

I am Anita Martinez, an Early Childhood Generalist National Board-Certified Teacher. I teach first grade dual language at Mariano Azuela School. I chose to pursue National Board Certification to further my professional growth, earn my master's degree, and become a highly Accomplished teacher. Thanks to your CPS/CTU Nurturing Teacher Leadership (NTL) program partnership, I have met all three goals. I personally and professionally benefitted from the program design support, and funding.

Going through the NBC process was one of the biggest challenges of my life. It was rigorous and demanding. It was especially difficult as I, myself, am an English Language Learner, and a busy mother of three. In addition to weekly classes, I spent many nights and weekends reading and studying the Early Childhood Generalist Standards, and analyzing whether or not, and to what degree, I met them. I reflected daily on what and how I would need to improve my practice in order to meet these high teaching standards. I read many articles and books on pertinent topics. For example, the importance of play in the classroom – even at the first-grade level, was reinforced in the book. “The Foundation of Children’s Learning” by Lisa Murphy. In fact, I suggested to the CPS Board members that they read this book to help inform their decisions about pedagogy and curriculum for early childhood programming, including 1st and second grades. I also dedicated much time writing portfolio entries; working with my mentor team; and analyzing my instruction, the videos of my teaching, and my students’ work – all to improve my practice. In addition, I spent many hours in my classroom trying out new techniques I learned in NTL, implementing research-driven pedagogy, and putting new content knowledge into practice. To be honest, I wanted to quit many times, but thanks to this program, I was not alone in my journey. My Nurturing Teacher Leadership family wouldn’t let me quit. My cohort facilitators, professional development providers, program leaders and mentors provided much guidance and support. They never gave up on me and went out of their way to provide extra support when I needed it most.

As an early childhood Generalist National Board-Certified Teacher, I now fully understand the importance of addressing the needs of the whole child, recognizing that each student is unique, capable, and naturally inquisitive. Throughout this journey, for example, I deepened my appreciation for the role of play, even in 1st and 2nd grade. Early childhood is not just pre-k and kindergarten. Play is the most authentic way to bring joy to learning in a 3 to 8 year old classroom that is also student centered, and research-based. Through play, even my students in first grade at 6-7 years old, regulate their emotions, develop social skills, and build critical thinking abilities. In my classroom, play has fostered a positive learning environment. During this process, I also formed wonderful and continuing professional and personal relationships with my colleagues because of the Cohort model that the NTL program is based on.

I want you to know that even though this is the most rigorous professional development process I have ever been through, it is do-able for all our teachers. In fact, I was one of the few candidates who did not achieve National Board Certification after my 2nd year in

the program; but NTL leadership was there to support me through the retake process, and I am now part of NTL's 93% success rate. When I found out that I was just three points short of achieving certification on my first attempt, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and encouragement from my Nurturing Teacher Leadership family. This time, I never even considered giving up. Once again, I received invaluable support from my mentors.

Since becoming an NBCT, I have taken on more leadership roles and contribute to professional development initiatives. I have been able to benefit not just my students but also add value to the district. For example, I presented at the CPS Dual Language Conference on "Dominar las convenciones: desarrollar sólidas habilidades de escritura a través de dictados semanales y lecciones de Puente." Mastering Conventions: Developing Strong Writing Skills Through Weekly Dictations and Bridge Lessons. I taught other teachers of young children that it is essential for students to develop strong word study skills, including mechanics, spelling, punctuation, fluency, and organization of ideas. To support this learning, I taught others the strategy of El dictado (Dictation), which reinforces these foundational skills in an engaging and structured way. It was in NTL that I learned the importance of using explicit vocabulary instruction because this is a strong predictor of reading comprehension.

I appreciate NTL's continued advocacy for increased support for English Language Learners such as providing more bilingual staff and assistants to support students, as well as enforceable class size limits for all age groups so students can get more 1-1 teacher support. This is important to me because I have refugee and newcomer students who are non-readers or writers.

I am grateful for the NTL opportunity to grow in my profession, helping me achieve my goals. My experience in Nurturing Teacher Leadership has reinforced my commitment to student learning, deepened my understanding of the subjects I teach and how to effectively deliver them, enhanced my ability to monitor student progress, and strengthened my role as an advocate for my students. This learning has made a significant impact on my students. They are now active learners. They engage in meaningful collaborative discussions, self-monitoring their own behavior, and demonstrate respect and empathy toward one another. I no longer rely on behavioral charts or fill-in-the-blank answers since implementing strategies I learned through National Board. My school has also benefited from my participation in the Nurturing Teacher Leadership program because I brought this learning to our kindergarten through 2nd grade teachers.

I encourage all teachers reading this to sit for National Board Certification through the Nurturing Teacher Leadership program.