

Life lessons on the blacktop

THERE ARE NO BIASES on the blacktop or elsewhere at Pioneer Junior High School in Upland, Anita Marquez and her tutors see to it.

Here it's all about PEOPEL — Physical Education Opportunity Program for Exceptional Learners. It's a modified P.E. class designed to promote self-esteem, dignity, social interaction and friendship. And it's working. The program isn't new. It started in 1984, but it has become so engrained in the school's culture that it has become one of the most popular partnerships on campus.

Each year, eighth graders are invited to apply to become tutors to fellow classmates who have a disability or some physical challenge.

Tutors are trained and then paired for the year with students living with Down syndrome, autism, a learning disability or a visual or hearing impairment.

Together they share a one-on-one interaction that goes beyond making a basket or kicking a ball. Those in the class meet the same standards for learning, but at a slower pace with softer equipment and a large dose of civility.

"Many of these students spend their days in self-contained classrooms with little social interaction, that is until this program," Marquez said. "Now they are out with their fellow students, talking between classes and at lunch. I can't tell you how much these kids light up when they see their buddies. This has led to terrific relationships."

Marquez never thought about teaching anything other than physical education when she received her bachelor's degree from Cal State San Bernardino. She knew early on that she wasn't an office/inside person. She wanted to be outside promoting health, fitness and friendships.



» Anita Marquez

PHOTO BY FRANK PEREZ

It seems a lot of people agree with her. Last year, 43 students applied to be tutors, the most in the program's history. There's only room for 25.

"I expect that to be the case again this year because these kids realize how important this is. I've seen growth on every student's part," she said.

— Suzanne Sproul

Education is not complete without a world view

AT CENTRAL LANGUAGE ACADEMY in Ontario, the school's "three C values" — confidence, collaboration, compassion — go hand in hand with one big L: languages. Students here aren't just taught a foreign language, they learn it.

The K-8 public school is unique in the region in that about half of its 650 students are enrolled in "dual language immersion," according to Principal Gorman Bentley. This means that half of their classes are taught in English, half in Spanish. The remaining students are taught largely in English and receive foreign language instruction at least three days each week.

"Every student here receives multiple language instruction," Bentley said. That includes studying a language and country of the week; last year students learned simple, basic, polite phrases in more than 30 languages.

Students from throughout the region attend the school, Bentley says. Central Language Academy serves not only its neighborhood area, but also pupils who travel from Claremont, San Dimas,



» Gorman Bentley and his team

Upland, Rancho Cucamonga, Pomona, Chino Hills and San Bernardino. Seventeen members of the staff have their own children enrolled there as well.

The magnet school opened four years

ago, the culmination of two full years of planning. Bentley guided it through that process and became the school's inaugural principal.

In all, he taught school for 13 years, seven of those in bilingual education, before moving into an administrative post in Ontario-Montclair coordinating bilingual education at the district level. While in that position, he helped write a grant application for dual-language immersion at one of the schools. That grant was approved, and similar programs eventually were started at two other schools. Bentley then was asked to pull all three together.

The Central Language Academy continues to thrive and has expanded to include sign language and the upcoming introduction of Mandarin. As part of the language instruction, the school also teaches about customs and traditions in other parts of the world.

"There are amazing life gifts that go along academically with learning another language," Bentley said. "It's global competency, as well."

— Carla Sanders