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Class Acts: A Q&A with Modesto teacher Aracely Franco

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Sherry Rodriguez nominated Aracely Franco for Class Acts. Rodriguez said Franco never gave up on her daughter even though she was struggling. Franco also is good at keeping parents informed. Rodriguez added that Franco invited her daughter and other students who had progressed to her house for hot cocoa, and she is sure her daughter and the other students look up to Franco and will never forget her.

Name: Aracely Castillo Franco

Age: 38

City of residence: Modesto

Occupation: First-grade teacher at Orville Wright Elementary School

Family: Husband, Jesus; children, Natalie and Andrea

Education background: Bachelor's degree in creative arts, minor in art education; bilingual teaching credential with a supplemental authorization in Spanish

Teaching experience: Twelve years teaching first grade. In a two-way bilingual immersion program, transitional bilingual and English sheltered.

Q: Why did you get into teaching?

A: In high school, I was given the opportunity to be a teacher's aide for a first-grade class. After that experience, I was always drawn in by tutoring jobs. I tutored high school students and incoming college freshmen and I realized that helping others to reach their highest potential would be an ideal profession. I couldn't be happier with that choice.

Q: What is your favorite thing about being a teacher?

A: The daily interaction with the students. I loved my time in the classroom. There are miracle moments to be experienced: when a student has been struggling and suddenly the light goes on, when I see kids cooperatively working to accomplish a difficult task, meeting a student from five or six years before who comes up and thanks me for teaching him how to read. Those moments are golden.

Q: What is the most challenging part of your job?

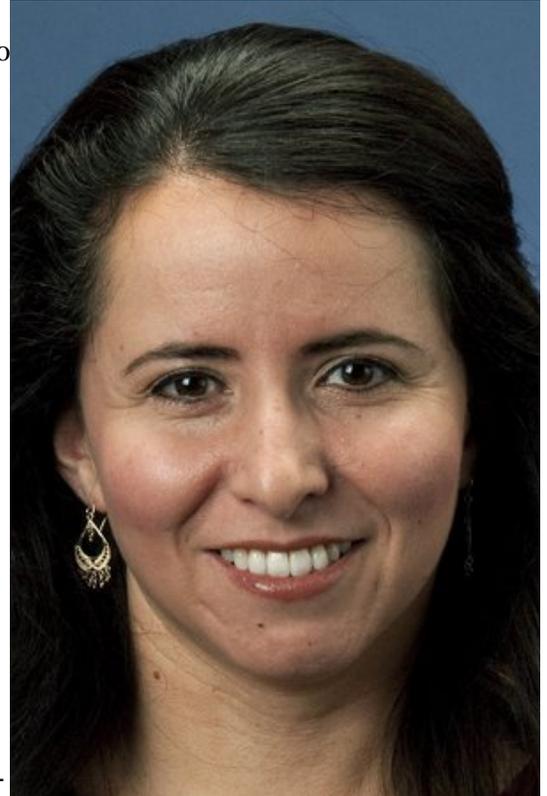
A: Being flexible to try new methods and ideas and learning from them. Having a variety of learning styles and learning abilities is a challenge as I try to meet each and every student's needs. I need to build on each student's strengths and be creative in how I help them overcome their weaknesses and struggles.

Q: What is the most important lesson you've learned?

A: Being a mentor for my students and the life lessons I teach them are far more valuable than any academic lesson.

Q: What is your favorite teaching tool or activity?

A: **PeaceBuilders** is a schoolwide violence- prevention program that teaches children and adults to be kindhearted members of society. Its essence is a common language that helps set behavioral expectations, reduce aggression and transform the climate and culture of any environment to one that is cooperative, productive and academically



Aracely Franco, first-grade teacher from Orville Wright Elementary School, for Class Acts - Modesto Bee - Karen Aiello

successful. **PeaceBuilders** is a way of life that creates a safe, positive environment for all children.

Q: What advice do you have for students?

A: Take charge of your own learning. Don't be afraid to ask questions. The dumbest question is the one that you never ask.

Q: What advice do you have for parents?

A: Get involved in your child's education. You are your child's first teacher. I believe modeling is the most powerful way to affect a child's learning. Model the love of learning at home by reading to and in front of your child. The help and support you give your child is essential. Your child needs to know that you are interested in his schoolwork and activities.

Q: What will it take to improve academic success in the valley?

A: Parental involvement is a vital step in improving academic success in the valley. A home-school cooperative method will help each student arrive at his academic potential as well as develop responsibility and self-discipline. This combined effort of home and school assists the student in extending learning beyond the classroom and in improving classroom achievement.

Q: How do you reach students not interested in school?

A: Children need to understand and make meaningful connections to their personal life with what they are learning. I let their interest lead my teaching and use these interests to spark motivation.

Q: What one area should schools put more emphasis on?

A: Schools need less emphasis on test scores and more emphasis on teaching our children to become problem solvers and creative thinkers. The emphasis has become "pass the test," not "teach the kids." Artificial timelines have been established with no regard to the actual pacing necessary to teach. Teachers need the time to reteach something if our students don't get it the first time.

Q: If you could change one thing about the educational system, what would it be and why?

A: Who will make sure our schools are teaching our kids an education that will prepare them for the 21st century? Schools are dependent on financial support for education. State representatives need to be committed to the development of students as future skilled employees. Students — and the schools they attend — need the resources and opportunities for learning in every area to prepare them for the 21st century.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Class Acts feature will wrap up its school year June 11 and head off on summer vacation. Look for Class Acts to return in August for the 2012-13 school year.