstruction of the collective text. Teachers must connect their knowledge of students and their cultural knowledge of the cultural group to which students' belong to help them connect self to text in order to gain deeper understanding of what is read. And the use of illustrations, although a different level of context, helps to build the student's confidence that he or she knows what the story is about before tackling the decoding skills.

Regarding contextualizing, the D&D group did not explore assertions in the same way as with the read-alouds. Instead, there was general discussion about the need for purposefulness in teaching and about how teachers had to be good observers of self and children so that they can detect when children are lost and it becomes necessary to adopt their teaching.

### **Creating learning environments**

Various aspects of creating a learning environment were discussed: displays, the use of word walls, independent reading, and preplanning. Dealing with disappointment and creating a community with students were also discussed.

**Displays:** There were differences observed in classroom displays. In one classroom, the use of thematic units around social studies was evident. One chart connected the children to their country of origin; another showed the countries of Latin America along with their popular sports and music; in another the countries and their capitals were on display; and, finally, there were student essays on "the most beautiful place in the world." This was a different display than "steps for spelling new words," or "rules for working with a partner," which listed classroom norms that were sometimes in evidence when the students worked together and sometimes not.

The discussion of the D&D group was that there were many purposes for displays and they demonstrated the richness of learning environments. In some classrooms the purpose was evident and the children's behavior made it come alive. In other classrooms, the purpose of a display was canceled out because it was disconnected to students and/or the curriculum. The school will pick up this topic and try to get teachers to think about the purpose of displays, when they can go from displays to reference notebooks, and the like.

**Word walls:** Word walls are parts of the displays, but they have a special significance in connection with literacy. In one case, a teacher was observed using the word wall during the morning collective writing activity to help students spell out a word. She asked one of the students to look at the word wall and find a word that sounded like the one they were trying to spell. The student was able to spell the new word by using one he already knew. In another classroom, the children were observed going to the word wall when they got stuck during journal writing time.

The word wall discussion was similar to the general display discussion because the words used indicated different purposes. Some teachers set up the wall with the most common words, others set it up with content vocabulary, and some set it up with no apparent instructional purpose because the students do not have ready access to it. Again, this is a subject that will be taken up in the school.

**Independent reading:** This year teachers were asked to level the books used in independent reading. Each book is labeled and each student is supposed to know the range that is appropriate to his/her reading level. They are to choose five books for independent reading. Some teachers organize the books in book baggies, others in baskets, and still others in carton containers they call libraries.

The D&D observation team found the variety in ways of organizing the independent reading was something that could help others and give choices. We felt that it meant that teachers needed to spend time organizing in the classroom and that the time spent was evident where the practice was observed.

**Preplanning:** The organizing of instruction and the materials to be used is evident in independent reading and in the smoothness of transitions observed. In various lessons, teachers had the materials for a few lessons organized to their right so that they could choose what they needed without interrupting the lesson. There was a lengthy discussion on the prereading and preplanning the teachers collaborated on in setting up and reflecting on the read-alouds.

**Dealing with disappointment:** The smoothness of the transitions and the flow of the lessons were not solely attributed to preplanning. Members of the D&D team felt that how teachers learned to deal effectively with disappointment with lessons, with students, and with themselves was also very important for the smooth functioning of the classroom. A discussion of preplanning, physical cues to students (applause, etc.), embedded strategies for allowing students to channel their energies so that they could focus on the learning, issues around control, and so forth were all related to how smoothly a day progressed.

Another aspect of the discussion was the program and school-wide perceptions of students. Some teachers believe that the children in the different programs are different. Other teachers claim there is no difference in the students and that it is more of an attitudinal issue. The D&D members felt that this was another area that needed to be

captured on video, because while there are behavioral, body language, and linguistic features associated with the messages teachers give children and their responses to children's behaviors, this was one of the areas in which a picture says more than a thousand words. Another suggestion is to get teachers to reflect more systematically about their lessons - what they had planned, what they changed on the spot, what their thinking was when they changed, and how students responded to the change. The discussion of this issue brought us to think about teaching as building stamina - of learning how to accept things that come your way, not necessarily in a conformist way nor by being paralyzed, but using it as a learning tool. It also brought the group back to professional development and the creation of spaces for teacher development as central to educational reform, because if teachers are enthusiastic about their workplace, they will be about teaching. Creating a more fluid mentoring environment for new teachers was also discussed.

**Building community:** Creating learning environments is not solely about teachers; it's also about students. The flow of the lessons is also about the relationship between the teacher and the students, which brings us back to the culture of the school. Over the last seven years, staff, parents, and supporters have participated in creating the excitement and challenge of striving to achieve a range of goals, seeking financial support to do it, and assembling the human resources needed to create high expectation and meaningful learning.

### **Discussion of Best Practices**

A discussion of what is exemplary and a best practice was enlightening and revealed important issues for the entire D&D initiative. As the PS165 D&D group went through the fieldnotes generated by the observations, the issue of what we documented, what we listed as best practices, and so forth came up. Most of those present had problems with lists of practices, because they do not express the connections with the broader sociocultural life of the school that permits, supports, and promotes the practices. The group's stance is that more of the broader culture has to be portrayed. Another issue was whether all best practices should be documented and studied, or should the D&D effort focus solely on the unique practices that contribute to an understanding of what is different about this school and what it does with ELLs. The group's thinking was that the school needed to document as many practices as possible in order to make clear the sociocultural adaptations that were necessary to make them part of the school. Finally, how do we know something is a best practice if there are no comparisons? The group felt it was necessary to enter into comparison at some point - whether it was embedding our findings in the literature on best practices and/or the education of ELLs, or actually beginning to establish a relationship with another school in order to make comparisons.

### **Plans: Images of Success**

The following are the priorities for the third year:

- To complete the analysis of the interviews of the teachers conducted in the first year;
- To make a set of videos on the read-aloud teams;
- To develop a video on the broader sociocultural environment of the school; and
- To develop a training video on dealing with disappointment and creating community with students.

The D&D team does not expect to complete all three video projects in one year, but we aim to put them in motion and we will give priority to them in the order presented above. The time that would be involved was discussed. One of the research team members calculated that she and her graduate students had invested approximately 350 hours in the work of 1999-2000. These hours must be multiplied in order to get a sense of what is involved in gaining a deeper understanding of educational phenomena. Research work is meticulous and time consuming. What we have cherished highly is the opportunity to engage in accountable talk amongst all involved.

## APPENDIX 1: THREE EXAMPLES OF CONTEXTUALIZING LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Teacher No. 1, who was engaged in the morning agenda, was very purposeful in her presentation. It was the Spanish portion of the Dual Language Program. There was a sense of preparedness about it. Everything she needed to complete all the parts of the learning event were at her side. The flow of the parts and the engagement of students during transitions showed that this learning environment had a routine in which both the teacher and the students agreed on the governing norms. An example in which she contextualized the teaching of spelling will help illustrate her purposefulness.

After setting up the date, the teacher reminds the students what the turn-taking rules are and begins to write on the chart board what she says.

T: OK. Buenos días niños y niñas. [Good morning boys and girls.]

In her writing, she does not include the tildes on the two *ns*.

A student says: Le falta el gorrito. [The hat is missing.]

T: ¿Qué le falta? [What is missing?]

She looks around before she calls on a student; she praises a student who is following the rules.

T: Me gusta como esta X. [I like how X is behaving.]

When she calls on a student, the student, pointing to the *n*, says: Ahí tiene que tener un gorrito. [You need a hat there.]

The teacher corrects the verb, it is a subtle correction.

T: Ahí tiene que poner un gorrito. [You need to put a hat on.]

She puts the tilde on the first *n*, but the students say, no.

The teacher looks at the writing and says: En la segunda *n*? Muchas veces se nos olvidan, se nos olvidan los sombreritos. [On the second *n*? Frequently we forget to put them, we forget the little hats.]

A student contributes to the reason why the hats are necessary: Iba a decir niño y niña. [You were going to change the words.]

T: No iba a sonar bien. [It was not going to sound right.]

Throughout the lesson, the teacher did not directly teach grammar, she demonstrated errors and corrections and she used editorial marks, also on display on the wall, to indicate her corrections.

Teacher No. 2 was doing a read-aloud in Spanish. Belief systems were very important to the story she was reading. She had stopped various times to talk about beliefs the characters held. This time they were talking about the main character. A student had said that the main character was astute.

T: Es astuta porque le hizo un truco a su hermano. Es inteligente porque aprendió a hacer las grullas enseguida. Es una persona que cree en muchas cosas que le van a ayudar. ¿Cuántos conocen la palabra supersticiosa? Yo encuentro que Sakaro es supersticiosa. Les voy a dar una pista. Ella cree en las arañas, ella cree en el cielo sin nubes, ella cree que si hace 1000 grullas, se va a curar. [She is astute because she tricked

her brother. She is intelligent because she learned quickly how to make paper cranes. She is a person who believes that many things will help her. How many of you know what superstition means? I find Sakaro is superstitious. I will give you a hint. She believes in spiders, she believes in the sky without clouds, she believes that if she makes 1000 paper cranes, she will be cured.]

The students respond by talking to each other. They have made the connection and are now talking about their beliefs. The teacher continues the explanation.

T: Yo soy supersticiosa. O, si. Si yo paso por el funeral, yo digo solavaya, solavaya, solavaya. [I am superstitious. Oh, yes. If I pass a funeral house, I say solavaya, solavaya, solavaya.]

Sx3: O, si. [Oh, yes.]

T: Cuando yo veo un gato negro, me hago la cruz. Yo no quiero la mala suerte. [When I see a black cat, I make the sign of the cross. I do not want bad luck to come upon me.]

The children break out in animated talk. The teacher has made the cultural connection around belief systems and how important they can be to the individual.

Teacher No. 3 does a picture walk through the text the small group will be reading.

T: What kind of animals do you see and what is happening?

S: They are eating.

T: Who is eating? Why do you think they are eating? Look at the picture and tell me what you notice? Let's do the picture walk together.

The teacher goes through the entire text with the students and then asks them to read and ask questions of understanding in pairs. By talking through the story from the illustrations, the teacher is giving students an understanding of the characters and the plot. This gives students strategies for deciphering the print.