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Semillitas Project Supports Tribal Language Preservation

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., with Della Warrior, M.Ed.

Language is a primary way we engage students, reinforcing their identity, history and unique culture. It's a way for children to express themselves and connect with others. IDRA's Semillitas project, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, responds to the need for educational equity by providing bilingual, culturally and linguistically relevant early childhood materials for children and families, supporting community partnerships and providing technical assistance to educators. Semillitas helps children and English learners prepare for success by third grade in Texas. IDRA also is collaborating with Native American tribes in Oklahoma in supporting language preservation by translating and creating children's books for learning key concepts.

Della Warrior, director, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Museums of New Mexico, added: "The books, once completed, will be a really valuable learning tool for the young children of each tribe and will help preserve and foster language continuation. It is very exciting! It is important to remember that it has been only recently that some tribes have begun developing written languages. Some are struggling to develop orthographies and dictionaries. So the work we are doing is very important in helping them retrieve, revive and retain their respective languages."

It has been said that a people without knowledge of their language is like a tree without roots – it

often cannot sustain itself. The bilingual English-Spanish Semillitas de Aprendizaje little books are a collection of key concepts, numbers, and shapes to help children master key skills as stepping stones for later learning. The new translations are a labor of love, often a community effort not without challenges, especially for languages that are on the verge of extinction. Few people remain in the tribes who speak the language, and when someone is identified to translate, the languages often lack a dictionary or orthography, resulting in discussions on the proper pronunciation, definition, spelling, gender, etc., for each word.

The Otoe-Missouria language in use today is a merging of two separate languages into one that is a combination of both tribal languages. Fortunately, the language is being preserved through classes taught by Sky Campbell, B.A., language director, a non-Otoe-Missouria, who has learned the language. Campbell is assisted by tribal elders in teaching the language and ensuring accuracy.

IDRA is exploring collaboration with the Otoe-Missouria Tribe in northern Oklahoma, the Ponca Tribe, and the Pawnee Nation, located in Pawnee, Oklahoma. Because of prior government policies of acculturation, the languages of many tribes are at-risk of becoming extinct. Hundreds of native languages have already been lost, and several people are struggling to learn

(cont. on Page 2)

"An effective school is one where all students feel welcomed, valued and above all achieve both academically and socially."

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

(Semillitas Project Supports Tribal Language Preservation, continued from Page 1)

their language from recordings made by anthropologists in the early 1900s. These tribes in northern Oklahoma are no exception and may have fewer than 10 people who speak the language fluently.

This effort will have a significant impact on language survival as well as cultural identity. Within her own lifetime, Warrior has observed language loss in two generations. “The little math books and stories are going to be great assets in helping the tribes revive their languages,” Warrior explained. “If the little ones can learn the language, then the language will have a chance of surviving. Along with the language, of course, is the culture. Learning their language will help develop the student’s pride in their own identity as a tribal person.”

A storybook is planned as well, comprised of original legends shared through the oral tradition, illustrated by a local artist, to include legends that have special significance for the tribe. For example, one story tells of often long periods without food, especially in the winter. Another references tobacco, since it is important for young learners to know that tobacco was used for religious purposes, prayer and ceremonies. Another tells a tale about a turtle counting “coup,” which was a part of tradition with tribes of the Plains cultures.

The Otoe-Missouria people have lived in Red Rock, Oklahoma, since 1881. They were forcibly moved to their current location from a government reservation on the Big Blue River where they had been confined since 1855. Traditionally, they were hunters and gatherers, and it was difficult when they were put on a reservation because they could not go on buffalo hunts. Originally, the Otoe and Missouri were two separate tribes

and part of a group including the Winnebago and Iowa Tribes that lived in the Great Lakes Region. The state of Nebraska gets its name from the Otoe-Missouria words for “water flat” referring to the Platt River. These words are “Ni Brathge” (nee Brahtth-gay). Both the State of Missouri and the Missouri River are named after the Missouri Tribe. The Otoe and Missouri tribes were the first encountered by Lewis and Clark in their exploration expedition.

The tribe now has a little over 3,000 members. Among these, an estimated 5 percent can speak the Otoe-Missouria language at some level. It is believed that only three members are fully fluent in the language of today. The tribe has established a language department and is striving to preserve their language through an early childhood education program and language classes. “The Semillitas de Aprendizaje books are very much needed materials and will be a great asset toward teaching the children their language and preserving the language,” stated Warrior.

Research is abundantly clear on the benefits of bilingual education, especially now that we are becoming a “Nation of Polyglots” (Joseph Berger, 2007). Most nations value multiple languages for their inherent value. In fact, it is the norm in many nations for children to speak more than one and often several languages.

Language is not only an expression of culture, it is culture. We are at an important juncture in our history as a nation. As our global society expands, we have the choice to co-create a better future for our children by ensuring equity in education as a core value that will help transform our world. That choice helps us to become all that we can be as a people through honoring and celebrating our diversity of languages, history and culture.

It enables our children to fully embrace our multicultural and multilingual society, and calls upon us to provide full support for all learners, particularly those young and most vulnerable. It is a logical choice that reflects that we can never be less than that which we have already become. As we sort through sound educational choices for the future, the question to consider becomes what kind of world do we want our children to inherit? Hopefully, it is a world where diversity of languages unites rather than divides us, and where full engagement of families, educators and communities will ensure equity, access and excellence in education for all children.

More information about IDRA’s *Semillitas de Aprendizaje* materials and professional development support in the use of the materials is online at http://www.idra.org/Quality_Early_Education/Semillitas/

Resources

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Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., is director of development at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at comment@idra.org. Della Warrior, M.Ed., director, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Museums of New Mexico.

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.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2013) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

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

María 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

The Value of Cooperative Learning in Science for English Language Learners

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., and Juanita C. García, Ph.D.

Some teachers at one point or another have dreaded pairing students to do group science projects in their diverse and inclusive classrooms. “What if someone gets paired with someone they hardly know and doesn’t want to participate in the activity?” “What if they argue with each other and create chaos in the classroom?” “Where do I begin if I want my students to purposefully interact with each other and at the same time ensure they are actively learning the science content objectives?”

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: use cooperative groups to maximize language usage, global interaction and science achievement in a multicultural setting.

Research has shown that cooperative learning activities for English language learners help improve academic performance as well as increase motivation, strengthen self-esteem, encourage student bonding and promote literacy skills (Calderon, Sanchez & Slavin, 2011). Cooperative learning processes lessen individual competitiveness and foster cooperative small group problem-solving behavior as humans learn best when they collaborate with others and actively process personally meaningful information. When used correctly, cooperative learning develops students’ social and communication skills, increases tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and improves academic achievement. Students who have meaningfully participated in cooperative learning exhibit less competitive behaviors and more cross-ethnic cooperation. Furthermore, cooperative learning promotes better relationships among students with special needs and with varying races and ethnicities.

In using cooperative learning in the science classroom, teachers often fear that a shy student won’t

participate fully when paired with more outgoing students. To solve this, teachers can create more equitable cooperative groupings, create activities that encourage participation from each student individually and provide excellent opportunities for students to acquire social skills in a natural setting. When paired well, a student who has stronger language skills can help a student with weaker language skills improve through cooperative learning science activities.

In traditional classrooms, ELL students usually work alone. They don’t have the chance to learn to work well with others or to manage their own emotions while interacting with others. Using cooperative learning structures helps students acquire social skills and deepen character virtues and emotional intelligence. In science, students must understand that questioning, response to review and open communication are integral to the scientific process. What sticks for students are learning experiences based on engagement. ELL students will become successful in science when they are engaged in hands-on, minds-on learning experiences.

Cooperative learning enables teachers to achieve the following instructional objectives to comply with the National Science Standards:

- Improve students’ thinking and help them construct their own understanding of science content by strengthening and extending their knowledge of the topic. The sharing of ideas allows students to explore, refine and question new ideas.
- Promote student involvement and engagement as students take responsibility for their own learning and not depend solely on the teacher.
- Aid in the development of important communication skills and scientific thinking processes.

Cooperative techniques provide the social settings in which teachers can help students analyze their
(cont. on Page 4)

Cooperative learning in the science classroom is a highly structured form of group work that focuses on the problem-solving that can lead students – when directed by an excellent and high quality teacher – to deep learning and genuine paradigm shifts in their thinking.

(*The Value of Cooperative Learning in Science for English Language Learners*, continued from Page 3)

thinking processes and encourage all students to interact with their teachers and peers in a way that is conducive to science learning.

A Beginning Point

Spencer Kagan's (Clowes, 2011) Essential 5 is a list of cooperative structures to be used as a starting point to understanding cooperative learning. We at IDRA have conducted numerous cooperative learning professional development sessions. We have listened to teachers' concerns and have used the following cooperative learning structures as a springboard to access and use pair structures to form teams, promote social skills and maximize student to student interaction.

The Essential Five

Rally Robin. In pairs, students alternate generating brief oral responses. Examples:

- If the earth is always rotating, why doesn't it feel like we're spinning?
- What does the shape of a car have to do with its speed and mileage?
- Centrifugal force pushes outward. Centripetal force pulls inward. Give an example of these two forces in action.

Timed Paired Share. In pairs, students share with a partner for a predetermined time while the partner listens. Then partners switch roles. Examples:

- What is the key thing that you learned?
- What is one question you have about the topic?

Round Robin. In teams, students take turns responding orally. Examples:

- What makes a good scientist?
- List objects that float.
- What is one of your favorite topics in science?

Rally Coach. Partners take turns, one solving a problem while the other coaches. Then partners switch roles.

- What is another way you could draw an atom?
- What are the steps involved in drawing a Lewis Electron Dot Diagram? Draw one for the element of your choice.

Stand Up, Hand Up, Pair Up. Students stand up, put their hand up and quickly find a partner with whom to share or discuss. This structure is

perfect for class-building, processing and reviewing information, energizing the class, forming random pairs or teams, lesson starts or wraps.

The Essential Two

According to Kagan, a huge difference in achievement and engagement can be attained when teachers use Rally Robin and Think Pair Share, two strategic structures. Higher academic achievement becomes more evident and a reduction of the gap between high and low achieving students is apparent. There also is an improvement in social skills and cooperativeness, self-esteem, liking of school and learning, and positive classroom climate while discipline problems decrease. Also evident is an increase in leadership and employability skills, improved conflict resolution skills, and increased empathy and concern for others.

Intermingling cooperative learning structures with other teaching techniques enables students – whether ELL, learning-disabled, at risk or accelerated learners – to develop into a community of learners that models the process of open information exchange, which characterizes the world of science. Students have the opportunity to eagerly voice and debate scientific ideas and come to accept and share responsibility for their own learning. Students reflect on their own thinking and are more aware of their own decision-making and problem-solving skills. In the end, students not only develop deeper thinking and listening skills but they also become cohesive units as they collaborate to meet educational challenges.

Cooperative learning in the science classroom is a highly structured form of group work that focuses on the problem-solving that can lead students – when directed by an excellent and high quality teacher – to deep learning and genuine shifts in their thinking. We have provided you with a beginning point as a springboard to accessing and using pair structures. So don't dread pairing your diverse students to do science projects. Go for it! All your students will reap the benefits.

Resources

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Get More Online at the IDRA Newsletter Plus

- Online sample book from Semillitas de Aprendizaje™
- Info on the resource: *Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners ~ A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades*
- Classnotes podcasts about teaching science to English learners
- Links to resources on actionable knowledge
- Information about IDRA's highly successful Science Smart! professional development program
- Articles about using iPads and other tablets in the classroom
- Video: What students say about the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

Visit www.idra.org for more information.

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Nilka Avilés, Ed.D., is an IDRA senior education associate and Juanita C. García, Ph.D., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to them via email at comment@idra.org.



The Learner-Centered Approach – Leading with the iPad and Other Tablets

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

As we finalize this three-part series on using iPads and other tablets in the educational arena (see September 2012 and April 2013 issues), we will examine the benefits of these technologies for school leaders. iPads are the hottest item to infiltrate the education front and its trinkets promise to increase student achievement – if used appropriately and with fidelity. They are here to stay... at least for now. In our previous articles, we discussed how iPads can be used to increase student efficacy during the learning process and teacher efficacy for instructional delivery. So this begs the question, “What role do iPads (and other tablets) play for school leaders in creating an equitable teaching and learning environment that will maximize student achievement?” This question becomes especially critical for traditionally marginalized student groups, such as English learners who already face the challenges of finding their social identity and learning a new language while discovering their academic identity as well.

As the administrative leader on campus, a principal’s chief responsibility is to build the capacity of its staff, create a college-going culture and ensure students are provided a safe and equitable learning environment. Being a learning leader means balancing the evaluation of teachers using collected data based on student outcomes set forth in the curriculum while also taking into account students’ ability to demonstrate the content, how they utilize higher order thinking skills in processing their understanding, and what problem-solving strategies are incorporated into the learning. By refocusing on the outcomes and process of learning, it becomes possible to establish a culture where professional learning becomes reciprocal.

Let’s consider how the iPad is currently being used by administrators on school campuses. Perhaps there are those administrators who use iPads mainly to stay connected and be available to the staff and community they serve by having email at their fingertips. Web access also may enable them to access online accountability data, such as absences, using a secure web browser

on the district’s intranet or maybe even use their tablets for scheduling meetings. Perhaps some brave administrators have even ventured out and adopted a software program that enables them to collect data on their teachers for summative evaluation purposes.

So how does this connect with the technological capacities available at your fingertips? It depends on how innovative one is willing to be. Sure, one might hear at any given moment: “Oh, you need that? There’s an app for that!” However, this article is about capitalizing on what can be done on any tablet without the need to download or purchase any apps. The two areas we will be touching on are: online data collection for evaluative purposes and capturing ongoing “snapshots” of classroom life for value-based professional development that includes student voice as a means of reciprocal learning.

Online Data Collection

Tablets can be used to efficiently capture relevant evaluative data. While there are many options available on the web, we have found Survey Monkey to be secure and easy to use on mobile devices (SurveyMonkey.com). It is an online survey development tool that, with the basic free membership, enables administrators to create their own surveys with a maximum of 10 items per survey. Questions can range from posted lesson objectives to classroom arrangement. Surveys can be created for as many focus areas as are needed. This alleviates having to use paper, and reflections can easily be sent via email immediately upon completion of a classroom visit. The data collected is stored in your Survey Monkey account for future access and review. A very alluring perk is that reports can be generated using Excel, PDF and HTML formats as well as .csv and .xml files for more advanced data analysis systems.

Snapshots of Classroom Life

Administrators can bring the walk-through observation into the 21st century by using tablets to
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“What role do iPads (and other tablets) play for school leaders in creating an equitable teaching and learning environment that will maximize student achievement?”

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

(The Learner-Centered Approach – Leading with the iPad and Other Tablets, continued from Page 5)

collect snapshot data through photos and videos of the learning environment. Conducting these visits at frequent intervals helps evaluators gain a more complete picture of the classroom culture, norms, engagement levels and curricular alignment. Stopovers in five- to seven-minute intervals provide a platform for observing the learning process without derailing the lesson. Ultimately, collecting data over the course of the year will give a more complete story of teachers' instructional patterns (DuFour, 2002) and students' efficacy with the subject. Things to look for include effective teacher practice, levels of student engagement, powerful examples of differentiated instruction or questioning, and intentional use of academic speak among and between students.

Additionally, it is an opportune time to observe and capture, through videos and photos, how traditionally marginalized students, such as English learners and special education students, are faring with the culture and content of the classroom. These captured moments can then be turned into short, one- to two-minute vignettes to use during team meetings, mini-professional development sessions, or day-long learning workshops as a platform to highlight positive teaching and learning moments (as well as the occasional discussion for improvement). This provides the potential for students to voice their perceptions of the value of learning the content and collective learning in the classroom.

It is through candid shots of student learning, informal dialogues for student feedback, and learning reflections from students that teachers can become reciprocal learners. Fletcher (2011) stated it best by noting, "Embracing a diversity of perspectives can make student voice the most significant tool in the school improvement toolbox."

Adapting to the growing needs of the school by using technology such as tablets to build the collaborative learning culture needed for student success goes without question. When administrators shift the school culture to one that is inclusive and responsive to the children they serve, with learning outcomes as the focus of instructional improvement, "Students see that both administrators and teachers value instruction and learning" (Protheroe, 2009).

Resources

Betancourt, V., & P. Johnson. "Science Classroom Strategies for English Learners – Learning with the iPad and Other

IDRA 40th Anniversary

Since IDRA's 1986 landmark study of dropouts in Texas, IDRA has kept the issue at the forefront, taking a stand that "Every child is valuable, none is expendable." For many years, IDRA has worked with schools to help them account for every student. IDRA has worked



Some of the high school students who were part of San Antonio's Youth Tekies: Joseph Cuéllar (left) and Ray Romero (right).

to transform schools so they embrace the characteristics of all students, celebrating the strengths and contributions that they and their families bring. This work has included demonstrating how student engagement can be expanded to promote youth leadership. For example, through IDRA's Pathways initiative funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, students in Canton, Mississippi, used documentary photography to share their stories and perspectives on how to expand pathways to high school graduation and college. In the Texas Rio Grande Valley, 80 teenagers came together in their neighborhood as part of IDRA's Fair Funding Now! initiative, which informed community leaders across the state about the state's draconian cuts to education. The teens shared their own testimonies of how the budget cuts had affected them and their classmates. And they committed themselves to telling others about Fair Funding Now! and actions they could

take. And while for many students – particularly those who are minority or economically disadvantaged – the dream of going to college is stymied by adults around them who deem them as not being "college material," a group of high school students in San Antonio's Youth Tekies challenged that perception among hundreds of low-income, minority students, many of whom were low achieving in school, by working with 600 of their peers to help them apply for college.

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Veronica Betancourt, M.A., and Paula Johnson, M.A., are IDRA education associates. Comments and questions may be directed to them via email at comment@idra.org.



San Antonio Dropout Prevention Program Expands to Chicago, Detroit, L.A., New York City & Sacramento

IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Grows with New Grant from The Coca-Cola Foundation

Schools in five U.S. cities will benefit from IDRA's highly-successful dropout prevention program, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, made possible by a new \$1 million grant from The Coca-Cola Foundation to IDRA. Through the grant, five school districts will be funded to implement the program for up to four years. Selected schools in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Sacramento and New York City will be invited to participate. IDRA designed and developed the program and provides the full range of training, technical assistance, evaluation and support materials. With this grant, IDRA also will work with local community, state and federal sources to shape and sustain the program beyond the initial funding.

"In 2014, the Coca-Cola Foundation and IDRA will celebrate a 30-year partnership of implementing the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program nationally and internationally," stated Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO. "The program is based on the creed: All students are valuable, none is expendable. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has maintained a less than 2 percent dropout rate and is approved by the Texas State Board of Education as an innovative course eligible for elective credit at the high school level."

Created by IDRA, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an award-winning cross-age tutoring program that has kept 98 percent of its tutors in school – more than 33,000 students, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. The lives of more than 787,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program in cities across the United States and in Brazil, Puerto Rico and the United Kingdom.

This research-based dropout prevention program works by identifying middle school and high school students who are at-risk of dropping out and enlisting them as tutors for elementary school youngsters who are also struggling in school. Given this role of personal and academic responsibility, the Valued Youth tutors improve their literacy and thinking skills, bolster self-esteem and feel they belong in their school. Schools shift to the philosophy and practices of valuing students considered at-risk. Results show that tutors stay in school, have increased academic performance, improve school attendance and advance to higher education.

"The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program gives an opportunity for young people to see themselves and for others to see them as the valuable and important young people that they are... not limited by adult or school perceptions about them," added Dr. Robledo Montecel.

Since 1990 when The Coca-Cola Foundation was established, it has provided IDRA with funding for materials and curriculum development, research and expansion. Under this new grant, in addition to launching the five sites, IDRA will help identify partnering networks to sustain the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program in their communities. IDRA also will expand outreach for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Alumni Fellows Network among tutors and their college-going peers in ways that inspire persistence, graduation and the view that they, too, can be college-bound.

Interested secondary schools can apply to become part of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program network by contacting IDRA to implement the program at their campuses. Districts and campuses use federal funds, such as Title I,



Title II, Title III, and state compensatory and migrant funds to operate the program. Often schools form school-business partnerships with local businesses and civic groups to secure funds.

Additional information is online at: <http://www.idra.org>

- Video: See a quick overview of how the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program impacts students and schools. (01:30)
- See essays by student participants.
- Hear podcasts about the program.
- Read Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.



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