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Focus: Change Strategies

The Challenge of Seeing

Shaping the Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity

by Bradley Scott, Ph.D.

It seems that our nation has arrived at a place where we must think about a new way of committing to students' excellence and success. The federally-funded equity assistance centers have been engaged in profound conversations about what it will take for our public schools *really* to educate all children to excellence. IDRA has raised the same concerns as we have described various elements of the Quality School Action Framework™ (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010) and in the *IDRA Newsletter*.

This new place requires us to see with a different eye and commit to a more productive – albeit more challenging – enterprise of doing and being in the world of public education. This article begins that different enterprise by describing the equity context and lens for action. To date, five *generations* of civil rights and educational equity have been identified as follows.

- **First Generation:** 1954-1964 – litigation, starting with *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* shaped civil rights.
- **Second Generation:** 1964-1983 – legislation, starting with the passage of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, redefined the civil rights landscape.
- **Third Generation:** 1983-1990 – state-driven reform efforts, starting with the report, *A Nation at Risk*, refocused the civil rights conversation on issues beyond just access alone.
- **Fourth Generation:** 1990-2000 – state and national government reform efforts, starting with the national governors meeting on education challenging the country to look forward to the new century, as a marker for how public education should support excellence for all.
- **Fifth Generation:** 2001-2011 – *No Child Left Behind Act* passage, starting with the educational and civil rights conversation, challenging public schools to be accountable for disaggregated student achievement outcomes.

The time is right to discuss a new generation of civil rights and educational equity.

- **Sixth Generation:** 2012-beyond – NCLB as updated by the current administration's Blueprint for Reform.

The sixth generation is currently being shaped. While both the fifth and sixth generations are focused on *systemic equity*, the sixth is challenging us to be more focused on rigorous curriculum presented by highly qualified teachers under the supervision of dynamic leadership.

Other factors are emerging in this advance toward this new generation. The drivers that cause persistent outcome gaps for learners – including issues of disproportionality; over- and underrepresentation of minorities in special education and gifted and talented programs; high

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"Three change strategies help schools, as systems, hold on to all students and secure their success: building community capacity to strengthen schools; creating coalitions that amplify parent and community voices and impact; and building school capacity to ensure that every child receives an excellent education."

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

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dropout rates for minority, linguistically different, low-income and special needs learners; persistent low college-going and college completion rates for these same populations; and differences between learners by gender – are clearly some of the key challenges this new generation of civil rights and educational equity compel us to address. But there is more.

The sixth generation is calling us to examine the quality, correctness and suitability of the *inputs* to produce different *outcomes* for all learners regardless of their differences to provide them with knowledge, skills and competencies that raise their global competitiveness in this 21st century world. Will our learners measure up? Will they be competitive? Will they be able to stand toe-to-toe with their counterparts around the globe and be successful? I think they will, but it will require us to see the world through a different lens.

Systemic equity is "the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every student has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, personal and social responsibility, and self sufficiency for school and for life" (2000). And while systemic equity is still the goal, a new way of seeing is required.

Similarly, I have described the Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform (comparably high achievement and other student outcomes, equitable access and inclusion, equitable treatment, equitable opportunity to learn, equitable resource distribution, and equitable shared stakeholder accountability) (2000; 2002). Strategic and focused implementation of these goals is critical to the creation of systemic equity.

The sixth generation also is challenging us to see change and transformation through a different lens. A *deficit lens* is neither accurate, productive nor useful for looking at the outcomes for learners. Such a lens seeks to explain away, trivialize, excuse or fabricate the lived experiences of learners and their families as a reason for how they fare in schools.

An *equal lens* for seeing change also is neither useful nor productive because it ignores the diversity of real students in real communities and schools and the experiences they bring with them that shape who they really are.

What is needed is an *equity lens* that creates a different context to really see diverse learners, to value and embrace them and their differences, and to find ways of appropriately responding to and capitalizing on those diverse characteristics to move them to excellent academic outcomes as a part of their success in college and life.

The Equity Context and Lens

The equity context is comprised of the systems and structures a school district puts into place to ensure that no learner is denied the fair and equitable benefit of a quality, sound educational experience afforded to all other students regardless of race, gender, national origin, language, economic level and special need. Great teachers and leaders are prepared to engage students and families so that the equitable benefit is created and guaranteed for all learners. It becomes *the lens* through which all of the business of the organization is filtered.

At a minimum, the following questions must be posed before an organization can say that it has employed an equity lens to serve all students regardless of their differing characteristics.

1. How does this (activity) impact all learners?
2. What might create a negative or adverse impact on any identifiable population?
3. How might that adverse impact be avoided?
4. What precautions should we take as we move forward?
5. How do we monitor our work and the comparable outcomes for all students?
6. How do we change our policies, our practices and our processes to produce different, fair and equitable outcomes for the students and families we serve?

The Final Challenge

Every educational institutional has an obligation and is challenged to filter its business in support of student success through a lens of educational equity. This lens helps to protect the civil rights of every learner under the law; guarantee equitable educational opportunity for every learner regardless of their differing characteristics; provide the

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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/

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Science Classroom Strategies for English Learners – Learning with the iPad and Other Tablets

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

Technology is ever evolving in exponential leaps and bounds. Just a few years ago, the iPad debuted. Soon, we can be expecting the iPad 3 to make its way into our hearts. So what does this mean for educators and the field of education as it exists today? Schools are encouraged to ensure we educate our children to be globally competitive, yet the structure and ideology of schools has remained the same for decades. As such, a vast majority of classrooms simply become contexts of unproductive learning (Sarason, 2004).

IDRA's new 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: maximize use of technology in delivery of effective science and EL instruction and use Internet resources to supplement and enrich instruction of EL students.

Technology has shifted the ways in which children engage and learn. Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis and social media sites, thrust the Internet from a platform of *receptive communication* (sit and get information) to one of *interactive communication* (dynamic, real-time interaction) and has created an urgency for us to engage learners in a manner that maximizes the resulting benefits. Capitalizing on students' knowledge of navigating technology for social interaction can be transferred into an academic setting that creates ongoing opportunities for application of critical thinking skills toward real-world issues that promote real-world solutions.

The question that now resonates is: How can we use iPads and other tablets to effectively generate a dynamic learning environment for maximum engagement in rigorous instruction? Rigor has traditionally been equated with a mastery of the content and was only available to a select few. But there must be a transformation of this definition to include applicable skills in conjunction with content knowledge in order to effectively and efficiently respond to the dynamic world and changing circumstances we face (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). This translates into understanding that rigor requires us to challenge students beyond their comfort zone emotionally, intellectually and academically.

In a three-part series of articles, we are going to share how use of the iPad and other tablets can be maximized in multiple contexts: learning with the iPad, teaching with the iPad, and leading with the iPad.

Learning with the tablets can be maximized when instruction is designed to focus on big, interrelated ideas accompanied by essential questions (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). The iPad and other tablets have many possibilities for use in the classroom when applied to real-world circumstances that engage students in analyzing situations and applying critical and creative thinking to find reasonable solutions.

For English learners, this means having intentional opportunities to also engage in outcome-oriented discussions with justification. By allowing students to negotiate using such technologies as the iPad as a tool for learning, they can broaden their social and academic language skills and demonstrate their understanding of the content through expressive means (writing or speaking).

For example, in a middle school life science class, students are learning about food webs and the interactions between biotic and abiotic factors in the environment. It isn't enough to just understand what food webs are and learn the terms biotic and abiotic. Rather, it is critical that students are able to apply that knowledge to real-world situations. So instead of simply practicing how to identify the energy transfer among organisms in a food web, students may be challenged to research a particular environment (i.e., rainforest in Peru – http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/Peru), identify

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The iPad and other tablets have many possibilities for use in the classroom when applied to real-world circumstances that engage students in analyzing situations and applying critical and creative thinking to find reasonable solutions.

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unique flora and fauna to that region, and pinpoint threats that could upset the balance of that food web. Additionally, students can use social networking sites, such as Facebook (if over the age of 13), to investigate organizations with environmental concerns and compare their own ideas with those of practicing organizations (i.e., Rainforest Alliance).

Instructional rigor is achieved by extending the activity and engaging students in finding potential solutions that would prevent an environmental upset. These types of highly cognitive learning opportunities immediately increase rigor and require students to apply and negotiate their academic knowledge in a solutions-driven environment.

The tablet becomes a learner tool as students research the web and collect data that would contribute to the solution-driven activity. In completing the activity, the learner must have or acquire sufficient knowledge of: (1) what food webs are; (2) in what ways food webs are significant to an environment; (3) what abiotic and biotic factors are; (4) which biotic factors contribute to a food web; and (5) how abiotic factors contribute to or affect the success of a food web. Engaging in solution-driven activities with the iPad, etc., goes beyond superficial and lower-level tasks by requiring students to expand their knowledge in context and through active engagement with others.

Products that can be used to demonstrate learning and critical thinking include creating a public service announcement with an iPad or tablet and allowing students to edit and create a final video with iMovie, for example. English learners benefit greatly from this type of expressive task because they must negotiate their understanding of the topic with others in their group and engage in a cooperative team environment that requires extensive interaction with their peers to come to a common understanding of the issue at hand.

Additionally, students may be asked to use the iPad or other tablets to present their contrived solution in the form of a concept map and may include a visual representation that would demonstrate the catastrophic impact of how identified threats to the region could negatively impact the food web within the environment.

There are multitudes of learning apps and opportunities that can be used with tablets. This above scenario is just one of limitless ways in which the iPad and other tablets can effectively be used as a student-driven tool for learning. It is especially useful for English learners because it offers a medium for communication practices on both a social and academic level. Subsequent articles in the *IDRA Newsletter* series will focus on how tablets can be used as a teaching tool and as a leadership platform for catapulting teacher efficacy and student success.

Resources

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Lady Bird Johnson Centennial Symposium on Early Childhood Education

November 8, 2012, at Texas State University, San Marcos

This symposium will focus on early childhood education in recognition of Lady Bird Johnson's work as the honorary chair of the board of the original Head Start program. Quality early education can have a profound impact that lasts a lifetime in terms of preparing students for academic success, teaching fundamental reading and math skills, and developing social and cognitive strengths that are important for school, college and the world of work. Research has shown that children who receive high-quality early education earn higher test scores, complete more years of education and are more likely to attend a four-year college. These children also demonstrate higher academic achievement in both reading and math from the primary grades through young adulthood. Based on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2010 Kids Count data, low-income and English learners who receive high-quality pre-K programs demonstrate the highest gains and greatest reductions in achievement gaps, and yield some of the most substantial improvements in school performance.

On November 8, 2012, Texas State University is hosting a symposium for dialogue and action planning around this important issue. IDRA's President, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel was recently interviewed by Emmy-award winning producer Robert Currie for a video production being developed as part of the planned events, in which IDRA will collaborate.

Over 30 years of research have proven that bilingual education, when implemented well, is the best way to learn English and children in such programs achieve higher academic standards. Yet there is a lack of culturally-relevant bilingual Spanish-English materials for children, families, caregivers and educators. IDRA's Semillitas de aprendizaje™ represents a new era of early childhood education and helps teachers to foster literacy, cognitive skills and social-emotional development by supporting children as they exercise their curiosity and bring their own experiences into each lesson. Learn more about this supplemental curriculum series on Page 8 or online at www.idra.org.

Identification and Assessment Issues Raised in English Learner National Evaluation of Title III Implementation

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

In 2012, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) released its national study conducted for the U.S. Department of Education regarding Title III education of English learners (ELs) (Tanenbaum, et al., 2012). The study described the progress in Title III implementation across states, examined programs and services that localities have in place to serve EL students and how they relate to state policies, and focused on the diversity of EL students (concentrations, languages, ages and length of residence in the United States) and the educational implications of this diversity.

Findings show that the numbers of EL students are increasing in all parts of the country. The EL population has grown by 18 percent in the five-year span from 2002-03 to 2007-08, from 3.7 million to 4.4 million. This growth in enrollment is evident not only in states that have historically educated language-minority students – California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Texas – but also in many states where EL students are emerging as a new, fast-growing student sub-population – Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, among others.

The rapid growth in EL enrollment in many areas is of particular significance because it presents new challenges for states and communities that have limited experience in serving EL students and must now address a broad range of complex issues quickly and in a large scale (IDRA, 2009).

EL Student Identification Practices

According to the study, initial student identification procedures are similar in states around the country. For example, it was noted that in 45 states the EL identification process typically begins with a home language survey followed by an assessment of English proficiency. A new finding uncovered by this study though is that only eight states have "established consistent statewide criteria for identifying ELs, while the remaining 42 states provide districts [varying] discretion in making identification decisions."

In most states, the home language survey is used to identify students to be administered some assessment of English proficiency. Though a common practice, the study found great variation in what constitutes a home language survey. The comprehensiveness of the surveys varies extensively, with some requesting as few as two questions, while others have as many as 10 questions. The authors report that in the majority of states (33 and D.C.), the home language survey includes between two and five questions. The survey is important in that most states use it as the basis for determining which students will be administered the more comprehensive English proficiency measure. This notable variance in initial language screening procedures may well account for extensive ranges in the number of prospective EL students who may be (or not be) identified in a school district or in specific states.

IDRA's extensive experience in working with schools serving EL students confirms there is tremendous fluctuation in expertise required to accurately identify an EL student, resulting in notable under-identification of students as non-English proficient.

EL Assessment Practices

The 2012 AIR report also found that language proficiency assessments vary extensively from state to state. According to the study, "All states require use of some assessment of English proficiency, with 26 states and D.C. requiring use of a state-mandated specific assessments, including seven states requiring use of a state-developed assessment (Arizona, Idaho, California, Kansas, Michigan, New York, Washington), six states requiring districts to use certain state-approved assessments, and *(cont. on Page 6)*

Absent some uniformity, EL student populations are subject to the whims and political leanings of state political leaders who may have limited interest in identifying – and thus being required by law – to provide specialized educational services to EL students residing in their communities.

(Identification and Assessment Issues Raised in English Learner National Evaluation of Title III Implementation, continued from Page 5)

the remaining 18 states allowing districts to choose their own assessment."

Major non-state-developed measures used in states include the WIDA Consortium assessment, the LAS Links Family, IPT Family, Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey, and Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA).

The extensive variation in EL identification (and exiting) procedures suggests a need for examining this vital area at the national level and providing more standardized procedures to ensure consistency in policy and practice. Absent some uniformity, EL student populations are subject to the whims and political leanings of state political leaders who may have limited interest in identifying – and thus being required by law – to provide specialized educational services to EL students residing in their communities. Since federal involvement in the EL area, both in legal and political realms, dates back nearly five decades, such national standardization in EL identification policies and procedures is long-overdue.

The authors found extensive variation in the degree of state direction on what information must be gathered and how much additional input may be considered in making determination on an EL student's level of English proficiency. For example "24 states allow districts to use criteria in addition to English proficiency assessment for identifying ELs, with criteria ranging from teacher judgment to parental input" – though all 50 states require English language proficiency to be one of the criteria.

EL Student Exiting Practices

Those familiar with EL program issues recognize that decisions on when EL students are ready to be re-classified as English proficient and thus should be exited from special programs are not simple ones. In the AIR report, the authors explain the opposing tension of a desire for simplicity and transparency in the making of EL exiting decisions and recognition of the complexity and "the individual nature of language acquisition and content learning process." This dichotomy is reflected in the fact that 14 states and District of Columbia require that exit decisions be made solely on the basis of EL students' performance on an English language proficiency test, while the remaining 36 states allow or require districts to use multiple criteria.

Tension between district and state level prerogatives related to EL programs also are reflected in the amount of discretion provided to districts in making EL exiting decisions. According to the study, 32 states allow local district discretion in exiting students from the EL sub-groups.

The decisions on when to exit EL students from specialized services are critical ones. Premature exiting of ELs can result in chronic student under-achievement when they subsequently participate in the regular instructional program with no specialized language related support.

The authors correctly note that exiting decisions must be grounded in the "recognition of the complexity" and "the individual nature of language acquisition and content learning process." Exiting EL students from specialized support programs would benefit from some degree of standardization across states, provided that such policies and procedures are premised on the understanding that such decisions require the consideration of multiple factors that, taken together, offer evidence that the student is ready to make a successful transition into the all-English school curriculum.

This latest report suggests that there is extensive need for greater standardization of EL student identification and assessment. Whether states will be receptive may rely in part on how much they feel a need to continue to receive the limited Title III funding provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Related EL funding research conducted by IDRA indicates that state support varies greatly from state to state, thus incentives for effective identification of EL students also may vary widely at state and local levels.

In their conclusions, the authors note, correctly, that this extensive variation in the procedures used to identify ELs means that "a student who is identified as an EL according to one district's practices may or may not be identified as such according to another district's practices (even within the same state), raising implications for state and local EL funding levels, accountability and service delivery for this sub-population." If federal funding is to have greater impact in improving services to EL students, some degree of similarity across states seems essential to ensure that funding is targeted to those states and students most in need.

Resources

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Can't Wait to Celebrate 100% Graduation in Texas

Statement by Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO, on TEA's Latest Dropout Study

The Texas Education Agency has released its annual report of dropout and graduation rates in Texas high schools, finding that graduation rates have reached an all-time high of 85.9 percent. IDRA's study released in November 2011 also found a trend of gradual improvement in high school attrition rates in Texas. TEA reports an attrition rate of 24.9 percent, while IDRA's study for the same period found a rate of 27 percent. For example, the gap between the attrition rates of White students and Black students has increased from 7 percentage points to 16.

But the disparity in dropout rates and attrition rates has not improved between racial-ethnic groups. The racial-ethnic gaps are dramatically higher than 26 years ago, based on IDRA's annual studies.

While it is certainly encouraging to see graduation rates improve, IDRA's analysis shows that, at the current rate of attrition, Texas will not reach universal high school education for another quarter of a century in 2037. It is far too soon to celebrate. And we at IDRA will not celebrate until all students enrolled in Texas graduate from high school with a college-ready high school diploma in four years.

We have witnessed some exciting initiatives by schools and entire districts that are producing results that are clearly paying off. Their investment into dropout prevention programs and college readiness initiatives is beginning to show some sign of promise.

However the state has taken steps to impede this progress by returning to student tracking and cutting funding for, and in some cases eliminating, programs designed to increase graduation rates. While all school districts suffered from special program cuts, the state's lowest property wealth districts suffered the most.

Even more detrimental, the state's resistance to providing equitable funding across the state has restricted low wealth and medium wealth school districts from providing quality educational programs, including reading, math and science. These districts have higher concentrations of low-income and minority students. These are the students who are more likely to be in under-resourced schools with limited access to quality teaching and curriculum. IDRA's analyses have found that simple attrition rates vary dramatically when comparing the lowest property wealth and the highest property wealth groupings of districts.

We cannot meet our goals of educating Texas youngsters to compete in a global economy without closing the racial-ethnic gaps in high school graduation and college completion rates. At IDRA, we have brought together what is known about how to do this in our Quality Schools Action Framework™. The framework focuses change on the system indicators that research and experience say matters, including fair funding and high quality curriculum that prepares students for 21st century opportunities.

Schools are not underperforming because children in them are poor or black or brown. Rather, it is poor policies, poor practices and inadequate investments that hold our children back.

It doesn't have to be this way. Our state can do better than 85.9 percent. Texas must move from its low expectation that only some of our state's students can successfully graduate to expecting and supporting all of our students to graduate college-ready. Then, we'll have reason to celebrate.

This statement was released on August 10, 2012. For more information, see IDRA's latest Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2009-10 and our Fair Funding Now! Initiative at www.idra.org.

(The Challenge of Seeing, continued from Page 2)

appropriate educational supports for school success, post-secondary school attendance and completion and life success supported by the necessary resources to make that success possible; while ensuring that every education stakeholder holds self and others responsible for these outcomes.

To see the Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform in more detail or in Spanish visit: http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/Six_Goals_of_Education_Equity/.

Resources

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Focus: Change Strategies

"The bottom line is: schools are responsible for the education of children – for all children, be they Black, Brown, White, poor, rich, female, male, disabled, non-disabled, English-speaking or not."

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