

CAMINO NUEVO CHARTER ACADEMY LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

This is an excerpt from:

Creative Community Building: 2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

Bruner Foundation, Inc.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2002104398
ISBN: 1-890286-05-2

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CAMINO NUEVO AT-A-GLANCE

WHAT IS CAMINO NUEVO CHARTER ACADEMY?

- A K-5 public charter elementary school located in the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles;
- A community school that involves parents in the process of their children's education and also offers a wide variety of opportunities to community residents;
- One of four schools founded by Pueblo Nuevo Development Corporation in cooperation with a distinguished team of educators and the local community;
- Part of a community revitalization strategy for the MacArthur Park neighborhood that also includes a nearby middle school, an employee-owned janitorial business, thrift shop, and church.

GOALS

- To create an elementary school that would provide neighborhood children an excellent education (including English language proficiency) in a safe and nurturing school environment;
- To ensure that the elementary school, through community programming and parent involvement, becomes a stabilizing and energizing force in the MacArthur Park neighborhood;
- To eliminate blight caused by a derelict mini-mall and design a school that would serve as a catalyst for reinvestment by other neighborhood property owners;
- To create a new model for elementary education in disadvantaged communities in Los Angeles.

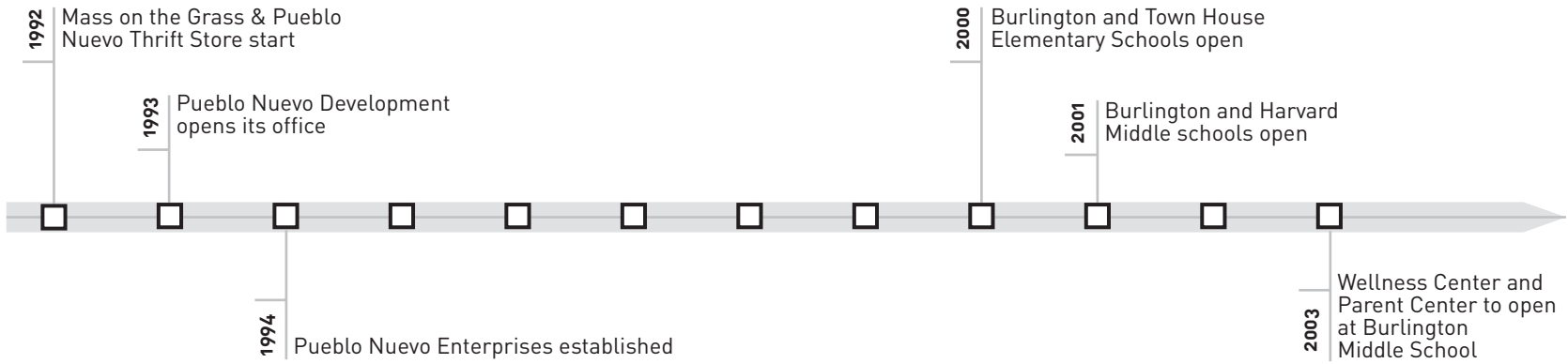
PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

- 1992
Mass on the Grass & Pueblo Nuevo Thrift Store start
- 1993
Pueblo Nuevo Development opens its office
- 1994
Pueblo Nuevo Enterprises established
- 2000
CNCA, Burlington and Town House Elementary Schools open
- 2001
Middle schools (Burlington and Harvard) open
- 2003
Wellness Center and Parent Center to open at Burlington Middle School

KEY PARTICIPANTS

(those interviewed indicated with an asterisk)*

- Rev. Philip Lance*
Executive Director, Pueblo Nuevo Development
- Catherine Griffin*
Pueblo Nuevo Development
- Ana Ponce*, Principal, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy
- Anita Landecker*
Executive Director, Excellent Education Development (ExED))
- Dr. Paul Cummins*, New Visions
- Louise Manuel*, Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)
- Kevin Daly*, Architect, Daly Genik
- Dana Cuff*
Programmer and planner, Community Design Associates
- Grace Arnold*
Charter Schools Division, LA Unified School District
- Parents, staff and students* from Camino Nuevo Charter Academy



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

URBAN CONTEXT

Note: Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (CNCA) consists of four campuses in Los Angeles: two elementary schools, and two middle schools. The school that received the 2003 Rudy Bruner Award is the Burlington Street elementary campus, located in the MacArthur Park neighborhood. CNCA, therefore, refers to the Burlington elementary site, unless otherwise noted.

The MacArthur Park area is one of the poorest and most densely populated neighborhoods in Los Angeles, with population density estimated at 145 persons per acre, compared with a citywide average of 14 persons per acre. (*Architecture Review*, Nov. 2002) Most residents are recent immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and other Central American countries. According to the Pueblo Nuevo staff, it is not unusual for four families to live together in a two-bedroom apartment. Despite the fact that the Los Angeles Redevelopment Authority is building some new housing in the area, there is an ongoing crisis in affordable housing in the MacArthur Park neighborhood, as well as in Los Angeles in general.

Annual income within the census district is the lowest in Los Angeles; the average median income is \$11,475. The poverty rate in the area is 35% compared with a citywide rate of 18%. Recent immigrants often stay in the neighborhood only until they have the



MacArthur Park area commercial street



Neighborhood retail

opportunity to move to an improved living situation. Turnover is therefore high; many people live in the neighborhood less than two years. This trend, together with high unemployment, low paying jobs, and pervasive poverty undermines neighborhood stability and contributes to the prevalence of gangs, drug trade, and violent crime.



Camino Nuevo Charter Academy founder, Philip Lance

PROJECT HISTORY

In the early 1990s, Philip Lance was serving as an Episcopal minister in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, where he had started a Spanish language ministry and developed his own congregation. When his church made the decision to tear down its building to make way for a new one, Lance lost his position. He was then recruited by All Saints Church, a wealthy Beverly Hills congregation interested in reaching out to inner-city residents. Lance was by then deeply committed to working with the urban poor and All Saints provided him with a modest stipend to continue that work.

During his tenure in Echo Park, Lance had been an active supporter of the “Justice for Janitors” movement that had fought hard for a living wage for those serving in janitorial positions throughout the city. When Lance began his work with All Saints, he re-connected with some of the people he had worked with in the janitorial strike. In 1992, around the time of the Rodney King riots, Lance began a gospel-based discussion group that met on Sunday afternoons in MacArthur Park and came to be known as the “Mass on the Grass.” These meetings slowly grew to include some homeless individuals and others from the area who were, for the most part, unemployed.

In addition to being a minister, Lance had been trained by the Industrial Areas Foundation (Saul Alinsky’s group). In combining his ministry with community organizing, Lance focused on forging one-to-one connections with people, and on developing a self-sustaining economic base for the community. His goal was to empower community members to gain the skills and economic

wherewithal to improve their lives. As a first step, Lance and community members settled on the idea of opening a thrift store, with a \$5,000 grant from the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. The store responded to the constant turnover among households, providing a market for used household goods and clothing and at the same time making them available at low cost to those moving in. The shop employed neighborhood residents, filled a local need, and was a source of revenue. In April 1993, Pueblo Nuevo Church rented the storefront next door and opened its chapel, a home for Mass on the Grass. In the same year, Pueblo Nuevo Development (PND) was established as a non-profit corporation.

As director of PND, Lance continued to seek opportunities for community economic development. After considering the

employment options available to residents, such as domestic service and gardening, he concluded they were not sufficiently lucrative or stable to make a difference in the community. In late 1993, Lance established Pueblo Nuevo Enterprises (PNE), a for-profit, cooperatively-owned janitorial services company, capitalizing it in part through a personal donation of \$20,000. PNE has grown steadily and the company now employs over 50 people and has \$1 million in revenue. After six months employment, PNE offers employees the opportunity to buy a share of the company for \$500. Each application for membership must be accepted by the cooperative's general assembly. At the time of the site visit, 17 were full members, and another 30 were eligible to join. Clients include mini-warehouses, common areas in affordable housing projects, a state college campus, and small businesses in the Los Angeles area.



PND Thrift Shop



PND Enterprises

PNE profits are distributed according to hours worked. Employee/owners have 50% of their medical insurance paid through the company and receive paid vacations and holidays. Louise Manuel of LISC, which loaned CNCA the funds to purchase the school site, reported attending a meeting of the PNE board. At that meeting, where the review of company finances took place in English and Spanish, everyone understood company financials and its balance sheet. According to Manuel, that is virtually unique in the world of community development, and attests to the skill-development and economic empowerment of employees.

Meanwhile, community residents were growing increasingly concerned about the poor quality of their children's education. At that time, and still today, many children from the neighborhood were failing to learn English and were being bused to schools in

remote locations. In Los Angeles, that could be as far as the San Fernando Valley – sometimes up to an hour each way. This was unsettling and sometimes frightening to newly arrived immigrants unfamiliar with the city and the school system and made it difficult for parents to be involved in the school due to constraints of transportation time and cost.

Also, in response to overcrowding, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) implemented a year-round calendar with three sessions per year, reducing classroom days from 180 to 163. Families, especially if they had children at multiple schools, found the schedule fragmented and inconsistent. And children who were spending too much time at home or on the street, were not acquiring needed skills and language development. At Esperanza, the local public elementary school, overcrowding has resulted in the



Esperanza elementary school

addition of temporary classrooms in trailers, and a year-round calendar that assigns students to shifts, to accommodate overcrowding. Esperanza is close to the bottom of LA schools in performance and is said to have an annual transition rate of 60%, reflecting the fact that families move and kids frequently change schools.

LAUSD operates 959 schools of which 689 are K-5. It serves a population of 906,000 students. Despite a \$9 billion budget, LAUSD is severely constrained by outdated building requirements and codes that make it virtually impossible to acquire adequate tracts of land to build new schools without significant housing displacement or unmanageable land acquisition costs. By one estimate LAUSD needs to build as many as 100 new schools immediately, yet they have not built a new high school in 30 years. It was clear to Lance that the school crisis in Los Angeles would not resolve quickly and that if his constituents wanted better education, PND would have to get directly involved.

BUILDING A TEAM

In response to the concerns of the neighborhood, Lance decided to learn more about educational options available to community residents. In 1998, he met the director of the award-winning Accelerated Charter School and became aware of charter schools' potential for creating educational opportunity and for stabilizing and re-energizing a neighborhood. Only ten charter schools were then operating in Los Angeles, but they had established themselves as venues of experimentation and reform, outside the constraints of conventional school building and development requirements.

Lance reached out to Dr. Paul Cummins, one of the major forces on the Los Angeles educational scene. Cummins had founded the private Crossroads and New Roads independent schools with pioneering curricula focused on art and social/cultural diversity. Retired from the schools, Cummins had established P.S. Arts and New Visions foundations. P.S. Arts provides arts programming in a wide variety of public school settings, while New Visions' mission is to "launch inclusive independent schools which would provide more equitable access to educational excellence for diverse primary and secondary school aged children." (At New Roads School, 50% of the students are non-white and 60% receive scholarship aid.)

Cummins immediately became interested in the challenges of the MacArthur Park neighborhood. He brought in Anita Landecker of Excellence Education Development (ExED), an organization that provides consulting assistance and financial management services to alternative schools. ExED's mission is "to dramatically improve the quality of public education by creating access to K-12 schools with high student achievement in low-income neighborhoods through the vehicle of community-based charter schools." ExED was instrumental in assembling budgets and preparing the charter school application, as well as assisting with finding financing. Lance, with no experience as in an educator, had assembled an exceptionally strong team combining vision and practical management with a commitment to helping underserved neighborhoods.

Both Cummins and Landecker believe strongly that a good school can become a central force in stabilizing and improving



Anita Landecker, ExED



Paul Cummins, New Visions Fdn.



Former mini-mall

communities. Landecker, in fact, had left a high leadership position in LISC's Los Angeles office to focus on education, believing that schools can make a greater difference in community development than can affordable housing or other more traditional bricks-and-mortar projects. Cummins and Landecker believe that effective schools impart skills and passion for learning that enable students to create opportunity in their own lives. They are committed to the notion that the school should serve broader community needs, offering parents opportunities in health care, parenting, language training and other important skills. They believe strongly that if the programs are effective the school will ultimately stabilize the community by strengthening families and encouraging them to stay.

As PND's focus on education was developing, it was negotiating to acquire a derelict mini-mall near its other facilities. The initial intention was to use the mall for PND offices and related programs, but when the idea of a charter school was born, the possibility of converting the mini-mall into a school was tested. LISC provided funding for the feasibility studies which showed that it could be done. LISC then assisted with a portion of the funding for property acquisition, though Lance still had to raise substantial funds. A charter would make the school eligible for operational funding from the state. Lance took his idea back to the community, which was enthusiastic, and the project began in earnest.

Louise Manuel of LISC stated that Lance’s proposal, his track record in the neighborhood, and the team he had assembled convinced them to provide funding. In addition to education experts, Lance had a significant level of real estate expertise on the PND board. Dan Ardell had had a long career in commercial real estate and Eric Heggen is a practicing architect. Despite the fact that PND had less than \$10,000 in the bank at the time, LISC had confidence in the project and its leadership (see Finances). LISC also believed CNCA would become a major catalyst for further investment in the area, a pre-requisite for their lending. With the acquisition of the mini-mall, Camino Nuevo became the first Los Angeles charter school to own its own building.

THE SCHOOL

Four Campuses

CNCA houses 280 students at the Burlington Street elementary campus (the subject of the Rudy Bruner Award application). During the site visit, we learned that it also operates the Town House campus with another 132 K-5 students and, on the opposite end of the Burlington block, a new middle school is in operation, serving 108 students in grades 6-8, with an ultimate enrollment goal of 288. The Harvard Street site, the largest of the campuses, houses 544 middle school students. Demographics vary somewhat among the schools. At all sites, the majority are Spanish speakers, but at Harvard Street, 20% are of Korean and 3.5% of Filipino background. At all four campuses, a significant number, (80%-95%) of students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch and the average daily attendance rate on all four campuses is 95%.



Burlington Street elevation

Creating a Community School

Camino Nuevo is based on the belief that it is “possible for a committed neighborhood to ... help themselves” and give direction to their schools. Since the community’s priorities were language learning and personal safety, CNCA’s Burlington elementary curriculum emphasizes language immersion as well as the arts. The school’s architecture and staffing as well as its operations, are also a response to community concerns about safety, and have emphasized design features which help to keep the school secure.

Among the first challenges faced by any new school is who will attend. At Camino Nuevo, students are enrolled on a first come, first served basis. The initial classes included children who came to



CNCA Students

CNCA from Esperanza. Many of them had significant academic challenges and were struggling in the larger Esperanza setting. Lance notes that in the first year they had many special needs kids who required support from multiple specialists working with them one-on-one. PND views the enrollment profile as a trade-off in other ways as well. In their words, “we had to choose between giving priority to neighborhood children who have the fewest choices about education and who are almost 100% Hispanic, and recruiting from outside the neighborhood to gain racial and ethnic diversity. We chose to remain with our vision of building a community-based school for neighborhood children.”

Camino Nuevo Charter Academy has now completed its third academic year. As reported to the Bruner Foundation team, the first year of operation was challenging. The first principal left in the middle of the year, which was highly disruptive. More recently, the school has a new principal, Ana Ponce, who leads all four campuses. Past dean of the Accelerated School and a former neighborhood resident, Ponce is credited with establishing strong policy and direction for the school, attracting high quality faculty and bringing CNCA a new measure of stability. The consensus shared with us was that the school has worked through its earlier problems and is “hitting its stride.”

In response to parental concerns, as well as the values and philosophy of the founders, CNCA also established its own school calendar. Parents were disheartened by the shortened, fragmented calendar that characterizes LAUSD, feeling that their children were being shortchanged. In response, CNCA instituted a 200-day academic calendar with an additional 30 minutes in each school day. This not only provided more instructional time but has reduced what often would have been unsupervised time at home or on the street. According to Lance, in this way the school becomes an extension of the family structure and offers kids an alternative to the prevalent gang activity and drug culture that surrounds them.

The size and structure of the classes are geared to achieving language proficiency and attaining other basic skills, with personal attention to the students. In kindergarten through 3RD grade, classrooms are limited to 20 students, consistent with California



Principals Ana Ponce and Sue Park

standards. In the classrooms visited by the site team, there were four round tables each with five children and, often, an adult. As the grades progress, students are expected to require less individual attention, and class size increases, to 25 for 4TH and 5TH grade, and 27 for 6TH and 7TH. The class size in these grades is smaller than in other LAUSD schools.

Curriculum

English language development is central to the CNCA model. The vast majority of incoming students are Spanish speakers, most of whom have little or no English spoken at home. The basic learning model is that beginning in kindergarten a small percentage of the school day is conducted in English, while many more hours are dedicated to teaching English. As children move up in grades, the



CNCA classroom

percentage of time in which class is conducted in English increases until proficiency is reached. By 5TH grade, all CNCA students are expected to be bi-lingual.

Parent involvement is also central. Parents of entering students are required to sign a parent pledge, committing to 15 hours of participation per year. Ana Ponce reports that they have little trouble in getting parents to fulfill this obligation and that, through their presence and involvement; they play an important role in supporting the curriculum. The involvement of parents is taken so seriously that CNCA actually issues twice-yearly “parent report cards” that assign a numerical score based upon completion and

timeliness of student homework; parents responsiveness to teacher contacts; students reading at least 25 books; student tardiness; unexcused absences; school uniform; student conduct; responsiveness to school recommendations; completion of service hours; and parent night and school event attendance.

CNCA also emphasizes the arts — at least in part due to the influence of Paul Cummins — and much of the art curriculum is delivered under the auspices of P.S. Arts which teaches music and visual arts to all students (with help from the Crossroads Community Foundation). A dance and movement program is provided through the Gabriella Axelrad Education Foundation; all



CNCA parent volunteers



CNCA tap class in storefront church

CNCA students have classes twice a week and dance is offered after school. This is accomplished despite the challenges of a small campus where space is restricted and there are no dedicated art rooms.

Community Programs

CNCA functions as a center of community activity, with opportunities offered to parents and families after school. The variety of programs is diverse. Vision testing is offered and Lens Crafters provides free glasses to students, 60% of whom were found to need them. In partnering with a local hospital, CNCA offers free health and dental screenings as well as immunizations. An annual Health Fair brings 20 to 30 health agencies to CNCA to showcase free or low-cost services available to the community.

Zulma Suro, Director of Health and Family Programs, described some of the other offerings. A collaboration of local funders sponsors classes in early childhood development. This program uses classrooms after school for a 300-hour, 18-month course that leads to certification for pre-school teacher aides. Twenty-five parents are currently enrolled and for most it is their first time taking college level courses. There is a waiting list, despite the rigorous curriculum. Suro also organizes “monthly institutes” for parents on subjects such as how to help children with homework. These sessions have been attended by up to 120 parents.

For Halloween, Camino Nuevo parents organized a carnival with a high degree of parent involvement. It included a costume event, food

and games, and was well attended. Afterwards the school hosted a thank-you breakfast for parents. While these kinds of events are taken for granted in a middle-class school, they are more unusual for a low-income immigrant community.

The community appears to feel a great deal of ownership of the school. Parents, students and volunteers all express pride in CNCA and appreciation for the colorful, creative new spaces in which to learn. According to the local pastor, the expanded educational opportunity offered there “fills our hearts with increased hope for the future.”



Zulma Suro, Director of Health and Family Programs

Teachers and Administration

Teachers are central to the success of any school. Because CNCA offers the opportunity for creativity in teaching and curriculum development, as well as an unusual degree of parental involvement, CNCA has attracted good teachers. Some come from the LAUSD system, because of the opportunity to teach more creative curricula in an environment where parents and students have selected the school and have a demonstrated commitment to it. All teachers must meet California credential standards. Teacher salaries tend to be higher at Camino Nuevo than at other schools because of the increased number of teaching days and hours. Again, this contributes to a self-selection of teachers willing to work a longer school year. Grace Arnold of LAUSD expressed no concerns about CNCA attracting good teachers away from other schools, and is supportive of the kind of opportunity CNCA offers young teachers.

In visiting the school one gets a strong sense of positive energy and productivity. The children are all in uniform, clean and well groomed (a portion of the cost of uniforms, \$18,000 per year, is donated by a retired physician). The classrooms are well designed and colorful, and are set up with a rich variety of materials and activities. The children seem eager to answer the teacher's questions and the classrooms are orderly and lively. In interviewing a 5th grade student, she was especially enthusiastic about her "AVID" classes which teach study skills and longer-term goals. This student loved CNCA and compared it very favorably to her experience in other LAUSD schools. She welcomed both the longer year and the extended day.



CNCA parents and staff



CNCA classroom



CNCA classroom

DESIGN

PRE-DESIGN AND COMMUNITY PROCESS

The PND board selected Daly Genik from a field of 10 architects who responded to their Request for Proposals. Zola Manzaneres, pastor of Camino Nuevo Church, says community members were involved with every step of the planning process “...meeting with architects, interviewing potential principals, and participating in curriculum design.”

The process was led by the architects who worked closely with Dana Cuff of Community Design Associates (CDA) in developing consensus about the kind of school they wanted. Cuff, who is nationally known for her work in this field, acknowledged that getting significant community input was a challenge in this neighborhood—residents were not accustomed to having direct input into the design process. In addition, language barriers were considerable despite the fact that CDA had a Spanish-speaking partner. So Cuff developed tools to help participants visualize options for spaces and design features. This took the form of a graphic planning workbook that included a variety of images of school environments, which she showed to groups and asked for comments and reactions. According to Cuff, the workbooks were fairly successful and served as a tool to get a sense of community priorities. Among the main conclusions was the importance of security in and around the school. Cuff distributed the results of the workshops through local schools and churches.

Daly Genik then prepared a master plan for the Burlington Street block, with the elementary school as the cornerstone. Acquisition of an adjacent lot for play space was identified as a second phase (now complete) with opening of the middle school at the far corner of Wilshire as third phase (now also complete). (The Wilshire middle school building will also include a family center and a health clinic offering a variety of support and medical services.) The long-range plan calls for acquisition of additional properties in the middle of the block for a performing arts center and pre-school.

PROGRAM AND DESIGN

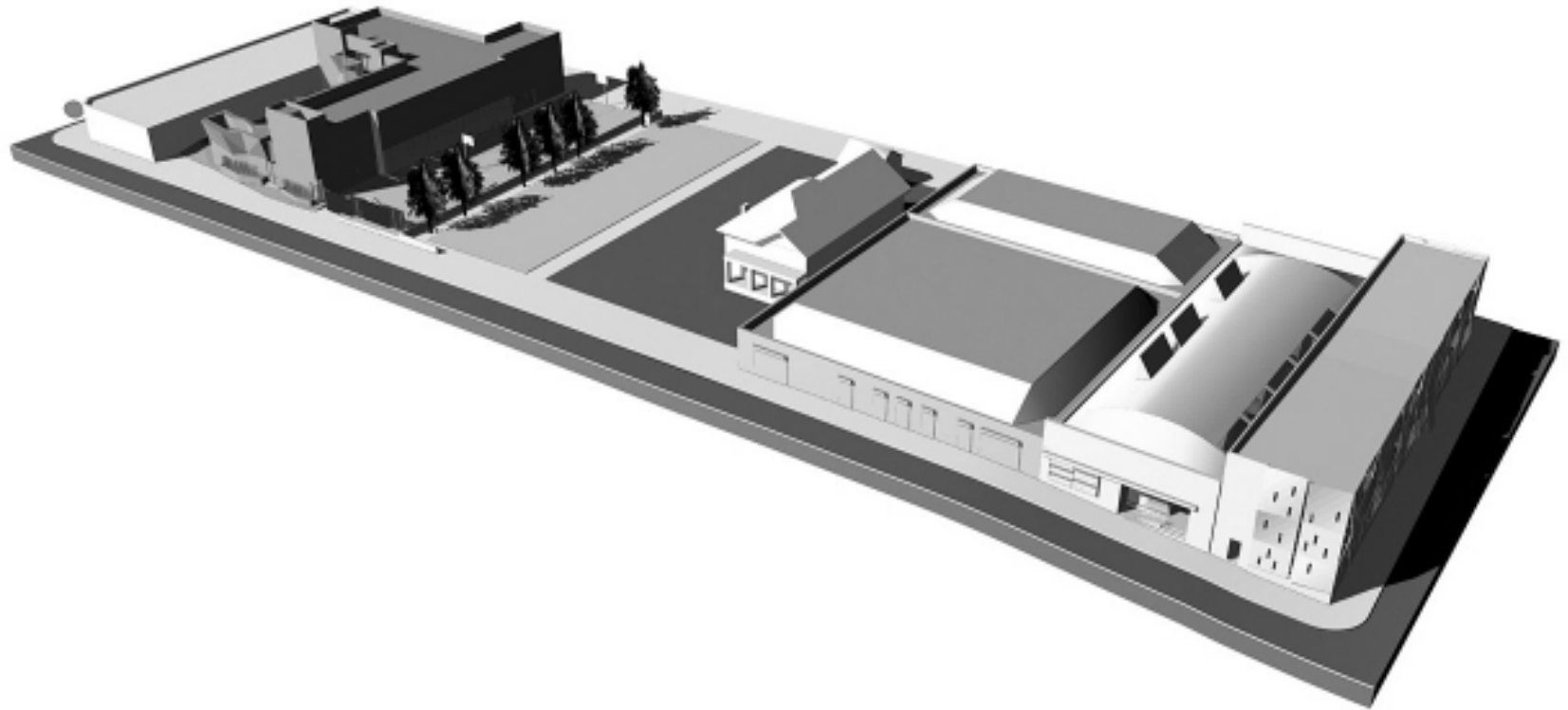
Daly Genik faced a considerable challenge: to create a new and exciting school environment that would house an innovative educational program, foster community participation, and become a highly visible community landmark “inviting and invigorating to the local community,” all within the severe space constraints of the defunct mini-mall as well as a tight budget. This led to a decision to maximize classroom space (creating 12 classrooms) rather than provide separate rooms for all activities in the curriculum. A desired gym, music and art rooms, and an assembly hall were all sacrificed. Because of the tight spaces, the design emphasized flexibility — each space had to serve a variety of purposes.

Kevin Daly based the design on what he called the “four Rs”. First, to *remove* all mini-mall features and create an entirely new environment; second, to *recover* lost and under-utilized space; third, to *reconfigure* the space so it enhanced the educational program of the school; and fourth, to *replace* unsightly or inappropriate design features to create a new design identity for the building.



Architect Kevin Daly

To achieve these design goals within a tight budget of \$1.1 million, Daly had to be creative. To provide visual separation from the street he created the only entirely new element of the school, an 11,000 square foot bathroom and storage structure that faces on to the courtyard (formerly the entrance to underground parking), providing an edge to the street. Attractive fencing and a gate further separate the school from the street and control access to the school grounds. They are accented by street tree planting and planting beds. As described in *Architectural Record*, “the school’s street façade is a play of planes that push in and out and work with



Burlington block model

planted areas to activate the sidewalk. The architects designed the rest room unit as a faceted, sculptural element that engages the public realm.” The bright coloration and sculptural walls that characterize the design are also culturally appropriate — strikingly contemporary, and reminiscent of Mexican and Central American architecture.

To further enhance the courtyard, the entrance to underground parking was relocated to create an outdoor space that serves as playground, assembly area, and space for small group tutorials or parent workshops. Stairs to the upper level were widened to double as seats for school meetings and performances. A signature element of the design, in addition to the brilliant colors, is the curved lattice

that forms an edge to second floor walkways, and extends to the ground level in the courtyard. The lattice is visually dramatic, and protects the upper level classrooms from balls and the intense late afternoon sun. In widening the walkways, and edging them with the lattice structure, Daly also created gathering spots and mini outdoor classrooms which, in the moderate Los Angeles climate, can be used for small group meetings or informal gatherings for most of the year. Surrounded by the curving lattice and brightly painted stucco walls, the courtyard space is colorful and lively. Visible from classrooms and administrative offices, the courtyard brings light into the rooms and forms the functional heart of the school.



Upper level outdoor space

Together, these elements make the school a visible and recognizable oasis in the middle of a depressed neighborhood. It stands in striking contrast to its neighbor school, Esperanza, with its drab institutional architecture. Grace Arnold of LAUSD told us that the building has become their model for what can be accomplished in a charter school. And the renovation from mini-mall to elementary school was accomplished very quickly – two years from original concept to opening.

The architectural world has recognized the design in a number of major publications including *Architectural Record*, and *Architecture Review*. National publications such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* have also had high praise for the design. The *Los Angeles Times* called Camino Nuevo “one of the most inspiring projects built in Los Angeles in years.” It was also featured by the LAUSD in a conference held in Los Angeles on charter schools, and is considered an important model within the education world. Perhaps even more significantly, its young pupils, according to Kevin Daly, call it “chide,” Spanish for “cool.”

In a similar vein, Daly Genik’s Burlington Middle School was recently reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times* which described it as follows:

“The new (middle school at) Camino Nuevo Charter Academy is the kind of project Los Angeles could use more of: a thoughtful, low-cost work of architecture that embodies the kind of civic purpose and progressive ideals that so many public institutions give lip service to but rarely fulfill.”



CNCA stair and courtyard

FINANCES

PRE-DEVELOPMENT AND PROPERTY ACQUISITION

Early on, LISC agreed to support PND in its efforts to acquire the mini-mall property, first assisting them in determining that the \$650,000 asking price was appropriate. According to Louise Manuel of LISC, it was “a very good deal,” especially with 28 basement parking spaces.

LISC teamed with the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) to provide four initial grants and loans: (1) \$10,000 grant to pay for an appraisal, a Phase I study, and a cost estimate for the remodel; (2) a \$50,000 recoverable grant, at 0% interest, for architectural and engineering costs related to renovation; and (3) a \$400,000 below market rate mini-perm loan, and (4) a \$500,000 loan from LIIF. These loans were eventually consolidated and refinanced by LISC, who got City National bank to take over the two larger loans at a rate of 7% over 20 years.

In a major effort, PND raised an additional \$650,000 from a variety of private sources including the Ahmanson Foundation, the California Community Foundation, the Weingart Foundation, the Parsons Foundation, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and other individual and corporate donors.



Burlington Street elevation



School yard with new building

BUILDING COSTS

As with many construction projects, especially those on tight budgets, costs increased during construction – from the estimated \$900,000 to an actual completed cost of \$1.1 million. Despite this, the overall building cost was only \$100/square foot, or under \$8,000 per student. This represents less than 25% of the \$33,000 per student it costs LAUSD to build an elementary school (The charter process enabled CNCA to build a much smaller school than the LAUSD would be permitted to build, providing only 40 square feet per student compared to the LAUSD standard of 75 square feet, which would account for some of the savings).

OPERATING COSTS

For a community development organization the size of PND to acquire funding to build CNCA was a significant accomplishment. Another challenge was to be certain that operating funds from the California Department of Education would cover the expenses of the school as well as debt service on the property. ExED contributed to securing these funds. Their knowledge of state and federal funding for charter schools, as well as per student costs, enabled them to both construct an operating budget and assist with obtaining funding which set CNCA on a sound financial course.

The role of fiscal agent played by ExED has proven essential, and frees CNCA from the complex and cumbersome paper work associated with applying for and accounting for funds. In addition, ExED has dealt with some of the complexities associated with CNCA's unique program. The state, for example, will pay for only

180 school days per year, and summer school funds had to be accessed to pay for the additional 20 days. The fees to ExED are only \$160 per student per year, allowing the bulk of the funds to go directly into the educational program. This has proven to be a manageable and successful arrangement.

As a charter school operating under the auspices of LAUSD, CNCA receives a per capita sum based upon average days of attendance. The standard allocation is \$7,000 per student per year; ExED secured slightly more (\$7,372) for CNCA, which has been able to commit \$578 per student to repayment of the property financing.

**Camino Nuevo Charter Academy
Revenues and Expenditures for Burlington Sites**

Source: EXED

Revenue 2002-2003*	Total	Per ADA**
State of California	\$1,158,975.00	\$3,004.90
Federal Revenue	\$249,359.00	\$646.50
Other State Revenue***	\$613,054.00	\$1,589.50
Other Local Revenue****	\$875,521.00	\$2,270.00
Total	\$2,896,909.00	\$7,510.90

Expenditures 2002-2003		
Certified Salaries	\$1,035,075.00	\$2,683.60
Classified Salaries	\$431,488.00	\$1,118.70
Employee Benefits	\$301,874.00	\$782.70
Books and Supplies	\$195,925.00	\$508.00
Services, Operating Expenses	\$716,750.00	\$1,858.30
Capital Outlay	\$77,500.00	\$200.90
Direct Support/Indirect Costs	\$85,102.00	\$220.60
Total	\$2,843,714.00	\$7,372.80

- * Includes both Burlington sites
- ** Average Daily Attendance
- *** Mainly related to economic aid
- **** In lieu of property tax, fundraising, etc.

IMPACTS

Recent standardized tests of middle school students at CNCA show 20% improvement from the previous year, and are 10% higher than the neighboring schools. In a recent letter sent to friends of Camino Nuevo, Philip Lance cites with pride the figures which rank Camino Nuevo Middle School at level 3 out of 10 as compared to the performance of students statewide, and 9 out of 10, close to the top, when measured against schools with similar demographics. This is an impressive achievement considering that neighboring schools ranked at the bottom – 1 out of 10 overall, and 3 and 4 out of 10 in the same category. At the time of testing, elementary scores, however, had not yet improved significantly. CNCA attributed this to the rocky first year and expressed confidence that, with the new leadership and stabilization, those scores would go up as well.

It should also be noted that standardized test scores are a problematic measure of impact for a school like CNCA that has accepted new students at all grade levels, many of whom were significantly under-achieving in their previous schools. If one focuses on those portions of their elementary population, 2ND grade students, who have been at CNCA continuously for 3 years, one finds strong achievement scores relative to other schools in the area.

Despite the improvement in some subject areas and grade levels, others fell short of California's recently instituted "Adequate Yearly Progress" measure. CNCA students scored well in math, but not as well in language arts. Conversely, some of the CNCA middle school students met goals in English, but lagged in math. "The test results show that we are making progress," says Ana Ponce, "but we began so far behind it is going to take at least another year to show significant gains."

CNCA continues to find creative ways to address the issues of students who need special help. PND recently raised the funds to initiate a summer program that featured intensive intervention



Burlington Street planting

and small group settings for CNCA students who require additional skill development.

Another measure, parent satisfaction with CNCA, is quite high. 241 parents recently completed a survey which showed that 88% were satisfied or very satisfied with overall education and 90% were satisfied with safety.

For a small elementary school, CNCA has received a great deal of publicity and has been widely showcased in Southern California and beyond. It has been written up in *Newsweek*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* as well as numerous architectural magazines and has been featured on *CBS News*. In these stories, CNCA has been recognized for its innovative curriculum, for the boldness of the concept, and for exciting and appropriate architecture.

Although only in its third year of operation, CNCA can claim a wide range of impacts in the education world. LAUSD is impressed with many aspects of CNCA. Grace Arnold emphasized the importance of the bold architecture and color in creating a playful yet functional educational environment, attractive to young children, and recognizable as a landmark in the community. Arnold also commended CNCA on the degree of parent involvement that she acknowledges is difficult to achieve in low income communities.

In fact, LAUSD now considers CNCA to be a model for charter schools. It was featured at a 2000 symposium "New Schools, Better

Neighborhoods” in Los Angeles. The purpose of the meeting was to find new ways of addressing Los Angeles’ school crisis. At the conference, LAUSD showcased CNCA before hundreds of elected officials, school board members, civic leaders, architects, and urban planners. In the words of LAUSD, CNCA is considered “The Camino Miracle” because it was built so quickly and inexpensively, and has had such far-ranging impacts. LAUSD, in fact, recently interviewed Daly Genik and other creative architects for their own building programs. LAUSD also wishes to include more art in their curriculum and is trying to extend its school calendar to 180 days for all students.

At least partly as a result of CNCA’s success, there is now bond money available for charter schools to buy or build facilities. According to Anita Landecker, there are at least six other charter school developers hoping to rehab existing buildings in the area, all using CNCA as a model.

The physical and visual impacts of the school in the neighborhood are striking. The school is an oasis of color and greenery in an otherwise drab area. Before CNCA established the elementary school, the mini-mall was a blighted site, and the alley behind the school was littered with drug paraphernalia. Burlington Street, the front door of the school, was littered with trash and mattresses. Today both the alley and the street are clean and feel safe. The street trees and other plantings soften the streetscape and mark a place where there is life and caring. Although there is gang activity in the area, they have left the school alone and it has experienced little or no vandalism.

Consistent with LISC’s goals, the elimination of the mini-mall as a source of blight, and the introduction of the school appear to have sparked re-investment in nearby properties. An adjacent store has re-opened, and a prominent Victorian house across Burlington Street has been cleaned up and painted. There is evidence of people taking better care of their street and neighborhood.



Burlington Street gate

As a result of CNCA and other similar efforts, schools are increasingly a part of national community development agendas. This stands in contrast to more traditional revitalization approaches that have focused on providing affordable housing or other “bricks and mortar” solutions to the ills of poverty. There is increased interest in looking toward under-utilized and abandoned properties for re-use, thereby upgrading a neighborhood through infill on critical sites instead of razing entire blocks and causing large scale dislocation.

FUTURE PLANS

At the Burlington campus, PND’s goals are to acquire the remaining properties on their side of the block and complete the campus master plan. In the Spring of 2003 PND was negotiating to buy a vacant house in the middle of the block for use as a pre-school and the new middle school at the Wilshire Boulevard end of the campus was completing construction, and is now in full operation. The new middle school houses a family center and health clinic, strengthening services to area families. The health clinic will have counselors available to assist with issues of domestic violence which is a significant factor in the community. The family center will also offer counseling and programs for non-violent parenting and partnering to help reduce the incidence of family violence.

With four campuses now in operation, pressure is increasing for PND to open a high school so that students who have completed middle school would have an alternative to attending a standard school, where expectations will drop below what they have

achieved at CNCA. With over 1,100 students now enrolled at CNCA campuses, PND is appropriately concerned about diverting funds and energy from the existing schools, and is proceeding cautiously.

PND’s goals for all campuses are:

- CNCA students will meet or exceed state performance targets.
- More than 50% of CNCA students will make a 1.5 grade level improvement in reading.
- At least 50% of English language learners will become proficient.
- At least 30% of students taking LAUSD writing performance assessment will score 3 or above.
- School will hold three parent summits per year with at least 75% of parents in attendance at each.
- Schools will increase attendance rate from 95% to 96.5%.



New Burlington Street middle school

ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

- *To create an elementary school that would provide neighborhood children with an excellent education and English language proficiency, in a safe and nurturing school environment.*

There is evidence that CNCA is providing neighborhood children with a quality education, as seen in improved scores (at the middle school and to some extent the elementary school), the observed classroom environment, and testimony from parents and community members.

- *To eliminate blight caused by a derelict mini-mall and serve as a catalyst for reinvestment by other property owners in the neighborhood.*

CNCA has made an observable impact in the neighborhood. Aside from adding visual interest and excitement, it has contributed to cleaner and safer streets, and new neighborhood investment. This impact will likely continue as the Burlington campus gets built out and children progress through the CNCA system.

- *To ensure that the elementary school, through community programming and parent involvement, becomes a stabilizing and energizing force in the MacArthur Park neighborhood.*

In its third year of operation, it is difficult to assess the extent to which CNCA will become a stabilizing force in the neighborhood. It has become a center where children and families can go for education from grades K-8 and a variety of services that will contribute to opportunity and social stabilization. On the other hand, the forces of poverty, a flagging economy, and reduced opportunity cannot be understated.

- *To create a new model for elementary education in disadvantaged communities in Los Angeles.*

This goal has been achieved. Both the LAUSD and those involved in educational innovation in the Los Angeles attest to CNCA's importance as a model for charter schools and perhaps for the school district's own facilities. The extent to which CNCA has been "showcased" in both the education and architectural world indicate its continuing impact on elementary education. CNCA represents innovative thinking in both education and community revitalization.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

In selecting it as the gold medal winner, the selection committee was clearly impressed with many aspects of Camino Nuevo. Perhaps most importantly, they recognized Pueblo Nuevo Development's commitment to intervening in a challenged community at the level where the greatest impact might be felt – principally through education and jobs. Thus, the school is seen as an agent for social and economic development as well as a means to improve the urban design environment.

The committee praised Camino Nuevo for its grassroots beginnings and its continuing commitment to the involvement of the community in planning and management. They were very impressed with the quality of the team that was assembled to plan and run the school and found the architectural design to be very powerful and appropriate to the function and cultural backgrounds of the families served. Given the importance placed by the committee on the potential for a project to affect transformation, the committee felt that Camino Nuevo greatly changed its block and neighborhood and, more importantly, that it “changes lives ... that’s urban excellence.”

Consistent with the committee’s priorities, they valued the fact that Camino Nuevo can easily become a model for other communities. They felt that Camino successfully modeled people taking ownership of change in their community, and that implementing community development through education was an exciting new means of achieving urban excellence. Further, they felt the Camino model was particularly important because of the population bulge coming up through the schools and the need for models which deal with that population in disenfranchised and particularly immigrant communities. Finally, Camino Nuevo was selected not only because of its charter school, but because of PND’s full program of job creation, health care, and social service provision – the many avenues it pursues to help people create better lives. The fact that all this was done without reliance on large amounts of outside money only made the project more impressive, and certainly more sustainable.

The selection committee had only a few reservations about Camino Nuevo and these centered on the need for a better understanding of why elementary student test scores have not improved more substantially. Since the time of the selection committee meeting, those scores have improved somewhat, particularly among current second grade students who are the only group that has had three full years at the school. The staff expects that scores will continue to go up as more children with continuity at the school are tested, and they reminded the site visit team that the initial student body included many children with learning issues and behavioral problems which would be reflected in lower test scores.

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