

Before moving to the United States 25 years ago, Olimpia Bahena taught French in Mexico. Her first position in the United State was a bilingual educator in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. As a well-educated immigrant, her work in this low-income community opened her eyes to the importance of high quality instruction for historically underserved students. It became a calling.

Olimpia also developed a passion for adult learning, and this became the cornerstone of her professional growth. Her learning experiences exposed exciting opportunities to challenge herself. She is one of the first Latino educators in Chicago to be Nationally Board Certified. She served as a mentor and instructor for teachers with provisional teaching certification in the Project 29 at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and has taught bilingual courses at the Illinois Resources Center and at DePaul University. Olimpia has also presented nationally and international conferences on topics such as dual language education and professional learning communities.

As a participant in a Fulbright Exchange Program with the Board of Education of Argentina, she hosted Argentinian administrators. This year she visited Argentina to extend her knowledge of international education and Argentinean education. In many ways, she attributes her development as a leader to caring and disciplined mentors. They have helped her understand the significance of self-reflection, ongoing learning, and the humility to accept, learn from, and move forward after mistakes.

Olimpia is a strong proponent of dual language education for English Learners students. For eleven years she has served as Principal of Talcott Fine Arts and Museum Academy, one the few Chicago Public Schools with a Dual Language Program. Talcott is known for its innovative, well-rounded, and high-quality curriculum, dedicated and hard-working families, and learning-focused staff.

As an immigrant and Latina, Olimpia deeply values opportunities to collaborate with others to improve her professional practice and strengthen student learning. Her passion, persistence and determination as an adult learner continues to inspire and enrich her commitment world-class learning for each and every child.