



Focus: Student Success

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Building Teaching Quality from the Start New Skills for New Teachers

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., and Linda Cantu, Ph.D.

As described in IDRA's new book, *Courage to Connect: A Quality Schools Action Framework*, teaching quality is one of four indicators that are tied to student success. IDRA's Transitions to Teaching projects offer a unique approach for preparing incoming teachers in areas of critical need in Texas. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, these projects provide an accelerated but rigorous, state-approved certification route of 12 to 15 months. Certification is offered through university- or district-approved programs that partner with IDRA.

Two programs are currently underway at IDRA: Math and Science Smart (MASS) and Caminos. They target recent graduates and mid-career professionals who are working in fields other than teaching. These new teachers participate in intense professional development while in a first-year paid teaching internship. They commit to working in high-need school districts for three years, including the internship year.

IDRA's program is unique in creating a new cadre of professionals who are expert in their content areas and are prepared to engage students in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways. The projects provide specialized support and high quality in-service. A series of professional development sessions that we call *pláticas* are conducted with each group of teachers. Recent topics have included strategies for working with second language learners, classroom management,

and hands-on content area instruction. IDRA also prepares mentors to work with the new teachers through classroom demonstrations, co-teaching, identifying mentoring needs, engaging students, and effective parent engagement.

Both programs prepare teachers to instruct English learners. IDRA believes the following elements are key to effective preparation of teachers of English learners (Rodríguez & Villarreal, 2004).

- Teacher preparation must address our changing student body and build skills from an understanding of assets rather than using a deficit perspective.
- New teachers benefit from support throughout their preparation and induction period and beyond with professional development, including debriefing, coaching, one-on-one counseling sessions, and one-on-one coaching sessions.
- Teachers' personal qualities, such as persistence and resilience, should be stressed (Haberman, 2001).
- Effective collaborative approaches to teacher selection involve school districts, universities and, in this case, IDRA.
- Preparation for meaningful parent engagement is not usually addressed by traditional teacher preparation programs but should be. IDRA

(cont. on Page 2)

*"It is now time
that we make high
school graduation
and college readiness
the new minimum.
The economics of
undereducation demand
it. Our children deserve
no less."*

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

(Building Teaching Quality from the Start, continued from Page 1)

brings powerful expertise in this area and has a seven-part *Community Engagement Series for Educators* that is designed to create a culture of meaningful parent engagement with an equity perspective (Rodríguez, et al., 2009).

- Mentoring is vital. IDRA-trained mentors work with the new teachers following the Lindsey philosophy (2007). Our mentors use IDRA's Coaching and Mentoring of Novice Teachers Model as a guide throughout the program (Solís, 2004).

To better meet the needs of new teachers and influence retention of best teachers, IDRA ensures that project participants are equipped and supported as soon as their internships begin. We work collaboratively with schools to provide the mentoring and coaching necessary that is focused on psychological and pedagogical needs, infused with principles and strategies for working with culturally diverse children with special needs and their families.

All teachers have a campus-level "master teacher" mentor assigned to them as well as an IDRA mentor. The IDRA mentor evaluates the needs of each new teacher initially and develops an ongoing supportive relationship. Each year closes with an exit interview for assessment and continuous improvement of programmatic and individual needs.

Additional teacher support is offered through IDRA's social networking web site for current and future teachers in our programs. Participants are able to reconnect with those who participated with them; share experiences, successes and challenges on their road to teaching; share job and career opportunities; discuss effective bilingual and English learner strategies for classroom use; and strengthen the network of educators who work in high need schools.

Key lessons are shedding light on future steps to be taken for improving teacher preparation.

- Schools of education must place a high value on teacher education for a diverse student population and support the work across areas of discipline.
- Universities should share successful approaches for recruiting and retaining bilingual teachers in high growth states.
- The body of research and knowledge needs to be expanded about effective teacher preparation with other key stakeholders in education.
- A comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that enhance the preparation of educators who teach English language learners must be compiled.
- Holistic assessment and support programs must be developed for educators that rely primarily on the demonstration of knowledge and performance in the classroom.
- Schools of education are more effective when they provide consistent and long-term support for individuals when they enter teacher education programs to complete all requirements for certification and work in the classroom.
- Schools of education need to create innovative and meaningful partnerships between schools, communities and universities to support teacher recruitment, preparation and placement.
- Effective strategies should support teaching throughout and beyond the certification process by allowing prospective teachers to study theory and practice during their training while they apply prior experience.
- Schools of education should hire faculty who are

experienced, well prepared and knowledgeable about effective strategies for diverse students.

- Schools of education must expose teacher candidates to K-12 classrooms with diverse student bodies early in their preparation.
- Teacher education programs should build competencies that emphasize all aspects of developing Latino student self-esteem.

Over the past several years, more than 500 teachers have been selected to participate in IDRA Transitions to Teaching projects. Most are faithfully and effectively serving English learners and other students in high need areas in Texas. While the focus is on effective strategies for English learners, the excellent pedagogy and linguistic and cultural methodologies are relevant for all students.

Resources

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Accountability that Doesn't Hurt Students

By Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

A word search in the Microsoft Word thesaurus on the term *accountability* yields three terms: answerability, responsibility, liability. And while school accountability is critical, the rush to judgment sometimes has led to policies that are not very useful and are harmful and dysfunctional for individuals and groups of students (Robledo Montecel, 2010; Montes, 1993).

Texas was one of the states that led the movement toward increasing accountability for schools and students. It started with standardizing the curriculum that all students were expected to master in core content areas. Those policies were incorporated into House Bill 72 in 1984. Also included were the beginnings of the state's mandated assessment system, then known as the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). It was originally designed to provide diagnostic information to help school leaders and their staffs assess areas of instruction where students were doing well and identify others where additional efforts or changes in instructional strategies were needed.

In a similar vein, policies were instituted requiring schools to measure how many students were dropping out of high school. IDRA had discovered that this information was not collected by schools until they were required to do so in 1986 when such accounting was adopted into House Bill 1010 after IDRA's 1986 *Texas Dropout Survey Project* report recommended that such data be compiled (Cárdenas, et al., 1986).

In addition, more punitive accountability policies were ushered in. Students who did not perform at specified levels on state-mandated assessments were required to be retained in grade. At the high school level, students were denied a high school diploma, even in those cases where the students had gotten passing grades in those courses and had all the credits needed to graduate.

In 1993, new legislation adopted what would become the forerunner of today's school accountability system. It incorporated punitive consequences for schools and school districts that failed to meet certain

state standards related to the percentage of students meeting passing criteria on state tests, the number of students who were not promoted to subsequent grade levels, and the number and percentage of students who dropped out.

The school-related accountability provisions were considered by many, including IDRA, as a step in the right direction by establishing criteria by which schools might be held "answerable, responsible and liable" for the outcomes of students for whom schools were responsible for serving. At the same time, IDRA was among many who noted that such accountabilities – if they were to be fair – also had to recognize disparities in funding, staffing and related support services that were created and sustained by the state's school funding system (Cárdenas, 1997). This would need to be addressed in order to level the playing field for all schools.

These concepts were eventually expanded and labeled "opportunity to learn" standards that urged policymakers to consider not only student *outputs*, but also *inputs* that had a critical effect on how schools were able to serve their students.

In 1995, IDRA president, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, and IDRA founder and director emeritus, Dr. José A. Cárdenas, outlined the implications of upholding a school funding plan that fell short of fully equalizing funding in Texas, noting: "The hollow victories of the Texas Education Agency in [defending the new funding plan] create a paradoxical situation with the agency's recent launching of a massive effort for school accountability, while defending the inadequacies and inequities in the finance system which contribute to inadequate outcomes" (1995).

IDRA concerns regarding the prospective negative consequences of standards and accountability systems were echoed by this author in a 1998 article on these issues (Cortez, 1998). Other critics of the states' high-stakes-based accountability system concurred with IDRA's concerns on the misuse and unintended consequences of state accountability policies (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valencia & (cont. on Page 4)

It is possible to construct accountability systems that can hold schools accountable to the local communities that they serve without resulting in punitive and dysfunctional consequences for individual students.

IDRA Texas PIRC

For more information about the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC.htm

funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve the state of Texas

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Villarreal, 2005).

Yet, Texas' accountability system became embodied in the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) adopted in 2001. An underlying, but often unstated, premise of these accountability provisions has been the assumption that schools are providing all students equitable educational opportunities. These provisions would include equitable funding, comparably competent teachers, and similar levels of supplemental support services. But research has documented that these are quite inaccurate assumptions.

IDRA does not believe the shortcomings in state and national mechanisms that support delivery of education, however, mean that we cannot or should not hold schools accountable for improving and sustaining student achievement. Data on school performance are critical to ensuring that schools work to serve all students effectively. It also is important to help guide efforts that provide information on how resources might be more effectively targeted to serve those students who require additional support. By the same token, we also contend that it is possible to construct accountability systems that can hold schools accountable to the local communities that they serve without resulting in punitive and dysfunctional consequences for individual students.

Some examples of accountability policies that do not harm individual students include the use of sampling procedures to gather data on student performance at the school or school district level, rather than testing every student, a policy change recommended by Dr. Robledo Montecel. Such sampling could ensure that individual students are not subjected to high-stakes consequences, such as in-grade retention or denial of diplomas based on a single test.

Sample testing is already used at the federal level for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to provide a national profile of educational performance. It also can save states millions of dollars in testing costs – an imperative in today's climate of huge state funding shortages.

Other changes to existing accountability policies could require that any high-stakes decision involving students consider numerous criteria, such as student grades, student progress toward meeting performance objectives, teacher and parent input, and other mitigating factors (Jones, 2004; Hamilton & Valenzuela, 2007) – all factors that are currently trumped by a single test score in

many accountability systems.

An important consideration when re-assessing accountability policies impacting individual students is that, in the power pyramid, students occupy the bottom rung of authority. While students should be accountable for attending classes and exerting maximum effort in the classroom (factors that impact existing grading policies), they do not control how much funding is provided to their school; which teacher is assigned to their class; or whether that teacher is fully credentialed, is experienced or is a recent entry into the profession. Students also do not control the instructional materials that are provided or the extent to which supplemental support systems, including targeted instructional support or the newest in educational technology, is provided.

Until we begin to acknowledge these factors, students will remain the scapegoats for schools' systemic issues as outlined in IDRA's new *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* book (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010).

Changes in existing accountability policies require that we revisit some old assumptions that served as the foundations for much of today's accountability policies. And we must recognize that better options are available if the promises inherent in a fair accountability system for schools and students are to be realized.

Resources

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- *Community Engagement Series for Educators* details
- Resources on school accountability
- Details about IDRA's Transitions to Teaching programs
- *Semillitas de Aprendizaje* bilingual early childhood series web site
- *Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework* book web site with the framework, detailed table of contents, book excerpt, quotes, podcasts and more

Visit www.idra.org for more information.

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Incorporating Intangible Cultural Heritage into Curriculum

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., and Juanita C. García, Ph.D.

The former President of Mexico, Benito Juárez's statement, "*El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz*" [Respect for human rights brings peace] is a powerful message and an example of the intangible cultural heritage that has served the Latino community well for centuries. If not valued and infused into our schools, the wisdom of many of our communities will be forever lost. "*En la unidad esta la fuerza*" [In unity there is strength] is another strong message that, if heeded today, would contribute to a more peaceful and powerful nation. These messages, like others, have been cornerstones of Latino culture.

The erosion of wisdom and cultural heritage led to the creation of the United Nations 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, whose major responsibility is to safeguard and ensure respect for the "intangible cultural heritage of communities, groups and individuals" and to "raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage and of ensuring mutual appreciation."

In an age of increasing isolation, pleas for homogeneity and English-only policies, there is a need to recognize and value the unique heritage of our diverse communities as a national treasure and a source of individual and collective strength. There is a need for our educational institutions to exercise their roles as transmitters of cultural values, to value diversity and benefit from the wisdom that emerges from these gems of cultural heritage that collectively have forged this country's greatness.

This is especially true when xenophobia is consuming the energy of so many in this country. And given the fact that high school graduation is a national imperative, there is a special need for an established infrastructure in our schools that embraces diversity and cultural preservation, one that honors and recognizes cultural diversity as a human and national resource.

The United Nations Convention (2003) states: "'Intangible cultural heritage' means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills... that communities, groups and, in some cases,

individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage."

It continues: "'Safeguarding' means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage" (UN, 2003).

Our public schools belong to the communities they serve and should reflect their communities, not exist in isolation from them. The ability of the school to meaningfully engage with parents and community is an indication of their strength to prepare leaders for the future.

Creating Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Here are some suggestions for educators and school personnel to consider in building culturally relevant curriculum.

- Educate yourself about the communities you serve.
- Honor and foster the infusion of intangible cultural heritage
- Honor the pioneers and local *sabios* [wisdom] of the local elders.
- Eradicate stereotypes and dispel myths about each group.
- Honor the school's local context.
- Recognize that there is no "one size fits all" approach.
- Include all generations and voices in the process of engagement and partnership, especially the perspectives of elders and youth, who are not often heard.

True parent engagement and community-school partnerships are mutually beneficial, each recognizes and builds upon the strengths of the other and are grounded in a common vision for student success (Rodríguez, et al., 2010).

(cont. on Page 6)

Our public schools belong to the communities they serve and should reflect their communities, not exist in isolation from them. The ability of the school to meaningfully engage with parents and community is an indication of their strength to prepare leaders for the future.

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

(Incorporating Intangible Cultural Heritage, continued from Page 5)

Schools need their diverse local communities and, conversely, communities need their local schools in order to prosper. As schools create an established infrastructure for cultural preservation in their curriculum and practice, they should check with regularity its vitality and engage in the following practices.

Culturally Proficient Mentoring and Coaching

Teachers can benefit from acquiring the skill of viewing their students through a valuing cultural lens, engaging students in the classroom and building on their strengths. Linguistically, this is beneficial for English learners as well as for all students because it recognizes innate language and expands upon existing vocabulary to gain proficiency in a second language. (Solís, 2010)

Cultural proficiency is based on valuing, respecting and honoring diverse backgrounds and ethnicities while looking deeply at one's own beliefs. Culturally responsive coaching and mentoring boosts educators' cultural confidence and consciousness, while honing mentoring coaching skills (Lindsey, et al., 2007).

Use of Delightful Children's Literature that Reflects Cultural Identity

Stories that are linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant offer endless possibilities to think critically and creatively, contemplate new ideas, and delve into a world of fantasy, adventure, reality and mystery. A timeless story cleverly captures children's emotions making their encounters with reading engaging. This opens opportunities to inspire and challenge children to learn, engage and interact with text. (García, 2009)

Use of Vernacular "Dichos" and Proverbs

Proverbs cleverly express the folk wisdom of diverse cultures in memorable ways. Many have grown up with proverbs taught to them by extended family members. These pithy bits of advice have helped many through life's obstacles and adversities.

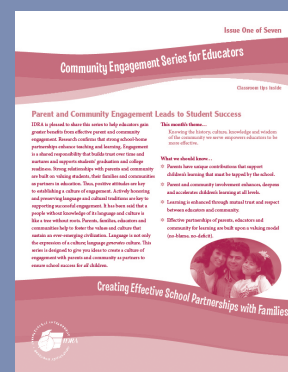
Teachers can use proverbs to teach students how to play with language and deal with life. Activities that draw upon the language arts we are all born with can help students appreciate their cultural heritage, strengthen linguistic skills, and improve ability to cope and thrive in our complex world.

Community Engagement Series for Educators

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., Juanita C. García, Ph.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

This series is designed for educators to give ideas for creating a culture of engagement with parents and community as partners to ensure school success for all children. There are seven issues in the series, one for each month of the school year. Each includes a theme for the month, classroom tips, an equity goal for the month, ideas for breaking down barriers, a self assessment tool, and an action planning guide and resource suggestions.

Available from IDRA for \$15.00 per set plus shipping.
(No ISBN; 4 Pages per Issue; 7 Issues; 2010)



Foster Robust Co-Curricular and Extracurricular Activities that Tap Community Resources

Research confirms the benefits of students participating in extracurricular activities. Students develop more positive attitudes toward school, better academic achievement and higher self-concepts. Students increase their overall school involvement, which leads to development of more positive attitudes toward school and learning (Peixoto, 2004).

Relationships with adult leaders provide social capital, such as knowledge, career awareness and valuable connections to community members. Adult leaders provide missing connections for youth as well as support for personal growth (Peixoto, 2004).

The basis of any sustainable culture is: (1) the people; (2) the linguistic and cultural expression of people through language, music, art and dance; and (3) opportunities to enjoy and appreciate these as we learn with and from one another. Our strength lies in honoring and incorporating diversity, not only as an educational imperative, but as an equity issue.

Resources

- García, J.C. "Hickory, Dickory, Dock... Critical Thinking and an Old Clock – Cultivating Thought with a Timeless Children's Story," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, January 2009).
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New Bilingual Classroom Materials

IDRA Releases Semillitas de Aprendizaje™ Big Books

IDRA has published the first component of its *Semillitas de aprendizaje* bilingual early childhood materials. A set of 10 beautifully-illustrated Big Books is now available for classrooms. The *Semillitas de aprendizaje*



- *La Cajita de Primeros Auxilios / The First Aid Kit*
- *El Minero Jorge / Jorge, the Miner*

Resources for Teachers

Other components of the *Semillitas de Aprendizaje* materials will include the following.

Theme-based Lessons

A set of highly-interactive and children-engaging lessons for the preschool bilingual teacher.

Bilingual Readers

A set of 10 primary grade bilingual readers beautifully illustrated by leading San Antonio artists. (These readers could be checked out by parents to read at home with their children.)

Cartitas Series – Letters Home with Activity Cards

(Spanish, English) – A set of 10 letters (two-pages each) for teachers to send home for parents. Each card has activities related the Big Book/Small Reader titles above.



and phonics, book knowledge and use, print knowledge and emergent writing, and storytelling/poetry reading. With a spirit of valuing diversity and cultures, the series encourages the richness of language and print. *Semillitas de aprendizaje* is designed to help teachers encourage communication and language exploration through discussions in both Spanish and English as a basis for learning English.

Semillitas de aprendizaje stems from research IDRA has conducted on its Reading Early for Academic Development (READ) project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to establish in preschool centers “classrooms of excellence” that ensure reading, cognitive and emotional success for all preschool children through a print-rich environment with appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities.



Big Books are Now Available

This set of 10 beautifully-illustrated stories is available for \$75 per set. Titles include:

- *El Curioso Tomás / Curious Tomás*
- *La Chamaca Machaca / Machaca the Ostrich*
- *El Collar de Margarita / Margarita's Necklace*
- *Los Números del 1 al 10 y otras Coplas*
- *Jesuita y las Arañas / Jesuita and the Spiders*
- *Confusión en el Circo / Confusion in the Circus*
- *Dos Pollitas Listas / Two Smart Chicks*
- *Mi Abrigo de Verano / My Summer Coat*

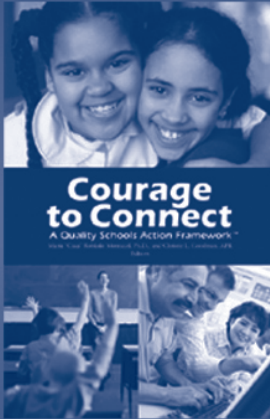


Preschool Math and Self Concept Books

(Spanish, English) – Set of 15 small books for classroom use and for parents to read with their children at home. The books feature photos of farm animals and focus on numeracy, science and social-emotion.

For more information about *Semillitas de Aprendizaje* or to order your set of the Big Books, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Listen to a Classnotes podcast episode about Semillitas de Aprendizaje: “Bilingual Stories for Young Learners” online at <http://www.idra.org/Podcasts/>



Courage to Connect

A Quality Schools Action Framework™

Edited by Maria “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., and Christie L. Goodman, APR

The Quality Schools Action Framework shows how communities and schools can work together to strengthen their capacity to be successful with all students. The framework is based on experience and empirical evidence that emerges from existing theories of change. It gives a model for assessing a school's conditions and outcomes, for identifying leverage points for improvement, and for informing action.

“I believe it is time to dream together – to dream about education not for a lucky few but for all. And it is time to make the dream of education for all become fact.”
— Dr. Maria Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO

Available now for purchase from IDRA (\$15 plus s&h)

To learn more about the book, visit www.idra.org/couragetconnect to view the framework, see the detailed table of contents, read an excerpt and listen to related podcasts.



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Focus: Student Success

“We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for every child in every school, understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education, and much is known about what to do.”

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

Intercultural Development Research Association

Classnotes Podcast



Twice monthly, award-winning podcast for people who care about excellent and equitable education for all children.

New Classnotes Podcast Episodes

This award-winning podcast series for teachers and administrators explores issues facing U.S. education today and strategies to better serve every student.

- “A Tool for Building Quality,” featuring Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., and Bradley Scott, Ph.D.
- “Bilingual Stories for Young Learners,” featuring Juanita García, Ph.D., and Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.
- “Pitfalls and Promises of Interactive Science Notebooks,” featuring Veronica Betancourt, M.A.
- “Learning Content Learning English,” featuring Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.
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