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Focus: Teaching Quality

The “Win-Win” of Quality Accelerated Teacher Certification

by Linda Cantú, Ph.D.

Federico Botello was a front office manager for an automotive repair shop. He identified auto problems and suggested repair options. At the same time, he watched his son struggle at school. Botello saw that his experience resolving automotive problems helped him figure out how to help his son. Over time, he decided to return to college.

Today, he is an elementary reading specialist: “My desire for teaching came from the heart. Alternative certification gave me the training and the tools for the job. Teaching is very similar to working on automobiles. Car mechanics use tools designed for working on cars. Teachers use tools designed for teaching and helping students learn. Sometimes we take existing tools and modify them to fit the diverse needs of our students. My struggling readers needed a long-term solution and not a quick fix. I taught my students not to fear reading and to become lifelong readers... Every year, I learn something new.”

Texas needs more teachers like Mr. Botello. The state is facing a dramatic teacher shortage. The Texas Education Agency, with approval from the U.S. Department of Education, identified the key teaching shortage areas for the 2014-15 school year in Texas: bilingual/English as a second language, career and technical education, computer science, math, science, and special education at both elementary and secondary levels.

In addition to teacher retirements, TEA reports that the current teacher shortage is a result of losing first- and second-year teachers due to lack of sufficient support and mentoring.

For 40 years IDRA has promoted equity and excellence as the basis for academic success of traditionally underserved students. It has gained a reputation for its work in culturally-relevant coaching and mentoring of teachers, particularly beginning teachers, who have made great strides in English learners’ achievement.

IDRA has been successfully implementing Transitions to Teaching programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, that have helped certify and add more than 600 bilingual, science and mathematics, ESL, and bilingual-special education teachers in more than 20 high-need urban and rural Texas school districts over the past 14 years. Another 100 teachers will receive their valid Texas certification by this spring.

IDRA has placed these new teachers in high-need school districts focusing on the STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), bilingual education (EC-6), all-level ESL, and all-level special education.

With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, IDRA has created partnerships with six colleges and universities and 20 school districts and academies that are dedicated to *(cont. on Page 2)*

“A vital nation must have educational parity for all students and not parcel out one set of opportunities for some and minimal expectations for others. Schools and educators, especially teachers, must be supported with the tools they need to ensure their students’ success, including technology, mentoring programs, and high quality curriculum.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

(The “Win-Win” of Quality Accelerated Teacher Certification, continued from Page 1)

preparing new teachers. Through the partnerships with these entities, IDRA helped prepare and support new teachers going through the alternative certification program route to have the professional development and coursework needed to be strong, caring classroom teachers.

Teacher candidates participate in one year of rigorous and meaningful coursework to help prepare them in their certification area. In addition, these institutions provide coursework and professional development that creates understanding and strategies to work with students in multicultural settings. All teacher candidates in our program are required to get an ESL supplemental certificate.

A former substitute teacher with a bachelor's degree in hospitality business, Ana Loa now teaches third graders in Donna, Texas. She said: “I know that being a bilingual teacher is not easy but it is a very rewarding job when you know you have made a difference in little minds. I have experienced both sides, being an ESL student and now a bilingual teacher. I have shared many of my stories with my students, and I am glad to see that I have impacted their lives. I show them that they can do anything they want in life... and that language shouldn't be a barrier... Speaking two languages is like having two souls in one, yet independent... I desire to be the role model for those students who think they can't. I don't just teach, I inspire!”

IDRA provides professional development sessions for our teacher candidates focusing on strategies in bilingual and ESL, math and science in both online and face-to-face formats. Topics have included:

- **Cultural Awareness in the Bilingual**

Classroom – Defining levels of culture that present ideas and discussion on how to integrate culture in the bilingual classroom.

- **Teaching Multi-level Language Groups** – Introducing principles of teaching in multi-level classrooms and providing techniques to plan lessons for multi-level ESL groups.
- **Classroom Management and Student Engagement** – Providing strategies for maintaining discipline and maximum student engagement.
- **Reading in the Content Area** – Discussing the importance of reading across the curriculum, sharing strategies for understanding expository texts, and emphasizing reading within the core content areas, beyond the language arts.

New teachers participate in training and professional development and in college coursework, which is crucial to teaching and learning. Mentors help new teachers transition the teaching strategies into real practice while teaching. This gives new teachers a support system and practical guidance in the classroom. Mentors help new teachers build confidence and feel supported during their first years of teaching. Coaching and mentoring creates a team approach that helps with teacher retention. Teachers feel they are part of a team rather than working in isolation. In addition, teachers participate in IDRA's online community of learners network to share ideas, successes and questions.

Federico Botello stated: “I was excited to be part of the alternative program, but I was also a little unsure that the program would prepare me for teacher certification. But alternative certification was not a quick and easy route. I was held to the same standards and ethics of the state,

school districts, shareholders, community, and students.”

IDRA's teacher preparation strategy is cultivating hundreds of new teachers to serve a more diverse student body, engaging seasoned teachers as mentors, and building networks for ongoing growth and support.

Resources

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Quality Instruction for English Learners – Getting it Right in Writing!

by Kristin Grayson, Ph.D.

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for English learners to master. It can be difficult because it involves so many aspects of language, including syntax (grammar), vocabulary, verb tenses, articles, spelling, transition words, and idioms. This article summarizes some of the latest research about providing English learners with quality writing instruction. Sample activities for the language or classroom teacher are included.

In an early article in 1993, Stephen Krashen, proposed two ideas about English learners and writing: “(1) Writing style does not come from writing or direct instruction, but from reading” (supporting the Reading Hypothesis, which he proposed in 1989), and (2) “Actual writing can help us solve problems and can make us smarter.”

These ideas support the use of *sustained silent reading* (SSR) or *drop everything and read* (DARE), where students are allowed to read materials of interest to themselves at their own chosen level for a specific duration of time each day. Language, some of which is rarely used in everyday conversations, is modeled for students while reading.

Krashen explains that listening is to speaking as reading is to writing. Language is acquired during authentic and meaningful exposure. For writing, this means that more writing does not necessarily improve writing, but that models of good writing are seen through reading and lots of it!

Teachers can provide reading models as the prompt for writing. For example, students can read a specific type of text, such as technical, opinion, reports or fiction. After reading, students should summarize the reading in one to two pages of writing.

Jim Cummins, noted linguist, elaborated on this same idea, in the framework he presented during his keynote at the TESOL (Teachers of English for Students of Other Languages) 2015 conference in his speech: Teaching through a Multilin-

gual Lens. According to Cummins, in order for English learners to develop the language skills they need, they must first have print access and literacy engagement. Engagement with literacy happens when teachers scaffold meaning, connect to students’ lives and their funds of knowledge, affirm their identity by valuing their cultures and languages, and extend language through explicit instruction.

Cummins states that phonics is not the answer for English learners and their reading and writing skills. In fact, he states that research shows that phonics is only helpful through first grade and after that does not add anything to reading comprehension. The keys for English learners are print access and literacy engagement. According to Cummins, engagement itself is a variable that can especially support students with low socioeconomic status.

Following the ideas of Krashen and Cummins, this means students need to be actively sharing and collaborating. For example, teachers need to ensure that their classroom set-up does not isolate English learners and allows for interaction with other students. For sharing, students can take turns choosing words from their own language. They can explain to the class the meaning of that word and why they chose a particular word. Greetings can be posted in the languages of the diverse student body. Additionally, student work should be displayed.

In order to have access to print, library books should be available for students and parents, including books in the languages represented in the school population. The school library also should have extended library hours so that parents can also have access to its books.

For engagement with print, Cummins emphasizes a focus on language. This focus must be deliberate with a validation of the student’s identity and culture. Some ways that teachers can do this are
(cont. on Page 4)

The important take-away from the research is that reading and writing go together! Reading allows us to interpret text, and writing allows us to construct meaning from text.

(Quality Instruction for English Learners – Getting it Right in Writing!, continued from Page 3)

to have students compare their native language and English and discuss how the grammar and vocabulary may be similar or different. Students also should write and reflect on their language experiences.

Cummins emphasizes that students should be encouraged to use their first language, such as by communicating with classmates in their native language about how to solve a problem and then explaining the answer in English to the teacher or in their writing.

Lily Wong Fillmore advocates for teachers to help students develop the habit of paying attention to language. Students don't necessarily notice language on their own. However, when it is a focus and is repeated intentionally, it becomes a habit, and students acquire the academic language in English that they need to know.

Fillmore also stresses that teachers engage students in instructional conversations in order to help students notice the ways in which meaning relates to words, phrases, and clauses in text. This language focus needs to be preplanned. When the benefits of bilingualism are factored into instruction, increased achievement can take place (Villarreal, 2015).

At first, English may seem confusing to students. But, by learning about how the English language works through its word origins (available on different websites), English makes more sense. As an activity for this, students can examine groups of words and make their own generalizations about how the English language works (such as by comparing the pronunciations words that begin with ca-, co-, cu- and words with ce or ci-).

Direct grammar instruction is not how native English speakers learn to speak such complex grammatical structures. For example, how and when to add the *do* auxiliary in specific types of questions is usually acquired through exposure to oral language. Direct grammar instruction may help some English learners at some levels as indicated in Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis (checking on the rules). However, in order to really become proficient writers in English, students must have text available and must be actively engaged in reading and then writing.

Authentic and meaningful instructional activities are important for English learners (IDRA, 2015).

A daily reflective journal is just one way to make that happen. A daily prompt might be: "What helped you the most learn about...?" In a reflection journal, the responses should not be graded for things such as grammar. Rather it can be used as an interactive journal with a peer or teacher adding a response to the student's reflection.

Writing letters to other students or to teachers about a given school activity is another example of writing for authentic purpose. Another way to make writing authentic is to have students collaborate together. For example, Student A writes the first sentence in blue, while Student B acts as the writing coach. Then the students switch roles with Student B writing in a different color. Seating students with this collaboration in mind can make classroom management easier.

Writing reflects culture, as indicated by the early research of Kaplan in 1966. For instance, American writing is represented by a straight line, while Asian writing is commonly represented as circular. Thus, by reading a student's own writing, the teacher can determine some of what the student knows and learn about the dimensions of their students' cultures.

Therefore, teachers need to serve a dual role: they must understand the culture of their students, and they must help students learn about the culture of the school and the community where they now reside. One of the ways teachers can learn about their students' culture is to teach common vocabulary on a given theme and then ask students to write about their own experiences with that theme, such as about their family. We can learn about our students through their writing.

The important take-away from the research is that reading and writing go together. Reading allows us to interpret text, and writing allows us to construct meaning from text.

Resources

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- Video: Courageous Connections interview with new teachers
- Texas school finance resources
- Framework for Effective Instruction of Secondary English Language Learners

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Considering Multiple Intelligences Theory for English Learner Classrooms

by Sulema Carreón-Sánchez, Ph.D.

As we begin another year of taking on the responsibility of educating students, we can reflect on what is quality and meaningful teaching. Recently, I was invited to visit a summer school classroom with elementary students, some of whom were English learners. During my visit, a teacher said: "I feel I work more and have less time to help my students. I have a weekly lesson plan, but students don't seem to learn. What can I do that is different to help them?" While lesson plans are blueprints of what a teacher will do, it is the delivery of a lesson that is the key to making learning meaningful. This article discusses how the multiple intelligences theory can help teachers who are serving classrooms with diverse learners.

According to Marjorie Hall Haley (2004), "Students achieve greater success rates when the multiple intelligences theory is implemented." Furthermore, she affirms, "All teachers must be better equipped to widen their pedagogical repertoire to accommodate linguistically, culturally and cognitively diverse students."

Reflecting on the teacher's question, a teacher's challenge is to create a classroom within a learning environment to help all students. Teachers can, through Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, provide various instruction strategies that will lead students to reach levels of success and acquire learning in all content areas.

Teachers have choices of instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of students, especially English learners. Various strategies in the classroom assist students in their understanding, learning and connecting to what they already know, hence, providing a rich learning environment leading to students' success. According to Mary Ann Christison (1996), "Multiple intelligences theory offers ESL/EFL teachers a way to examine their best teaching techniques and strategies in light of human differences."

Howard Gardner (1983) first introduced the multiple intelligences theory and acknowl-

edged, "There is no general intelligence, but rather that each person has at least eight distinct intelligences, which can be developed throughout his or her lifetime." The seven intelligences Gardner first introduced are: bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal-social, intrapersonal-introspective, logical-mathematical, musical-rhythmic, verbal-linguistic, and visual-spatial. The eighth, "naturalist theory," was proposed in 1999.

Haley's study (2004) identifies some instructional strategies and activities for English learners correlated to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. The first, **bodily-kinesthetic**, includes a sense of physical action, which is learning through movement and manipulating things. Some activities include role playing, dancing, total physical response (TPR), hands-on learning, manipulatives, and multimedia games or activities. Additional activities are known as stand-up and sit-down and inside/outside circle.

Strategies related to **interpersonal-social** learning consist of interaction with others and understanding of self. Students will be aware of their strengths or weaknesses and what makes them unique. Haley identifies activities that can help, such as cooperative teams, paired activities, peer teaching, board games, simulation, survey and polls, group brainstorming, situations and dialogues. Additional activities could involve working on vocabulary skits, vocabulary cards games, and peer editing. She states, "Cooperative learning that includes a variety of tasks accomplished through a choice of activities allow for multiple intelligences to be well represented within the context of instruction."

Intrapersonal-introspective style of learning includes students who are the most independent of the learners. Some activities for these students include working with books, creative materials, diaries, privacy and time. In fact these students can work on describing and writing journals on particular topics and engage in independent
(cont. on Page 6)

Providing opportunities for students to learn in ways in which they are most receptive maximizes their potential for success in the academic setting and in real life.

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

For more information about the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity
funded by the U.S. Department of Education

(Considering Multiple Intelligences Theory for English Learner Classrooms, continued from Page 5)

study. These students work better independently before they share their work.

The **logical-mathematical** style includes logic, abstractions, reasoning, numbers and critical thinking. Activities include word order activities, grammar relationships, pattern games, number activities, classifying and categorizing, sequencing information, computer games, and cause-and-effect activities. Activities also can include oral retelling of stories, short poems, creating advertisements, cloze activities, and reading the text backwards.

The **musical-rhythmic** style relates to sensitivity to sounds, rhythms, tones and music. The auditory learning uses the ear and hearing when learning. Haley's activity list includes writing jingles, jazz chants to remember vocabulary/grammar verbs, musical cloze activities, skits, plays, tonal/rhythmic patterns in music of target language. According to Brewster, et al., (2003), songs, rhymes and chants can contribute to the child's global development, and acting together is fun and stimulates the child's sense of humor.

Verbal-linguistic style connects high verbal-linguistic intelligence with words and languages. These students are typically good at reading, writing, telling stories and memorizing words. They enjoy debates, storytelling, online communications, group discussions and word games. They can work on jigsaw reading, read-alouds, and identifying main idea through the use of pyramids.

Visual-spatial style deals with spatial judgment and the ability to visualize in their heads. The visual and spatial learner learns through the use of the eye. Some materials that will help them include using graphs and diagrams, drawing a response, video exercises, computer slideshows, multimedia projects mind mapping, and graphic organizers. Other activities and materials include vocabulary cards, writing frames, journals, portfolios, sequencing mapping, and scaffolding charts.

The eighth intelligence is the **naturalist** style. This has to do with nurturing and relating information to one's natural surroundings their local environment. This theory focuses on the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations). Activities that include science content are an ideal

way of learning for the naturalist. Teachers can provide hands-on lessons for students in order to investigate, explore, and summarize what they learn. Activities that include maps, photographs, primary source documents, and video clips are what teachers can provide for this learner.

Haley found (2004) that the challenge in education is for teachers to create learning environments that foster the development of all eight intelligences. Moreover, Gahala & Lange (1997) note, "Teaching with multiple intelligences is a way of taking differences among students seriously, sharing that knowledge with students and parents, guiding students in taking responsibility for their own learning, and presenting worthwhile materials that maximize learning and understanding." Providing opportunities for students to learn in ways in which they are most receptive maximizes their potential for success in the academic setting and in real life (Armstrong, 2009; Beckman, 1998).

One response to the teacher's question, "What can I do different to help them?" is to incorporate Gardner's eight multiple intelligences theory by imbedding specific related instructional strategies and setting up the classroom where students

are encouraged to use language in cooperative groups. Meeting student needs, linguistically, culturally, and cognitively, can lead to not only a great learning opportunity but a positive teaching experience for teachers.

Resources

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Meet Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., IDRA Education Associate

This year, the IDRA Newsletter is highlighting our staff's varied and diverse talents and backgrounds. Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., provides training and technical assistance to school districts, teachers and parents to improve student achievement particularly in the area of gender equity, race relations and English learners. Aside from her professional interests, she has a lifelong focus on family and friends. She is originally from the Chicago area and maintains close relations with her family, who now live in vast parts of the United States and around the world. Kristin developed a passion for travel and learning about people and cultures as a teenager. Her anthropological interests have led her through Mexico, Central and South America, as well as China and Taiwan. She has a network of friends across the globe, and has found her 'family of the heart' in the highlands of Guatemala. Through yearly travels to the Mayan communities in Guatemala and Lake Atitlan, she is recharged in spirit, emotion, and mind. Kristin continually strives to achieve goals. She has recently achieved her goal of completing her doctorate. In 2013, she earned a doctorate in organizational leadership as she simultaneously completed a master's of business administration. She is also an avid reader, swimmer, and animal lover



Court Can End Neglect of Millions of School Children

Texas Supreme Court School Finance Hearing Held

On September 1, the Texas Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the largest school finance case in the state's history, *Texas Taxpayer and Student Fairness Coalition vs. Williams*. The hearing came 369 days after the Texas District Court ruled that the state's funding system is "constitutionally inadequate, unsuitable and financially inefficient." Much is at stake as the court decides whether or not to ensure that the state provides equal educational opportunity not for just some, but for all, of its children.

MALDEF's Interim Regional Counsel Marisa Bono presented the argument for the Edgewood ISD plaintiffs. IDRA provided expert analysis and testimony in the trial finding that the system is inequitable and fails to provide adequate levels of funding for educating English language learners and low-income students.

She stated: "The future workforce of Texas attends public school today. How well our students do is how well Texas will do. Every year, the state delivers tens of thousands of young people into our economy who are wholly unprepared for college and career. The state systematically fails to provide an adequate education, and it provides more advantages to students who already live in the most advantaged school districts."

Mrs. Bono discussed the weighted formula that provides additional funds for educating low income and English language learners as being set at levels "wholly unrelated to the needs of those students... The school finance system is failing low-income and English language learner, or ELL, students who make up over two-thirds of our student population." Those weights were set three decades ago at half the recommended level at the time and have never been adjusted to meet actual needs. "We want high standards for our kids but you've got to give them the resources to get there," Bono added.

A number of amicus briefs have been filed, including one by the national Education Law Center (ELC) along with several Texas organi-

zations in support of low-income and English language learner students urging the court to affirm the trial court's ruling. Joining ELC on the amicus brief were the Center for Public Policy Priorities, Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA), San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Texas Appleseed, Texas Association for Bilingual Education, Texas HOPE, and Texas NAACP.

Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel's op-ed for the *Austin American-Statesman* was published on the day of the trial, "If the State of Texas Wins this Trial, Texas Children Will Lose." In it, she stated: "It is vital that the court respect the rights of children across the state who have no other recourse to a better education and a better future. Investing in education means funding our public schools for excellence. We cannot wait any longer."

Al Kauffman's op-ed for the *San Antonio Express-News* was published just before the trial, "Texas Supreme Court has opportunity to improve public education: Constitution requires – and our students deserve – equality." He is professor of law at St. Mary's University School of Law and the former MALDEF lead counsel for the Edgewood parties in the school finance lawsuit from 1984 to 2002.

Investing in education means funding our public schools for excellence. Texas must provide equal educational opportunity not for just some – but for all of its children.

Resources for the Texas School Funding Trial

- IDRA has created a **dashboard** to collect news about the Texas school finance trial for easy access for parents, educators and communities: <http://budurl.com/IDRAsfNews>
- New **Classnotes Podcast episode**, "Key Issues in the Texas School Funding Trial," with David Hinojosa, J.D., IDRA National Director of Policy, who prior to joining IDRA was MALDEF's lead counsel in the current



Advocates for equitable school funding for all children as they headed into the Texas Supreme Court school finance hearing: Tedra Robertson, Equity Center; David Hinojosa, IDRA; Marisa Bono, MALDEF; Al Kauffman, St. Mary's University School of Law; Albert Cortez, IDRA; and Chandra Villanueva, Center for Public Policy Priorities.

Texas school finance case: <http://budurl.com/IDRApod155>

- Austin American-Statesman **op-ed by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel**: <http://budurl.com/AASopedo815>
- San Antonio Express-News **op-ed by Al Kauffman**: <http://budurl.com/KHUFsfweb>
- **Education Law Center amicus brief and overview**: <http://budurl.com/ELCambf>
- All **amicus briefs** on the court's website: <http://www.search.txcourts.gov/Case.aspx?cn=14-0776&coa=cossup>
- **Infographic** on the Texas School Funding Equity Gap: <http://budurl.com/IDRAig-Gap14>
- **Statement**: Court Rules Again: Texas School Funding Must Serve All Students Equitably, August 28, 2014: <http://budurl.com/IDRAsf814>
- The **50 Most Memorable Quotes in School Finance**, compiled by IDRA's founder, Dr. José A. Cárdenas, in 1994: <http://budurl.com/IDRA50list>
- **Video** of the hearing (Edgewood plaintiff's argument by Marisa Bono begins at 1:45 and runs to 02:02): <http://budurl.com/TXSCSep115>



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