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*Focus: Curriculum Quality*

# Suggestions for Conducting Effective Teaching Demonstrations in Classrooms with Diverse Learners

*by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.*

Mentoring teachers in the classroom setting has become a major professional development strategy. The success of a mentoring activity is influenced by teachers’ ideas about students, their feelings of self efficacy, and their level of interest and commitment to make a difference in student achievement. These factors are challenges that a mentor must be prepared to address when visiting a classroom or holding a dialogue with teachers.

A key and effective mentoring activity is to lead a demonstration of proven practices, show how to engage all students, including English language learners, and to produce achievement results. Teachers who benefit most from a good mentor are those who are willing to learn by observing good teaching practices and by partnering with a mentor to become proficient in using effective teaching practices. These teachers are advocates, innovators and the avant-garde who hold student success as the measure of their success as teachers.

Somewhat disturbing are comments by a small number of teachers – the skeptics – who are convinced that their limited success in the classroom is due to the backgrounds of their students and students’ families. These teachers appear to have a self-serving interest and seek support for their belief that their students’ circumstance (family, community, income status) is responsible for lack of success. Mentors often are

challenged to prove these skeptics incorrect. The purpose of this article is to share some thoughts about effective classroom demonstrations in classrooms with diverse student populations.

### **Building Trust Through Partnership**

IDRA’s extensive experience has shown that a good mentoring relationship is based on mutual respect, trust and a valuing perspective that honors and builds upon assets that teachers bring to the classroom. Trust is built over time by setting a mutual goal of student success, where the teacher understands that the mentor is a partner who will recognize, reinforce and build upon the individual strengths of the teacher to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Conversely, good teachers display an openness to risk taking and trying out new ideas and a desire to make a difference in the achievement of all students. Mentored teachers understand that the role of an IDRA mentor, for example, is not evaluative. Rather, it is supportive and intended to help teachers become more effective with all of their students. In some cases, mentors might be asked by administrators for an evaluation of a teacher. In these cases, the mentor with integrity protects the mentor-teacher relationship by reinforcing their supportive role and their mutually-agreed upon goal of student success.

*(cont. on Page 2)*

*“To fulfill our country’s commitment to children, school curricula must be aligned with the demands and possibilities of our times and must be accessible to all.”*

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

(Suggestions for Conducting Effective Teaching, continued from Page 1)

### Demonstration Content: Effective, Culturally-relevant Teaching Practices

Each demonstration provided by an IDRA mentor exemplifies a set of activities that must be evident in an effective classroom with a diverse student population. Participating teachers will observe a culturally-relevant classroom demonstration session, incorporating the following teaching practices and techniques.

- Lecturing is minimized to no more than 25 percent of class time. Home assignments are purposeful and directly related to reinforce or extend learning.
- Inquiry and the discovery of concepts are prevalent and are the main teaching modes. Labs are integrated as the major source for inquiry, and the scientific method for discovery and retention of knowledge is evident.
- Students are constantly being challenged with opportunities to use higher-order thinking skills. Teaching is connected to practical life experiences. Teachers incorporate the use of relevant student cultural experiences to make these connections.
- Retention of learning and new knowledge is less about memory of concepts and more about internalization and application of concepts through experience and inquiry.
- Data-driven instruction is planned to address a variety of student needs. There is evidence of scaffolding and “chunking” instruction and learning activities into 10- to 15-minute blocks of meaningful, engaging learning episodes.

- The teacher is constantly checking for understanding and application, re-teaching and extending concepts by challenging students. Differentiation and adjustments to the instruction are evident, planned, spontaneous and ongoing.
- Discourse using academic content-specific language is promoted among students, modeled by the teacher and used throughout the day in other contexts.
- Individual and group project-based learning become the major teaching strategies that promote inquiry and discovery.
- Multiple uses of technology to enhance and support teaching and learning are evident.
- Teaching of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) using English as a second language (ESL) techniques reinforces and extends the use of academic language.
- The teacher employs multi-sensory teaching techniques and frequently makes adjustments as needed to engage students and maintain interest, checking frequently for comprehension and offering ample opportunities to apply new learning to real world examples.

### Phases of Classroom Demonstrations in Staff Development

A classroom demonstration by an IDRA mentor involves three major phases. During the first phase, IDRA obtains information on the topic and lesson to be taught on the day of the demonstration. With the host teacher and other participating teachers, the IDRA consultant collaboratively prepares a lesson plan that

describes the roles of the consultant, host teacher and other participating teachers. The professional development focus areas that should be observed and evaluated are identified. The IDRA consultant meets with teachers through a Skype (interactive online) phone session. Teachers are asked to prepare students for the demonstration event.

Observing teachers are provided a form on which to assess and jot down those practices that they find useful and would like to implement, suggestions for improvement, and other questions or observations for use in follow-up discussions after the session.

In the second phase, the IDRA consultant begins the first 30 minutes of a 90-minute class by modeling effective practices, followed by a 30-minute co-teaching session with the host teacher. He or she will culminate the session with a 30-minute assessment and re-teaching activity.

In the last phase, after the demonstration, the host teacher and other participating teachers meet for about 30 minutes to reflect on what was observed. They determine how each teacher will apply the knowledge and personalize new teaching strategies learned in their own classrooms.

Effective mentoring strategies can be a powerful way of helping teachers to improve their effectiveness in the classroom, with all students, and particularly with English language learners.

*Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., is director of IDRA Field Services. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at [feedback@idra.org](mailto:feedback@idra.org).*

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# Differentiating Science Instruction using Language Proficiency Standards

By Veronica Betancourt, M.A., and Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.

The buzz these days is about “ELPS training” (English Language Proficiency Standards) for all content teachers working with English language learners (ELLs). Mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, each state must develop these state-specific standards to assist English language learners, a student population that has grown in the United States by 57 percent from 3.2 million to 5.1 million between 1995-96 and 2004-05 (Cortez & Villarreal, 2009). Support in science is essential. U.S. students have not shown gains among students around the globe in science since 1995 (TIMSS, 2008). This article addresses this imperative for quality science instruction for ELL students by providing tips for integrating the ELPS into a dynamic science lesson.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) published the prekindergarten through 12th grade ELPS that have guided states in developing their own standards. The ELPS consist of five standards, including social language and four content areas, with performance indicators clustered by grade for each standard. Performance indicators show how activities can be scaffolded within each standard and the language domains of reading, writing, listening and speaking while based on ELL proficiency levels.

What does it really mean to use the ELPS to plan and deliver instruction that meets the needs of individual ELL students in a science lesson? The following scenario provides a lesson plan sample.

## Science Class Scenario

A teacher is planning a middle school science lesson on the lunar cycle. In a class of 24 students, the teacher has six English language learners with varying levels of English proficiency. Using available language assessment data, the teacher summarizes ELL profiles as follows: two students are advanced level, three are intermediate, and one is beginning. Since these levels are detailed within the state’s

ELPS, the teacher can identify and project each student’s English language development path. Using assessment data, the teacher concludes that reading comprehension and writing are the biggest challenges for the intermediate and advanced ELLs. The beginning level student shows strength in listening, but requires well sequenced support in reading, writing and speaking.

## Intentional Linguistic Planning

The first question to be addressed is: What academic language about the lunar cycle do students need to understand and communicate?

Planning with the end in mind, this teacher begins by summarizing key vocabulary and concepts as defined in the state science knowledge and skills continuum. The teacher identifies the verbs (demonstrate, describe, predict, design, etc.) that standardize the cognitive load required within this topic and considers possible types of question terms (compare, evaluate, summarize, analyze data, make inferences, etc.) that might be used in assessment. Within the content standards, the teacher identifies key academic language that should be intentionally integrated throughout instruction and laboratory experiences. Intentionally integrated refers to systematically intertwining linguistic support and practice. Special emphasis is placed on words or combination of words that might be confusing for ELL students, content-specific or otherwise.

Examples of these words include: sequence, notify, report, determine, consumer, producer, reflection, condense, plate and power. The teacher also reviews all possible learning tools, including textbooks, models, Internet resources and other materials, for cognates, new vocabulary and text reading level so that linguistically appropriate materials are provided to students. These factors are critical in the choice of lesson activities to promote the learning and practice of these language structures.

(cont. on Page 4)

*“The English Language Proficiency Standards are a valuable guide for planning lessons that engage English language learners in the teaching, learning and second language acquisition process through intentional activities.”*

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*Differentiating Science Instruction, continued from Page 3)*

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### Scenario Theory into Practice

During the first part of the lesson, the teacher wants to find out: What language and knowledge do my students already have about this topic? For all students, the lesson begins with a two-part brainstorm. Students are divided into groups of four with ELL students interspersed throughout. They are instructed to engage in peer discussions about the cycle of the moon and create a group list of their ideas within a five-minute time period. As support, a visual of the lunar cycle is projected on a screen.

During the activity, the teacher works individually with the beginning ELL student. Being aware that this student understands more vocabulary than he can produce, the teacher asks for non-verbal responses by having him

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## Youth Matters

By Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Administrators, teachers and counselors know that student engagement is important but often are at a loss for effective means of connecting with students in ways that excite and energize them. This is especially the case for educators with little experience in diverse classrooms or those who do not see the benefits of working with students who are diverse in race or ethnicity, gender, family income, age, social class, language or culture, or of students' diverse perspectives, expectations and visions for their future. Students have an inside track on what matters to them, what kind of school they want and need, and what they want for their future and their families. The best way to engage students, all students, is to first acknowledge they have a voice and truly believe that what students have to say about their education matters. This is one of the key tenets of IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework (Robledo Montecel, 2005).

There are thousands of articles, guides and reviews on student engagement. One of the most engaging is *Student Voices Count – A Student-Led Evaluation of High Schools in Oakland* (Oakland Kids Count, 2003). What makes this particular report stand out is the evaluation process itself. More than 1,000 students from Oakland-area high schools completed a report card survey designed and developed by Oakland high school youth organizers. As Oakland, like every city in this country, struggles with reducing its dropout rate, high school youth challenged the adults to engage them to identify the root problems and work toward solutions.

I have been a researcher and evaluator for 30 years now, and I can tell you that their evaluation methodology is as good as any I have seen. They began with a vision of what the ideal school would look like: one that graduates 100 percent of students. This vision guided their survey categories: characteristics of effective teachers, principals and counselors who supported their success; meaningful professional development; and fundamentals for school facilities, safety, student leadership and student relations. They designed a survey using a format that was familiar and easy to use

for the respondents. They paid attention to the psychometric issues by developing guidelines that students would use to evaluate their schools and included space for open-ended comments.

Using Excel spreadsheets, they entered data and pulled out meaningful comments. They analyzed and synthesized the data, and used this to develop their recommendations for improving their schools: "There are 48,000 youth in Oakland's schools who are experts – who are in class every day and who have a lot to say about how the schools are run and how to improve our education. Whenever something happens in the schools, everyone wants to hear from the teachers and parents – but what about the students?... Why do we feel shut out, like no one cares what we think?" (Oakland Kids Count, 2003).

Some of the key findings included:

- Three out of four students want to have a voice on school issues, such as safety, teacher quality and classes;
- Three out of five students have never been asked for their opinion on how to improve their school;
- Three out of four students want to evaluate their teachers and see this as a way of supporting them; and
- Almost one out of four students did not know what classes they need to graduate from high school, much less to get into college.

Students showed a sophisticated understanding of the school system in their open-ended comments. When asked about when their teachers were less effective, their comments included: "Doesn't explain." "Gets flustered easy." "Class not always structured." "Needs more improvement on controlling class." (pg. 8)

Students also were clear about citing discrimination and harassment at their schools: "A girl was speaking Spanish, and a secretary in the office (cont. on page

*"We have a great resource in the schools that is being overlooked. There are 48,000 youth in Oakland's schools who are experts – who are in class every day and who have a lot to say about how the schools are run and how to improve our education."*

– Student Voices Count –  
A Student-Led Evaluation of High  
Schools in Oakland

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(Youth Matters, continued from Page 5)

said, "This is California, speak English." And "Because for me, being Black, they don't expect much from me." (pg. 10)

As a result of these findings, students recommended a process for evaluating teachers, prioritizing areas for teacher professional development, adding more counselors (including peer counselors and advisors) and having them meet with individual students once a month to make sure they have a plan in place to ensure all students graduate from high school and meet requirements needed for college admission.

What is extraordinary about this effort isn't that students designed, developed and implemented it. It's that someone believed students had the capacity to do this and gave them the support needed for them to carry it out. Someone believed that students of different races, ethnicities, gender, family income, age, social class, language and culture could bring their diverse and unique perspectives to a common purpose. That purpose – to help make their schools work for them – has resulted in better informed school improvement and strategic plans that take into account student voice and gives it, at a minimum, the same weight as everyone else's voice. Because this is the other part of the equation. It's not enough for students to have a voice in their education; decision-makers must listen in a true partnership, one in which everyone is mutually committed to the same goals.

So how do you engage students, especially diverse students? You begin with the Three L's:

**Let go** of deficit beliefs about youth.

**Listen** to young people as if their success depends on it – because it does.

**Look** upon youth as the "experts on their lives."

Jamaul Thomas, a student at Oakland High School, summarized: "No one ever asks our opinion. The truth is, we have the most to lose when our schools aren't working right and the most to gain when they are" (Oakland Kids First, 2003).

## Resources

de Frondeville, T. "Ten Steps to Better Student Engagement: Project-learning Teaching Strategies Can Also Improve Your Everyday Classroom Experience." *Edutopia* (San

## Continuities – Lessons for the Future of Education from the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

This new publication vividly captures seven key lessons for improving the quality of education for all students. It presents the voices of youth, teachers, family members and program leaders and the reasons valuing youth is at the heart of school transformation. It was released on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and in celebration of its success in keeping tens of thousands of students in school and positively impacting more than half a million children, families and educators on three continents.

Available from IDRA for \$7.00, plus shipping, or free online at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).



Rafael, Calif.: The George Lucas Educational Foundation, March 11, 2009).

Yazzie-Mintz, E. *Voices of Students on Engagement: A Report on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement* (Bloomington, Ind.: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University, 2007).

Oakland Kids First. *Student Voices Count – A Student-Led Evaluation of High Schools in Oakland* (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Kids First, May 2003).

Robledo Montecel, M. "A Quality Schools Action Framework," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 2005).

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# Supreme Court Ruling in *Horne vs. Flores* is a Missed Opportunity

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

## *Fair Funding is Critical to Successful Education of English Language Learners*

IDRA is disappointed by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Horne vs. Flores* involving Arizona’s funding for programs serving English language learners. Schools should have access to sufficient funding based on actual costs of serving English language learners. In fact, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lau vs. Nichols* requires states to adopt effective instructional practices for English language learners and to provide funding to support those efforts. But in *Horne vs. Flores*, the court cited new circumstances in Arizona that need further review by the lower courts.

There has been a flurry of confusion about the ruling. Here are some important points.

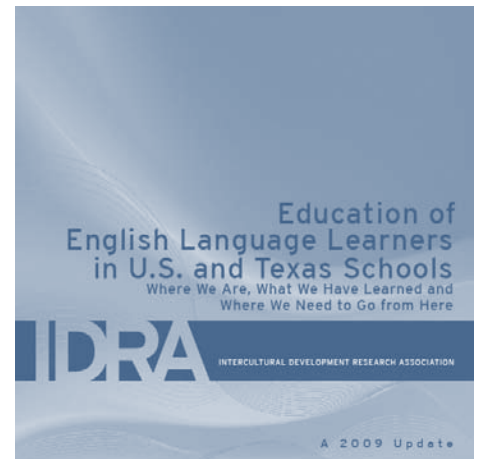
- The Supreme Court did not rule that Arizona provided sufficient funding for ELL education.
- The Supreme Court did not rule that Arizona’s immersion program is better or worse than bilingual education methodology.
- The Supreme Court did rule that the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* is viable law and has not been replaced by provisions in the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

The Supreme Court decision in *Horne vs. Flores* is a missed opportunity. The court could have affirmed the need for appropriate funding levels for ELL education. Schools need additional funds for assessment, staffing of teachers who are trained in serving ELL students, specialized staff training, specialized materials, and time and space factors. IDRA research has shown that, for example, bilingual education should have additional funding of 40 percent, but in Texas is only funded at an additional 10 percent. As a result of this and other factors, English language learners

in middle and high school drop out at twice the rate of the larger student population in Texas. They are retained at rates consistently double that of their peers. And they perform worse than their peers by a margin of 40 percent or more on the TAKS. Nationally, there are significant gaps in achievement between English language learners and non-ELL students.

IDRA’s policy update released earlier this year on the status of education of English language learners identifies improvements that are needed at the federal, state and local levels, including increased and more equitable targeted funding that is based on actual costs of services needed.

We hope that future deliberations relating to equity in funding, including funding provided ELL programs, are more in line with national research on these important issues.



## Get More Online

- One-page overview of *Horne vs. Flores*, by IDRA
- Fact Sheet on Supreme Court’s Decision in *Horne v. Flores*, by MALDEF
- An Analysis of the Supreme Court’s Decision in *Horne vs. Flores*, the Arizona ELL Funding Case, by META
- IDRA’s new *Education of English Language Learners in U.S. and Texas Schools – Where We Are, What We Have Learned and Where We Need to Go from Here – A 2009 Update*

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