



Focus: Teaching Quality

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New Teachers Learning and Leading through IDRA's Transition to Teaching Programs

by Linda Cantú, Ph.D.

To be successful, schools must have skilled, committed teachers who are passionate about innovation and engaging all students. IDRA has teamed up with universities and K-12 schools across Texas to address this need. 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.

During the past 12 years, IDRA has received five multi-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education's Transition to Teaching program. These are statewide grants that have helped recruit, prepare, place and retain a critical mass of highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent graduates as teachers in high-need Texas school districts. The teacher certification occurred through accelerated programs offered to already-degreed professionals. As part of IDRA's Transition to Teaching grants, IDRA has partnered with teacher preparation programs in colleges, universities and school districts throughout Texas. We have prepared teachers in high-need areas that were identified by school districts, such as bilingual/ESL, special education, math, science and other subjects with an added supplemental certification in ESL and special education. As a result, more than 600 prepared new teachers have been placed.

Two of IDRA Transition to Teaching programs

are currently recruiting and placing teachers. The goal of T³ ~ **Teachers for Today & Tomorrow's** is to transition mid-career professionals, recent graduates and highly qualified paraprofessionals who have excelled in other fields into teaching in high-need schools. T³ specifically seeks to increase the number of highly-qualified and credentialed teachers in math, science and bilingual/ESL.

Caminos is working with 150 bilingual and bilingual special education teachers through an accelerated teacher preparation program. Through Caminos, IDRA recruits, prepares, places and retains highly qualified mid-career professionals and recent graduates as teachers with extensive personalized and online mentoring and support to ensure success and retention in the teaching profession.

Caminos and T³ are statewide consortiums for accelerated teacher certification led by IDRA that offer the following to teacher candidates:

- High-quality training and university coursework;
- An accelerated but rigorous certification route of 12-15 months;
- A "grow-your-own" approach where, after a three-month orientation program, applicants become teachers of record while completing a preparation program;

(cont. on Page 2)

"To graduate students who are prepared for later life, schools need competent caring teachers who are well-paid and supported in their work. That means teachers are prepared, placed in their field of study and informed by continual professional development."

— Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

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- Support for tuition and expenses up to \$3,000;
- Online and on-site mentoring support during the first two years of teaching; and
- Review sessions to help participants pass certification exams.

An individual is eligible to participate, if he or she:

- Is a second-career professional with excellent employment and academic records from an accredited college or university; or
- Is a recent graduate (within the past three years) with excellent academic record from accredited college or university;
- Is a paraprofessional in a high-need school district enrolled in a degree and certification program at an approved college or university; and
- Meets entry requirements of the partner alternative certification program, including bilingual skills in English and Spanish.

There have been and are many successful teachers who are part of IDRA's Transition to Teaching programs working today in Texas high-need schools and working in high-need areas. Some of IDRA's teachers have shared what is possible.



Ms. Louanne Rintala, a graphic designer who worked in advertising for 11 years, joined the Caminos program because she wanted to make a difference. Today, as a bilingual teacher, she is combining

creativity and commitment for second graders in a San Antonio ISD elementary school. She says,

"One of my favorite things is seeing the pride in their faces."



Ms. Kerry L. Arrington is pursuing a general education and LEP certification through Dallas ISD and is combining her training with a love of learning and a commitment to all students' success. She explains: "I wanted to help students make a connection from real-world applications to taught concepts. I knew math could be fun and exciting, and I wanted to help students understand that as well. [IDRA's] program has equipped me with the tools needed to teach all students."



Mr. Chris Thelan, is working to become a teacher with Dallas ISD. Following five years of active military service, he is committed to learning, as that fulfills the potential of every child in his classroom. He is proud to bring the kind of leadership and respect for people of all backgrounds to work on behalf of children that not only connects them to math, but to a world of possibility. He adds: "[IDRA's] program has helped equip me further by building a more diverse 'kit' bag. Each session gifted me and my students with better ideas, calmer solutions and a greater ability to relate mathematical content."

Sisters Ms. Marlene and Ms. Martha Alonso had both originally set off on different career paths. Marlene earned an MBA and had gone to work in the banking industry. But with a true passion

for teaching, she left the business world three years ago to pursue certification through IDRA's program. Martha earned a degree in accounting and became an internal auditor for San Antonio ISD. But her childhood dream was to teach, and every time she visited a campus, that calling tugged at her until she was able to make it a reality.

Today, Marlene is a fourth grade bilingual teacher at in San Antonio ISD. Her management back-



ment committee at her school, securing donated supplies and engaging community and school partners in student tutoring and mentoring. Marlene says: "I feel like I am really making a difference in my students' lives, not only academically but also teaching and motivating them to see that they can be successful. I was raised in this neighborhood, so I can relate to my students."

ment committee at her school, securing donated supplies and engaging community and school partners in student tutoring and mentoring. Marlene says: "I feel like I am really making a difference in my students' lives, not only academically but also teaching and motivating them to see that they can be successful. I was raised in this neighborhood, so I can relate to my students."



Martha is in her third year at a middle school in San Antonio ISD teaching sixth through eighth grade ESL. As the

only ESL teacher in the school, she serves all 60 ELL students on campus, connecting with core content teachers and her students' families, and tutoring her students in math and science, before and after school, based on the ongoing analysis she does of student data. Martha says, "My childhood dream had always been to become a teacher." And she is not stopping there. Next up is a PhD in organizational leadership at the University of the Incarnate Word, to deepen her (cont. on Page 4)

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. IDRA fulfills its mission through professional development, research and evaluation, policy and leadership development, and programs and materials development.

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Publication offices:
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101
San Antonio, Texas 78228
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714
www.idra.org | contact@idra.org

Maria Robledo Montecel, Ph. D.
IDRA President and CEO
Newsletter Executive Editor

Christie L. Goodman, APR
IDRA Communication Manager
Newsletter Production Editor

Sarah H. Aleman
Secretary
Newsletter Layout



Science Classroom Strategies for English Learners – iPads and Other Tablets for Teachers

by Veronica Betancourt, M.A., and Paula Johnson, M.A.

iPads and other tablets are the biggest technology craze to hit the education field and are popping up on campuses all over the country in an effort to transform learning (Associated Press, 2012). The beautiful thing about iPads is that they are designed to entertain, and so many apps are designed with education in mind. We have already explored some iPad possibilities as a student tool in our previous article, “Science Strategies for English Learners – How to Use iPads and Other Tablets” (Betancourt & Johnson, 2012) in which we discussed the learning potential for students when the iPad becomes a medium for producing knowledge.

In this article, our focus shifts to how teachers, as instructional leaders, can maximize the capabilities of iPads and other tablets in the classroom as a teacher tool. Certainly, the effectiveness of iPads directly correlates to the comfort level of the user, so it is essential to ensure that teachers are comfortable with utilizing the iPads as both a teacher tool and a student tool.

We recently had the privilege of training some teachers in South Texas on this subject. The teachers shared stories of what was already taking place in the classroom to give us an idea of the types of learning apps that could be incorporated into their routine. Each campus (K-12) demonstrated a different need, and the level of iPad implementation varied. So we responded accordingly. It should be noted that we provided training and support to teachers who serve English learners. One of the common supports we were able to provide was how to implement apps when class sets of iPads (and in some cases, WiFi) are not readily available or as a facilitation tool for whole group and small group instruction.

During our recent visit to this district, we observed some use of the iPads in the classroom. A great app that was already in use at many of the schools we visited was **PicCollage**. While there was quite a variance on its implementa-

tion, teachers shared the same purpose for its use in the classroom: vocabulary development. The original intent of this app is to create collages with your photos, yet teachers allowed their creative juices to flow and used it for vocabulary development with their English learners. The variance occurred in how they facilitated the lesson. For example, some teachers demonstrated how to create a collage with a particular vocabulary word on their own iPad as it was projected on the screen so students could follow along.

In many cases, using one or two apps on the iPad is just scratching the surface of possible learning opportunities. Helping teachers envision and think outside the box on available apps is the key to ensuring iPad use is maximized and seamlessly integrated into the classroom. For example, in one elementary school, where the teacher serves K-5 students, we were able to share the free app, **Endless Alphabet**, to assist her students who were struggling with letter sounds and enunciation. The app centers on character monsters that run through and scramble words that are being practiced. A silhouette of the word is left, and students then drag the misplaced letters back to their original position. As they drag each letter to the correct location, the monster that represents the letter makes the sound of that letter (phonemes). This is an exceptional app for language learners because it helps them to hear and practice how to enunciate sounds and words. Once the student has placed the letters back in their original location, a demonstration and definition of the word is shown. The teachers we shared this app with were thrilled to use it in the classroom.

Similarly, a teacher at another campus, who also was working with her students on enunciation and articulation when reading, used the **record-ing tool** on the iPad. She had her students record themselves reading a paragraph or short story and then re-record that same reading days (cont. on Page 4)

In order for teachers to have a high level of confidence with the iPad, they themselves need to reach a level of self-efficacy with the technology for effective implementation.

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 http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

(*Science Classroom Strategies for English Learners – iPads and Other Tablets for Teachers*, continued from Page 3)

later to compare the recordings and analyze the progress they had made from the instruction that week. This provided the students opportunities to engage with the iPad for self-evaluation and promote an eagerness for improvement.

The excitement that can abound by the technology in the use of the iPads is evidenced by emerging research, such as that conducted at the campus level in Auburn, Maine. Kindergartners were given iPads to increase literacy development, and a pre- and post-test was conducted using a standardized measure of performance. Results demonstrated that every single kindergartner who used the iPad significantly outscored their non-iPad-using counterparts (Drinkwater, 2012). The principal noted the students' success stemmed from the teacher's ability to "customize apps to match instructional needs of each child, so students are able to learn successfully at their own level and pace" (Drinkwater, 2012).

However, in order for teachers to have this level of confidence with the iPad, they themselves need to reach a level of self-efficacy with the technology for effective implementation. Therefore, one-on-one or small group coaching needs to occur with teachers to provide the space for increasing their self-efficacy with iPads.

Steps to ensuring teachers feel comfortable in implementing apps in the classroom include: (1) conducting an on-site contextual analysis of the classroom, including materials, technology and lesson delivery approaches; (2) making recommendations for apps that can meld into the current situation and enhance the learning opportunities in the classroom; (3) offer and demonstrate ways in which these apps can be utilized; (4) engage in a reflective conversation with the teacher so they may offer their own ideas and increase their comfort level for app inclusion; (5) action plan next steps for accountability and commitment for scheduled implementation; and (6) follow-up and offer support during implementation and/or after implementation. Creating and encouraging the right support system is the key to ensuring maximum iPad and other tablets' potential in the classroom.

Resources

Associated Press. "Texas District Embarks on Widespread iPad Program," FoxNews.com (February 27, 2012).
Betancourt, B., & P. Johnson. "Science Classroom Strategies for English Learners – Learning with the iPad and Other Tablets," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, September

IDRA 40th Anniversary

Since IDRA's earliest days, strengthening early childhood education has been a priority, particularly for students who are learning English. The central element to ensuring academic success for preschool children is valuing children's cultural, linguistic, gender and racial uniqueness. Each April since 1994, IDRA has been providing the nation's only gathering place for teachers and parents concerned with early childhood education of English learners. During IDRA's Annual *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute, hundreds of teachers, administrators and parents come together to explore, assess and reflect on research-based, effective practices that lead to young children's success. They get to see in action IDRA's Early Childhood Centers of Excellence Model that builds success for preschool English learners by nurturing their learning through excellent classroom-based instruction and home-based support. In addition, IDRA's new *Semillitas de Aprendizaje* supplemental curriculum includes a teacher guide with planning tools connected to knowledge, skill and concept objectives to help lead students through the *Semillitas de aprendizaje* stories.



Participants in IDRA's Annual *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute

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Veronica Betancourt, M.A., is an associate in IDRA Field Services, and Paula Johnson, M.A. is an associate in IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to them via email at comment@idra.org.

(*New Teachers Learning and Leading through IDRA's Transition to Teaching Programs*, continued from Page 2)

expertise in English language learning.



Martha Garza was a data entry clerk for an ophthalmologist. Now, she has completed her third year as a bilingual teacher. She currently teaches at an elementary school in South San Antonio ISD. She thinks bilingual education is needed. Many of her students speak English but need help with comprehending vocabulary. She uses a lot of visuals to help them with comprehension. She

meets with many of her bilingual students after school to give them extra help: "I use a lot of hands on and visual to help those students learn. I feel that my students are like my kids."

For more information on IDRA's Transition to Teaching projects, see IDRA's website or contact Dr. Linda Cantu at IDRA. You can also hear a Classnotes Podcast interview with Martha Alonso, MBA, and Marlene Alonso, MBA, at <http://www.idra.org/Podcasts>.

Linda Cantú, Ph.D. is a senior education associate. Dr. Cantú also coordinates IDRA's Transitions to Teaching projects. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at comment@idra.org.

Fostering Mutually Affirming Relationships, Curriculum Rigor and Relevance –

Science Strategies for English Language Learners

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

There is a significant shift in today's population. Demographers predict that "minorities" will comprise the majority of schoolchildren by 2023, the majority of working-age Americans by 2039, and the majority of all Americans by 2042. Even though such demographic changes will vary across the country, today's young people can expect to live in communities and work in organizations that are much more diverse than in the past. Consequently, the ability to thrive in a diverse environment will be among the top competencies and work-related skills in the workplace.

This change in the population has challenged schools to teach a more diverse group of students and prepare them to collaborate in numerous job settings to function in a diverse society. Unfortunately, many teachers do not feel prepared to meet these challenges to effectively address culturally and linguistically diverse learners in prekindergarten-12 pipeline.

To be successful in a diverse classroom, the most effective teaching and learning mechanism emerges when mutually affirming relationships exist between the teacher and students, more so for English language learners (ELLs). We know that when affirmations are communicated, they strengthen the relationships and make them flourish along with the bonds, ties and understandings that have been formed. The foundation of these bonds begins when learners believe that they are recognized and acknowledged for who they are and are respected as such.

Similarly, ELL students need to feel that they are intrinsically valued, cared for, can be in a safe environment where they will be engaged, can take risks, can ask questions, make mistakes and learn from the mistakes without fear of being ridiculed. In an environment where recognition and affirmation is inherently valued, ELL students are skilled enough to ask questions about the world around them and communicate their understandings in the most appropriate way, one

free of inhibitions.

In diverse classrooms where there are ELL students, teachers often ask themselves what they can do to help students learn the English language while teaching the content that is required on top of preparing all the students to meet standards of a rigorous curriculum and state assessments. There are many strategies that, if adopted and practiced effectively, will benefit ELLs and all the other students in the classroom.

IDRA's publication, *Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners – A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades*, presents seven umbrella research-supported strategies for the science classroom (Villarreal, et al., 2012). This article describes one of the strategies: foster mutually affirming relationships, curriculum rigor and relevance in successful bilingual and ESL science. The strategies also can be used as a base for teacher professional development at both the elementary and secondary levels.

The first step is to learn all students' names. While seeming obvious, this doesn't always happen. The teacher must practice and pronounce the names as closely as possible showing the student that as a teacher they value and respect their identity for who they are rather than changing the student's name to make it "easier" for the teacher.

Secondly, ELL students benefit greatly when they are paired or grouped with non-ELLs, providing opportunities for students to develop oral language along with content knowledge. Students need to be exposed to listening, speaking, reading and writing activities so that, among their peers and group discussions, they can participate in specific tasks given ample wait-time to think and process information in a way by which they can succeed with the help of their classmates. Resources, such as pictures with the use of both native and English language, are critical to improve the understanding of academic
(cont. on Page 6)

Educating linguistically and culturally diverse students requires key strategies, meaningful communication, and interactions that are supported by research and practice.

(Fostering Mutually Affirming Relationships, Curriculum Rigor and Relevance, continued from Page 5)

language addressing specific unit vocabulary words. Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (2007) have shown that an integrated approach to teaching science and language skills enables ELL students to learn English through the context of science instruction while being engaged in meaningful activities and opportunities to use English cooperatively to address scientific investigations. The above also will help to prepare all students for the workplace by using and developing their collaborative skills.

In the 21st century, rigor is defined as not only a *challenging* curriculum but also an *engaging* curriculum, one that has teachers pushing students to learn and make connections to personal and meaningful experiences of the world around them. The relevance of what is taught in the classroom needs to be reinforced with real-world experiences for learning to make sense. Teachers need to plan lessons where students can develop their capacity to understand content that is complex, challenging, inspiring, thought-provoking and exciting. Students need to be challenged to make their own discoveries and expand their understanding about how the world works. ELL students as well as non-ELL students have the ability to learn to manage difficult content and work with difficult ideas provided that successful strategies can be intertwined in the lesson cycle allowing students to construct meaning of the concepts being taught.

Teachers also can use the following considerations.

- Use science activities that are inquiry or project based, requiring students to develop and produce their own answers.
- Have students use the results of their answers to explore ways they can make a difference in the world around them by making connections.
- Ensure science lessons contain elements from different disciplines, relevant to real-world experiences, encouraging students to link what they have learned reinforcing and building on previous knowledge.
- Ask students to examine their own emotions concerning science problems or controversial issues taking a position where they can voice their opinions based on knowledge gained.
- Give students access to important key words and academic language using visuals, manipu-

lative activities and total physical response to understand the science content.

- Set up interactive content word walls to reinforce science content along with the highlight of important nouns, verbs and/or prepositions for the specific lesson units.
- Provide students with sentence stems to facilitate speaking and writing skills.
- Use alternative assessments for the ELL students.
- Allow enough wait-time to allow students' minds to process information.
- Provide academic vocabulary in the students' primary language along with the English language and review cognates that will help them transition from one language to the other.
- Tap background knowledge and scaffolding to develop language.
- Document and monitor students' growth.

Teachers need to simultaneously use multiple strategies that will help build language and content knowledge, making sure that students have paramount opportunities to succeed in the core subjects, in this case particularly while learning science. In addition, teachers need to provide meaningful and genuine support systems, such as engaging tutorials, to help students organize and summarize information. Teachers also need to promote mentoring sessions to encourage and foster ELL students' social and academic participation providing ample opportunities for them to succeed, reinforcing teaching and learning.

Parents and community members are an important asset in linking the home environment with the school environment and its culture. Providing engaging science-related lesson activities for the home along with science night, science camps and other engaging opportunities are some examples where teachers can share what the students are learning. Furthermore, providing workshops for ELLs' parents to reinforce learning at home is vital to enhance and increase students' academic performance. Educating linguistically and culturally diverse students requires key strategies, meaningful communication, and interactions that are supported by research and practice.

Resources

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- Excerpts and sample lesson from *Minority Women in Science – Forging the Way*
- The Status of Teaching Quality – Review of the Literature
- Handout listing the seven strategies for instruction of English learners in science

Visit www.idra.org for more information.

- Marin. "Science for ELLs: Rethinking our Approach," *The Science Teacher* (2007) Vol. 74 Issue 3, p. 52.
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Focus: Teaching Quality

“Strategies that treat teachers or parents as the enemy do harm. Any strategy that does not value every single child, any strategy that blames a culture or ethnic or racial group for school failure does harm.”

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



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