

Interview with Alicia Gonzales (Pojoaque Valley Middle School, Santa Fe, NM)



Bluebird: What subjects do you teach?

Alicia: Spanish, Native American History, and Mathematics.

Bluebird: Do you like teaching math?

Alicia: The main reason that I love to teach math is because I was never good at math when I was a student. I always was the student that thought, "I'm so bad at this, and I'll never get it." Then, when I was offered the opportunity to get my math teaching degree, I had excellent teachers, who valued what I thought, and who showed me different ways and modeling and how to teach and how to make those connections. So I want to be such a teacher. I want my students to understand that they can do it. I tell them, it's not that hard. You have to just think about it, and you break it down, and you understand each piece.

Bluebird: What else do you want to tell us about your teaching style?

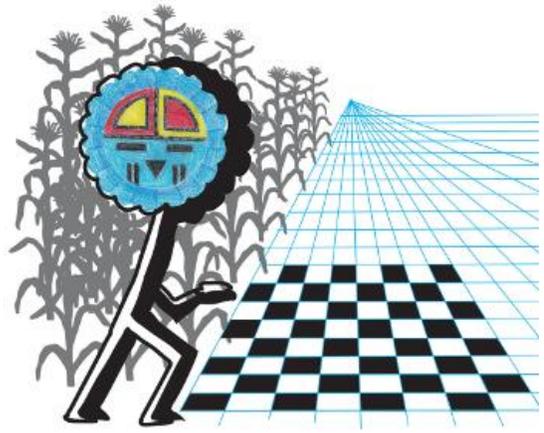
Alicia: My style of teaching has evolved over the years, in that I'm not going to give students the answer, I don't have the answers. I want them to give me the answers. I don't want them to have all the correct answers all the time, I want them to find mistakes and tell me why their solution doesn't work? What do they think should work? Does it make sense? Explain this to me. I emphasize the more in-depth thinking instead of just getting the right answer.

Bluebird: What Bluebird MC materials did you use in your classroom?

Alicia: We did the chessboard [Tawa] and the tiling with dominos puzzles [from Bluebird MC Issue #4].

Bluebird: Which puzzles did your students like and why?

Alicia: My students really liked both puzzles. Some of the comments that I got were that they felt more confident. They never thought math to be fun, and now they can see that it can be. And they feel like they accomplished something and they actually feel good about it. The students were not afraid to try. They didn't have to worry about getting it wrong. Once they realized that this was their own investigation, they just kept going.



Bluebird: As a teacher, what did you want to accomplish by using the puzzles?

Alicia: I don't want it to be a meaningless project, that they're just trying different ways of tiling the shapes. So I asked them: where did you start? How did you know what to do? What was your thinking? Just to get them to think about what they were seeing and what they were creating, and how the shape was growing. It's interesting to hear what they have to say.

Bluebird: Why do you like using puzzles and free play in your classroom?

Alicia: Approaching math concepts in this way allows for everybody to participate, more advanced students and struggling students alike. It also allows everybody to be successful at some level.

Bluebird: What do you value the most about Bluebird MC?

Alicia: What I value the most is making connections and communicating.

Bluebird: This is so good to hear! From the very beginning, the main idea of Bluebird Math Circle has been the creation of a community where people from different areas – geographic, tribal, professional – and ages – students, parents, teachers, grandparents – would be able to connect with each other.

There are also other types of connection – those between art and mathematics, sciences and mathematics, and between different parts of mathematics. Bluebird MC is committed to finding and studying these connections, too.

As for communication, your comment resonates beautifully with what Craig Young (Tuba City Boarding School, Tuba City, AZ, and AIMC Regional Coordinator) pointed out, "Using Bluebird MC materials in a classroom helps me to give voice to the voiceless."

Thank you, Alicia! We hope to continue our mutually rewarding collaboration.