

Inside this Issue:

- ✦ Engaging students in math and science
- ✦ Integrating technology seamlessly every day
- ✦ Parents and the school curriculum
- ✦ Early childhood educator institute



A Tale of Two Centrals

by Brandon Love

Editor's Note: Brandon Love is a student at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In February 2007, he participated with other students in IDRA's Brown and Mendez Blueprints for Action Community Dialogues in Little Rock in which educators and community members held roundtables on improving educational opportunities for underrepresented communities, specifically African American and Latino students. The students made eloquent presentations about how they see promises of the Brown and Mendez cases being fulfilled and not being fulfilled in their own schools. This is Brandon's story.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

– Charles Dickens

When one thinks of Little Rock Central High School, one invariably and subconsciously thinks back to events that took place 50 years ago. Then, the world watched nine African American students make history by desegregating the state's premier high school in the

face of open hostility – even from the governor. Escorted by the National Guard, these students walked the halls of what is now a national historic site and endured hardships that I can only begin to imagine.

Today, I walk the same halls walked by the Little Rock Nine. Oddly enough, in a school that was the first to desegregate and now boasts vast diversity, injustice reigns. After almost 50 years of struggle and confusion, my school has yet to integrate.

There is, of course, the Central that everyone hears about: the Central that is ranked 20th in the nation by *Newsweek*, the Central that annually produces more Advanced Placement Scholars and National Merit Semi-Finalists than any other state institution, the Central that is believed to have won more state championships than any other school nationwide, and the Central that is "the most beautiful high school in America."

But there is another Central to which many are blind: the Central that is filled with gang activity, the Central with obvious racism, and the Central divided by an imaginary line better known as Advanced Placement. As an

A Tale of Two Centrals – continued on Page 2

A Tale of Two Centrals – continued from Page 1

African American and the student body president, I have encountered A Tale of Two Centrals.

The greater part of my world consists of a predominately White Central pervaded by prejudice and stereotypes. As the only African American in most of my classes, I experience firsthand what some dismiss as “subtle” racism.

When food is the subject, my schoolmates stereotypically assume that my favorites include fried chicken, watermelon and Kool-Aid. When the classroom lights dim in advance of a film, somebody always feels compelled to say, “Where’d Brandon go?” as if my skin caused me to blend with the now dark room. To these White students, Black is also synonymous with being afraid of dogs, not knowing how to swim and wearing clothes that are too big. Stereotypes rule. As a result, for costume day at Central, White students dress in sagging pants and wear hats turned to the side pretending to be Black. When a vote is taken in class, someone always seems to

Today, I walk the same halls walked by the Little Rock Nine. Oddly enough, in a school that was the first to desegregate and now boasts vast diversity, injustice reigns.

interject a historical note – that my vote should only count as three-fifths of a vote because I am Black. White students seem perplexed that I want to attend Vanderbilt University, not Grambling, Arkansas at Pine Bluff, or some other historically Black college or university.

Then, there is the other Central I have come to know. At this Central, I am surrounded by students who look like me and talk like me. The majority of my lifelong friends at this Central are now affiliated with gangs. Most students at this Central couldn’t care less about completing homework assignments, let alone attending college. If a fight breaks out at school, the “natural assumption” is that one or more of these Central students had some involvement. These Central students are encouraged to work hard but are discouraged from crossing that imaginary line into Advanced

Placement. For my friends at this Central, the term *Advanced Placement* is synonymous with *White*. To these students, enrolling in Advanced Placement courses makes you a sellout. You might as well don Abercrombie and Fitch clothes and thong sandals like all of the other Whites.

That imaginary line – Advanced Placement – has negative implications that extend well beyond the classroom. Advanced Placement has driven a deep wedge between Black and White. For instance, if a homecoming queen is Black one year, the next year she has to be White or *vice versa*. During lunch, Blacks eat inside the cafeteria and nothing short of a downpour causes the Whites to leave their tables outside to come in.

In the past two years, I have taken 11 Advanced Placement courses. In
A Tale of Two Centrals – continued on Page 11

In This Issue...

- 3** **Releasing the Mathematician**
- 5** **Technology Integration in Everyday Instruction**
- 7** **Raising the Bar on Parent Engagement**
- 8** **Tools for Action**
- 15** **Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities**
- 16** **IDRA Classnotes Podcast**

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2007) 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.

Permission to reproduce material contained herein is granted provided the article or item is reprinted in its entirety and proper credit is given to IDRA and the author. Please send a copy of the material in its reprinted form to the *IDRA Newsletter* production offices. Editorial submissions, news releases, subscription requests, and change-of-address data should be submitted in writing to the *IDRA Newsletter* production editor. The *IDRA Newsletter* staff welcomes your comments on editorial material.

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 Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

Publication offices:

5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350
San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190
210/444-1710; Fax 210/444-1714
www.idra.org contact@idra.org

María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.
IDRA Executive Director
Newsletter Executive Editor

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

Sarah H. Aleman
IDRA Data Entry Clerk
Newsletter Typesetter



Releasing the Mathematician and Scientist within Students

by Kathryn Brown and Veronica Betancourt, M.A.

“You’re going to have fun today in class! You’re going to get to design a rollercoaster and find all the slopes!” said a freshman talking in passing to another freshman as he walked out of his Algebra I class and the other entered.

In an urban, Title I school district in north-central Texas, 18 high school students restlessly await the start of their Algebra I class. It is already November, the semester now drawing to a close. But for many of these freshmen, living just outside the technology-rich “Silicon Prairie,” mathematics seemed pointless and irrelevant.

Then the rollercoaster lesson begins. Whether they realize it or not, these students know slopes. From mountains, sidewalk ramps and skateboard parks, they have an immediate sense of the gathering speed you achieve on a sharp incline or a sudden drop. They know rollercoasters, too. At home or in class, they are not 10 miles away from a Six Flags theme park.

Today, they will build the ride to end all rides. They will be rollercoaster engineers! They will first “ride a rollercoaster” with hands up in the air

and stomachs turning as they watch a video that the teacher downloaded from the Internet to warm-up the students. Students will set the slopes and craft a model of wire ribbon and connecting cubes. They will draft a model to scale and will brainstorm the name that will send shivers down the spines of anticipating riders.

In the process, they will see how slope affects velocity and therefore the excitement of the ride. Students will calculate the slopes, the rise over the run, in real-space.

This is different from what they have done before when they had a worksheet with 25 problems where they had to find the slope of a line given two points that did not have relevance.

The teacher finds joy when students struggle with how to go about finding the slope of their heart-stopping drops. They compare their creations and go beyond the boundaries by taking on roles as project managers, design engineers and presenters to panels of students.

A student exclaims, “I always thought science was for *smart kids*, but this is really cool.” His teacher responds with excitement and sincerity, “You’re

going to make me cry.”

In a science classroom in south San Antonio, the objective of the lesson will be for students to compare organisms from various kingdoms. A sample of pond water is brought in from a neighboring park where students often go to play basketball and hang out. As students collect samples, they return to their station, and the ooohs and aaahs of excitement begin to fill the room. “What’s this?!” “Oooh, this is gross!” and “Check this out, it’s moving!”

Students begin to *violate* lab rules by moving back and forth from station to station to see what their peers are finding and compare them to their own discoveries. They are scientists in action – observing and noting what they find, comparing organisms that live in the same environment to each other and to themselves. Questions arise from the students as opposed from the teacher.

Students have taken ownership of their own learning with minimal direction from the teacher. The teacher is facilitating by extending students’ questions through cues and probes – an uplifting experience for everyone!

These are examples of what is

Releasing the – continued on Page 4

Releasing the – continued from Page 3

possible in a classroom for students and teachers when an engaging math and science curriculum is in place. Students become engaged and see possibilities within themselves that are hidden and inaccessible when instruction was delivered in a traditional, teacher-centered, text-book reliant, worksheet-ridden environment. It is critical that we make math and science accessible for *all* students, value who they are and what they bring to the classroom and kick open the doors to opportunities, fields of study and careers that they have long been excluded from.

“In order to tap the riches of diversity, teachers must first believe that difference does not equal deficit” (Stodolsky and Grossman, 2000).

The possibilities become exponential for the students, their families, and for us as a society. Imagine the cures for diseases and new technologies that are behind the eye and in the mind of every child. It is a huge burden to carry knowing that we overlooked and dismissed that one child who could have changed the world, simply because the here and now moment was too much to make the adjustment needed to engage the kid.

Engaging Our Students in Math and Science... Now

So how do we do it? What needs to happen in the classroom? How do we make adjustments on the fly and move from *text* and *test* to *teamwork* and *triumph*? We must do the following.

Value Teachers as Curriculum Creators

Teachers are the artists of the canvas of learning, “The greater control that teachers have over their curricula, the greater their students’ achievement will be” (Wiseman and Brown, 2003). This gives teachers the opportunity to experience what it is to create lessons that connect and involve higher-order thinking questions. Pulling in external

resources that connect to their students’ lives, they become more adept and break free of the confines of a scripted curriculum that is often designed as a one-size fits all agenda.

Connect Teachers with Professionals in their Fields

This could happen via internships in the summer, shadowing professionals in their area of study and connecting with them during the school year to work on problem- and project-based learning.

Release Teachers of the Burden of Being the Sole Provider of Knowledge

Teachers shift from direct instruction to facilitating activities unlike anything they have experienced as learners. They are the conductor “orchestrating classroom discourse so it moves students” from the role as *receptor* to that of the *initiator* of their own knowledge (Windschitl, 2006).

Have Dynamic Math and Science Curricula

We need to think of curriculum in a new dynamic way. Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and world-renowned mathematician and educator, Seymour Papert asks us to think of curricula in a new way, replacing a system where students learn something on a scheduled day, with one where they learn something when they need it in an environment that shows meaning and gives context as to why it is being learned. It is student-centered where students *use* what they are learning (Curtis, 2001; Brown, 2006).

Adynamic curriculum goes beyond the textbook and its ancillaries. The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk* found that textbooks were “of inadequate quality and rigor” and recommended that these tools (textbooks) of learning “should be upgraded and updated to assure more

rigorous content” (NCEE, 1983).

Integrate a Multidimensional Math and Science Curriculum

A multidimensional curriculum encompasses various goals for a successful student. These include personal, academic and social goals by both the teacher and student. “Holding multiple goals may make it easier for teachers to change curriculum and instruction because change can be justified on more than one dimension” (Stodolsky and Grossman, 2000).

The National Research Council has recently argued that it is imperative that curricula be flexible so that teachers have the space to work with the current understanding that students bring into the class for meaningful integration with new knowledge (Bybee and Stage, 2005).

Value the Student and Create a Learning Environment that Promotes Risk

Math and science require risky ideas, new thoughts and innovative ideas. They are not prescribed with a “step-by-step” list of strategies guided by “what’s the next step” type of questioning or an experiment that is scripted to the results that “should” be found. Have open-ended experiments. Have open-ended questions that require students to tackle.

Engage Students from the Get Go

Spark interest and make a student wonder, “What if...?” It is this type of peaked interest that is the basis of science and math—making conjectures and hypotheses and proving and disproving, reanalyzing and applying, and is applicable to their lives. By incorporating various forms of media and resources within a warm-up that is timely and relevant to students’ lives, students’ minds can be charged-up as they prepare for learning in math and science. This could involve showing

Releasing the – continued on Page 13

Technology Integration in Everyday Instruction

by Hector Bojorquez

Imagine a classroom where...

- A fourth grade student in San Antonio creates a movie where she acts out similes and idioms to be used as a teaching tool in other classrooms.
- A seventh grade student in New Orleans creates a spreadsheet tallying the progress of houses rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina to be used in a local newsletter.
- A 10th grade biology student in Pharr, Texas, communicates with marine biologists in San Diego, California, about a science project and, through simple collaborative tools like Google apps, is able to refine a testable hypothesis in real time.

Imagine students using the full power of technology tools available to them in an environment where technology is not an *enrichment activity* but an *expectation*. This is the promised land of technology integration: seamless use of technology that requires higher-order thinking skills in everyday instruction.

There is no limit to what students can do and what teachers can expect once technology is fully integrated into instruction. This article addresses some basic but pivotal ideas to start you on your way to successful integration.

Students Must be Creators

Imagine a teacher who reads every day to his students but never allows them to touch a book or read from one. It is a ludicrous scenario, but one that often occurs with computers in the classroom. Frequently, teachers are the only “user” of a classroom computer. This is most evident in classrooms where technology integration consists mainly of teachers delivering traditional lessons with PowerPoint. While there is a time and place for this type of activity, it is not the most effective use of technology.

When planning a technology-infused lesson, instructors should ask themselves: “Are my students using the technology to produce, create or communicate?” and “What higher-order thinking skills are being addressed?” Simply, who is creating and why? By expecting students to create and to address higher-order thinking skills in their projects, instructors are taking the first step to seamless integration.

Go Beyond PowerPointless

So now your students have begun creating. And they have started using PowerPoint to show their understanding of classroom material. Is this enough?

Consider the following assignments: A social studies teacher

assigns a PowerPoint presentation on the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., and an English teacher assigns students to make PowerPoint vocabulary “slides.”

These assignments may have been sufficient to engage students when PowerPoint was a novelty, but they hardly constitute effective integration. Why?

Ask yourself the following when assigning PowerPoint lessons: “Am I asking students a higher-order thinking question? Are my students synthesizing, applying or evaluating a concept or are they simply locating and recalling information?”

While the production of technology-infused products forces students to make important decisions (transitions, type size, colors, timing, narrations, music, etc), the content should always reflect the highest levels of cognition. Furthermore, the technology tools themselves should be used to help express these levels of cognition or to answer problems that without technology are too cumbersome to solve or express.

Consider the following scenarios.

- A social studies teacher assigns students to create a PowerPoint presentation on the causes of the U.S. Civil War. Students are asked to embed movies where they take

Technology Integration – continued on Page 6

positions on states' rights by acting out historical figures.

- A math teacher assigns students to create a PowerPoint presentation on examples of real-life decaying functions with embedded movies that display graphs of corresponding exponential regression equation (i.e., coffee getting cooler).

Without technology (MovieMaker and PowerPoint), students could hardly take on the persona of historical figures without resorting to mini-theatrical productions! Without technology, students would have a difficult time representing mathematical functions or showing real-life examples of said functions.

It is only by expecting students to work on projects that foster higher-order thinking skills that PowerPoint ceases to become PowerPoint/ess.

Keep it Real!

Keeping it real means being authentic and in a classroom. Being

authentic is the gold standard. We speak of authentic assessments when we think of assessments that actually enable students to fully express what they have learned rather than simply recalling facts or figures. We speak of authentic products when we think of assignments that connect and build on student's experiences or prior knowledge. It is what all educators should strive for, and what many educators fall short of doing. Technology presents instructors with a perfect opportunity for "keeping it real." But how?

Very often with technology this means going outside the boundaries of what one considers a "lesson." Recently, while demonstrating a lesson on PowerPoint in a biology classroom, I walked around and monitored student progress. Most were on task, except for a few in the back who I caught on a "social" web site similar to MySpace. To my astonishment these students had mastered the basics of HTML to produce startling web sites without relying on templates or such. I stopped

what we were doing and asked the class how many of them knew how to write a web page. Over three quarters of the class knew how to do it and had their own personal pages.

In spite of recent controversies surrounding the "social" web, educators ignore this opportunity at their own peril. Imagine students being asked to collaborate with students from across the world through the use of "social webs" or Google applications.

Imagine the same energy and motivation that students use with these new technologies being harnessed to motivate and fuel their imagination. In order to "keep it real" we must value students' technological fluency and build on a rich bank of knowledge that is a pre-requisite for success in the modern world.

Hector Bojorquez is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English

❖ A Guide ❖

Thirty years of research have proven that, when implemented well, bilingual education is the best way to learn English. New research by IDRA has identified the 25 common characteristics of successful schools that contribute to high academic performance of students learning English. This guide is a rubric, designed for people in schools and communities to evaluate five dimensions that are necessary for success:

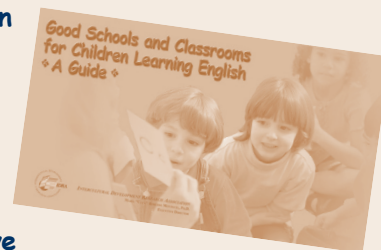
- ❖ school indicators
- ❖ student outcomes
- ❖ leadership
- ❖ support
- ❖ programmatic and instructional practices

(ISBN 1-878550-69-1; 2002; 64 pages; paperback; \$15)

Developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association

Contact IDRA to place an order. All orders of \$30 or less must be prepaid.

5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350 San Antonio, Texas 78228; Phone 210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714; e-mail: contact@idra.org.





Raising the Bar on Parent Engagement Can Curriculum and Standards Meet It?

by **Aurelio M. Montemayor,**
M.Ed.

Imagine this dialogue: A teacher on a site-based decision-making committee speaking to a parent: “Who are you to be able to evaluate our curriculum? You have no college degree and you don’t even understand much English!” A Latino parent responds: “Yes, who am I to be able to judge the quality of the school’s curriculum?”

Educational reform that benefits all children requires dynamic and informed parent engagement. The *No Child Left Behind Act* gives parents increased influence over the education of their children in public schools, and curriculum is central to that education. But are parents and other laypersons unable to inform the technical aspects of education?

Medicine is certainly technical, complex and seemingly inaccessible to the layperson. But medicine seems to have progressed with doctors and medical practitioners who support patients to be informed about their health, their medical options and more control over what happens to their bodies.

We posit that education also can be made more accessible to families and laypersons. Just like a patient does not have to become a doctor to

have clear understanding of his or her body, what a diagnosis means and what possible paths are available to better health, likewise a parent and a student can have a clear understanding of what helps and hinders his or her learning, what different options are available to learn and what alternatives could prove more compatible to one’s learning and academic achievement.

Curriculum is what is to be learned, what is to be taught. Most schools have adopted texts and other materials. Computer-based materials and online resources are becoming the norm. Some predict that books will become secondary and the computer will be the central source of information for the student and the teacher. These materials are intended to support a certain set of standards.

Standards identify what students are expected to know and be able to do. Standards can also support high expectations for all students. For many reasons there has been a strong push for having uniform high standards in education. The important question is, how do standards help or hinder our children in getting an excellent education.

The standards are set by the state, and each teacher is given a document that defines what will be taught and, in many cases, when and how much

must be covered in each period of time. Most states have adopted curriculum standards. Texas has been in the vanguard of that process.

Recommendations to Families

Parents can ask critical questions and must be given understandable, basic information in order to support children in high standards. Parents and families need to know what is going on in the classroom: how teachers are being trained, how their children are being engaged and how their children are understanding, reasoning, problem-solving and communicating. A curriculum that is incomprehensible is inappropriate.

Here is a case in point. A group of parents in a south Texas school district received a letter informing them that their children’s high school was not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of math scores. All three high schools were in the same condition so there was no other high school available to transfer to within that district. The parents’ initial question was whether the math teachers were certified to teach in their areas. They learned that most were. They also found that the experienced, properly certified staff were in consensus about one thing:

Raising the Bar – continued on Page 8

they believed most of the students were not capable of learning math. They felt that most students could only pass math if the standards were lowered.

No! This country will self-destruct if math departments continue to think that higher math is beyond the masses. We will not prepare the population for the challenges of the future if we continue to assume that college is not for everyone, but very specifically not for most poor, minority and non-English speaking students.

Yes! Families and communities can hold their schools to high standards and success for *all* students.

Educators must have ongoing dialogues with families about standards and how children can be supported to learn. Bilingual forums in lay terms inform and enable families to learn about the specifics of standards, how they are measured, and how they are assessed and can empower them to ask the right questions.

IDRA's model of parent involvement focuses on four major roles: parents as teachers, as resources to the school, as decision-makers, and as leaders and trainers of other parents. There are many things parents can do in these roles, such as the following.

Parents as Teachers

- Support children by creating space to learn at home.
- Reduce television viewing and other distractions.
- Ask children to share work and talk about school.
- Ask children what is helping and hindering their learning.
- Encourage children to support each other in learning.
- Create family peer groups and neighborhood support systems for children to extend their learning and experience individual and collective support for success in school.

Tools for

Curriculum Quality and Access

Effective schools depend on a high quality, enriched and accessible curriculum. In IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework, curriculum quality and access encompasses the educational programs of study, materials and other learning resources (such as technology) and ensures all students have access to this quality curriculum. Dr. María Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director, expands, "It also relates to the fair and unbiased assessment of students and the degree to which schools take responsibility for the academic success of all students."

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Developing leaders – In a South Texas school district, planned variation of its Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, the Professional Learning Communities and Learning Model, taps the leadership and commitment of eighth-grade teachers at a junior high school. The model provides a way for teachers to center their work on student success through IDRA's guided reflections and technical assistance.

In addition, IDRA is developing a supplementary bilingual early childhood bilingual curriculum, *Semillitas*, with classroom lessons, storytelling videos, big and little storybooks, a book set for home, classroom posters, activities for family engagement and tips for setting up the classroom. *Semillitas* addresses comprehension, phonological awareness and phonics, book knowledge and use, print and emergent writing, and storytelling and poetry. With a spirit of valuing diversity and cultures, the curriculum encourages the richness of language and print. *Semillitas* is designed to help teachers encourage communication and language exploration through discussions in both Spanish and English as a basis for learning English. The curriculum will be available this summer.

Conducting research – IDRA has begun a research study with San Antonio College to describe the experience of first-time college students. This is part of the Achieving the Dream Initiative that is designed to increase college access and success of students, particularly minority students. The research findings will help inform San Antonio College and other Achieving the Dream colleges as they refine their curricula and services to their students.

Action

Informing policy – IDRA is bringing together community, policy and education leaders to explore linkages among existing institutions in order to facilitate the transition from high school to college for under-served students. The effort is broadening citizen-based reform that is seeking to address inequities in education by providing viable solutions and improved policy and practice for greater access to college and the world of work for minority youth.

Engaging communities – IDRA's *Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English: A Guide* is a rubric based on research by IDRA that identified the 25 common characteristics of successful schools that contribute to high academic performance of students learning English. The guide is designed for people in schools and communities to evaluate five dimensions that are necessary for success – school indicators, leadership, student outcomes, support, and programmatic and instructional practices – in their neighborhood public schools.

What You Can Do

Get informed. Visit the web site for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development at <http://www.ascd.org> to learn more about the issues surrounding quality curriculum development. Review the Quality Schools Action Framework online (http://www.idra.org/School_Holding_Power/Quality_Schools_Action_Framework/) to see how curriculum quality and access is related to student success and school holding power.

Get involved. If you are an administrator, provide the space for your teachers (from pre-kindergarten through grade 12) to plan and attend professional development together so that there is vertical alignment in the curriculum being taught and so that teachers can experience and communicate this with their colleagues. IDRA's Math Smart! and Science Smart! trainings encourage that continuum across and within grade levels. See article entitled: "Re-Invigorating Math Curricula" in the April 2006 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*. Get more information on Math Smart! (http://www.idra.org/Services/Math_Smart!_Secondary_Training/) and Science Smart! (http://www.idra.org/Services/Science_Smart!_Secondary_Training/). Both are also available for the elementary setting.

Raising the Bar – continued from Page 8

Parents as Resources to the School

- At the elementary school level, parents are resources to the classroom teacher with oral language presentations, listener, coach and observer of children, etc.
- Identify and support children in using neighborhood support systems, e.g., libraries, religious and community centers, after-school support systems, YMCA and YWCA, computer access, and field trips.

Parents as Decision-makers

- Participate on curriculum committees and advisory groups.
- Review standards, tests and assessment procedures.
- Convene parent and community groups to increase awareness, school support for student achievement, and even getting elected to parent organizations and school boards.
- Create and support committees to increase financial support to schools, increase teaching staff and reduce class size.
- Work with schools to identify the variety of ways in which students learn.
- Find out about graduation rates and retention rates.

Parents as Leaders and Trainers of Other Parents

- Create parent and family networks of mutual support for student achievement, training other parents to be advocates, resources and decision-makers, and surveying families and using data to create further organizations, support and leadership.
- Poll and conduct focus groups of students, teachers and parents.
- Map the assets of children and families (if standards show what

Raising the Bar – continued on Page 10

students do not know, we need to find out what they do know).

The whole community wants children to achieve. The whole community needs them to achieve. It is inherent in human nature to want to learn. The power of family in this movement for high achievement for all students must be immediately recognized. High standards for all children are good if the appropriate support and resources are given to schools, to children and to families. All children and families must be valued, none is expendable to standards or tests.

Resources

Center for Law and Education. *Urgent Message for Parents* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Education, Community Action for Public Schools, 1999).

Keenan, J.W., and A. Wheelock. "The Standards Movement in Education: Will Poor and Minority Students Benefit?" *Poverty and Race* (May-June 1997).

Montemayor, A.M., and Díaz-Sanchez, M. "Children-Based Reform: Can Standards Meet It," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, March 2002).

Wheelock, A. "Everybody Has to Get It: Extra Help and Support to 'Meet Standards' and Prevent Grade Retention," Internet article www.middleweb.com/whlckreten.html.

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed, is an IDRA senior education associate and director of the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center. He also serves on the national board of PTA. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Errata

In the article, "Every Family Engaged = Every Child Ahead: Building School Capacity through NCLB Parent Participation Requirements," in the January issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*, the author states: "The current NCLB iteration has five major leverage points for parents, as Anne T. Henderson has effectively identified (2002). Below is a list of these leverage points along with possible strategies." However, Henderson's article lists six leverage points. The sixth, "State Review of Parent Involvement Compliance" was inadvertently omitted in the IDRA article. The follow-up article, "Accountability and Equity in Our Schools," by the same author, in the February issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*, correctly includes it.

Some Cautions About a Counterproductive View of High Standards

There are some myths among educators and the general middle-class non-minority public: Poor and minority parents want and support lower *standards for their children and also prefer social promotion*. This myth explains the belligerent berating of poor and minority students and families about the need to retain students until they meet standards. Families do not want inferior education. They want effective instruction that results in academic success for their children.

The high standards movement mouthed the goal of equity through excellence – positing lower standards as racist and exclusionary. But, as Keenan and Wheelock state, the results of simply putting new standards in place and enforcing them universally without providing necessary resources leads to increased rates of retention, failure and dropouts among poor and minority students (1997).

Keenan and Wheelock also state: "The standards movement further reneges on its promise when states translate standards into curriculum frameworks that reinforce the status quo, elevate certain knowledge to a level of official approval and render poor, African American and Latino students invisible in the curriculum. English language arts standards that call for more reading of *better* books create an aura of rigor, but if the frameworks fail to address the need for multicultural content, many students will remain on the periphery, perceiving school as another world, another culture" (1997).

Another concern about the standards movement is that when massive failure happens, too many people look for causes within the families, their culture, language, economic status, or limited formal education. A deficit view of children and families assumes that the lack of academic achievement by students is the fault of the family. Besides being inaccurate, this view increases the tension families feel over their children's educational achievement.

In these cases, the institution wants to change the family and the children to adapt to its "higher" standards. The fact is, most families want their children to do well and to have a bright future connected to their educational attainment. Most families are supportive of activities that will contribute to student success.

Each person has a particular learning style. And this variety of learning styles among students reveals another concern. School curricula, textbooks and some teachers' approaches to teaching have a narrow focus on how children learn. Too often the assumption is that the home is English-speaking, middle-class and college-educated.

As the bar is raised on standards, teachers may be tempted to increase the *rate* of teaching and the *amount* of content taught. This acceleration increases dependence on rote-learning and memorization of greater amounts of information. It reduces class discussion time, open-ended questions, creativity, one-on-one work and alternative approaches to learning.

Wheelock states: "When schools assert that every student can learn, they take concrete steps to saturate school life with opportunities to access the extra help they need to succeed. The steps they take can vary from school to school, but effective approaches have several characteristics in common: They are offered early and often as a normal part of the school routine; and they are often multi-faceted, with supports for academic achievement made available in a variety of ways" (Wheelock, 2002).

Excerpted from: "Children-based Reform: Can Standards Meet It," *IDRA Newsletter*, by A.M. Montemayor and M. Díaz-Sanchez (March 2002).

Epilogue to “A Tale of Two Centrals”

I had the pleasant experience and privilege to meet and work with Brandon Love and a group of 14 other students in Little Rock, Arkansas, who came together to create a student voice for their perceptions of the fulfillment of the promise of quality, equitable education for African American and Latino students in the spirit of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* and *Mendez vs. Westminster* and the California Board of Regents. The group of students was selected from two flagship high schools in the Little Rock School District, Park View Magnet School and the historic Central High School.

In the fall of this year, Central High School will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its desegregation, which was the result of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The photographic and media images of the hostility of jeering White parents and citizens of Little Rock as they reacted to the nine African American students upon whose shoulders the burden of desegregating Central High School fell and even a governor who vowed that such desegregation would not be allowed are indelibly seared into our collective national memory regarding the struggle for civil rights, social justice and equitable educational opportunity. Fortunately, those images have changed in Little Rock, Arkansas. A new reality has emerged.

In the 50 years since the days of those events, a very different Central High has arisen. It is racially mixed, it ranks among the top high schools in the nation, it produces an impressive number of merit scholars and has received numerous awards for academic

excellence. And yet, Brandon Love, an academically-gifted student, school leader, star athlete, a “true border walker,” and the author of this newsletter’s cover article, reminds us that, even in 2007, the past is still prologue in many respects.

His assessment of the world he inhabits at Central High School may threaten and embarrass some because it may appear to air those things that only insiders should know. His assessment may be discounted as the un-informed observations of a disgruntled student. It may even be viewed as the immature attempts of a troublemaker and provocateur to incite negative reactions as the Little Rock School District, Central High School, and the community prepare to commemorate 50 years of progress and advancement.

I want to go on record as saying that, in the time I had to work with and to get to know him, I found Brandon to be absolutely genuine, incredibly perceptive, unyieldingly balanced and fair, and stunningly candid in his capacity to read and assess a situation and respond appropriately to it. For these reasons and more, I would hope that as individuals read “A Tale of Two Centrals,” they will do so with a desire to hear the voice of the student, understand the message being conveyed and be catalyzed to act on behalf of all students everywhere across this nation knowing that there are still new, more insidious forms of segregation, discrimination and the denial of civil rights that impede the full measure of educational equality and opportunity to which every student is entitled regardless of their differing characteristics.

— Dr. Bradley Scott, director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

A Tale of Two Centrals – continued from Page 2

these 11 classes combined, I have had a total of only 20 Black classmates. Do counselors discourage Blacks from taking these demanding courses? Do Black students feel that they are not up for the challenge? Maybe Whites have the first choice when it comes to course selection, filling all of the classes before Blacks have a chance to try to enroll.

Either way, this is unacceptable. Central remains a great place to receive

a high school education. Sadly, the opportunities it offers are vast for some but limited for others.

I, like the Little Rock Nine, have worked tirelessly inside and outside of the classroom to help create the Central that so many people envisioned so long ago—a unified Central. I work to bridge racial gaps and break racial barriers that linger from the past and, in some cases, have sprung anew.

I consider myself lucky. Lucky because instead of being confined to

either the Black or White Central, I walk the halls of both Centrals daily and with relative ease.

Perhaps it is my personality. Perhaps it is my determination. Perhaps it is sheer luck. Perhaps it is a mix of all of them. I only know that despite the odds, I have been able to achieve while encountering *A Tale of Two Centrals*. I can honestly say, “It [is] the best of times, it [is] the worst of times.”



Ways IDRA Can Help You

IDRA provides technical assistance to public school and higher education personnel and to parent and community groups through training sessions, onsite meetings, classroom observations, lesson demonstrations, video conferences, evaluation research, conferences, phone consultation, and the IDRA web site, which includes online message boards, online resources, and the *IDRA Newsletter*.

Details of IDRA technical assistance are available on the IDRA web site by topic area. CPE credit is available. Samples are below.

Math Smart! (for Elementary or Secondary) – A process to maximize dynamic student learning in mathematics.



Science Smart! (for Elementary or Secondary) – Elementary student mastery and achievement using authentic relevant teaching.



Evaluation Research – Document project outcomes using qualitative and quantitative methods and improve future activities by clarifying what works, for which students and under what conditions.



Engagement-based Sheltered Instruction –

Extending teachers' knowledge of ESL strategies and sheltered instruction to ensure that English language learners are engaged in learning the academic content.



Parent Action for School Success – A model for effective parent engagement and taking the next step in meaningful school-home engagement for student success.



Success Using Bilingual Education – Comprehensive, in-depth learning opportunities for instructors that build upon the strengths and knowledge that teachers possess while developing new, scientifically-based research strategies for English language learner success.



WOW Workshop on Workshops –

Challenging, highly participatory training of trainers that gives practical, research-based tools for preparing and leading a superb workshop with minimal stress.



Focusing on Language and Academic Instructional Renewal (FLAIR) – Intensive

language-across-the-curriculum program created through sustained and intensive campus-based professional development.



Texas High School Allotment – Learn ways the new high school allotment can strengthen your school's holding power.



Contact IDRA to explore individualized contracted technical assistance in these or other areas.

210-444-1710 • contact@idra.org

a video clip (available on the Internet) of a professional basketball game from the night before and asking students to make observations and find relationships from the box score data or asking students to find pseudo-science topics in newsstand magazines and debunk the headline with scientific evidence.

Listen to the Student Voices

Students interests and what they are involved in (skateboarding, soccer, working and helping to support their families, first English speakers) can provide the context to math and science content. Students should also listen to themselves by being reflective about learning math and science and self-assessing their knowledge. It is through their voices that we can discover new ways of learning knowledge and ask students how to improve the lesson and what they would do to change it, tweak it or vary it. Students have wonderful ideas!

Remind Ourselves that High-stakes Testing Doesn't Ensure

Engaging Curriculum in Math and Science

High-stakes testing has depleted teachers and students to industrialized methods of learning that give the illusion of efficient learning. The NCEE concluded, "The minimum competency testing that was spreading across states was leading to a decrease, rather than an increase, in standards" (Smith, 2004). High-stakes tests look at surface knowledge as opposed to deep understanding of content.

A change in a linear equation's slope will transform its graph, no matter how slight the variation. Equally so, a slight increase in the amount of a chemical can significantly alter the results of the experiment, thus leading to new and undiscovered results. Such is the case for engaging math and science curricula.

So, while we inevitably juggle pressures of preparation time, time in class, class control, control of curriculum, curricular confines for students, and supporting students for student success, we can still see transformation and have students discover the mathematicians and scientists within them. It is the

implementation of an engaging math and science curricula that will create these possibilities for *all* children.

Resources

- Brown, K. "Re-Investigating Math Curricula," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 2006).
- Bybee, R. W., and E. Stage. "No Country Left Behind," *Issues in Science and Technology* (Winter 2005) 69-75.
- Curtis, D. *Start With the Pyramid* (San Rafael, Calif.: The George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2001). http://www.edutopia.org/php/article.php?id=Art_884&key=037.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, April 1983). <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.
- Smith, T.M. "Curricular Reform in Mathematics and Science Since A Nation At Risk," *Peabody Journal of Education* (2004) 79(1), 105-129.
- Stodolsky, S.S., and P.L. Grossman. "Changing Students, Changing Teaching," *Teachers College Record* (2000) 102(1), 125-172.
- Weisman, A.W., and D.S. Brown. "Teacher Curricular Control and Student Performance: A Cross-National Study of Curricular Accountability," *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* (2003) 5(2).
- Windschitl, M. "Sparking the Debate Over Science Reform Education," *The Education Digest* (January 2006) 20-31.

Kathryn Brown is an IDRA education associate. Veronica Betancourt, M.A., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Minority Women in Science: Forging the Way

by Keiko E. Suda, Oanh H. Maroney, M.A., Bradley Scott, M.A., and María Aurora Yáñez, M.A.

A great student-centered tool to support equity in math and science education!

We must ensure that minority girls are not left behind as progress is made toward narrowing gender and racial gaps in math and science education. This is an innovative resource that can be used with all students – girls and boys – to help break down gender stereotypes about scientists.

You will find:

- ◆ Profiles of seven minority women scientists who have surmounted barriers to forge the way for themselves and future scientists.
- ◆ Science lessons for the classroom that cover such topics as acid/base chemistry, earth science, wildlife and environmental science, and biology.
- ◆ Life skills lessons for the classroom that cover topics such as getting college information from the school counselor, identifying a support system, reaching goals, knowing self-worth, having community pride, overcoming stereotypes, and linking hobbies with career choices.
- ◆ The opportunity to use this guide to plan with other teachers, from other departments, using the stories of these inspirational women as the basis for cross-curricular lessons for students.

(Student Workbook ISBN 1-878550-67-5; 2000; 32 pages; paperback; \$6.50)

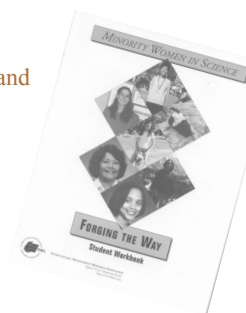
(Teacher's Guide ISBN 1-878550-68-3; 2000; 94 pages; paperback; \$25.00)

Developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228; Phone 210-444-1710;
Fax 210-444-1714; e-mail: contact@idra.org.

Shipping and handling is 10 percent of the total price of the order. Orders must be prepaid.
Purchase orders for orders totaling more than \$30 are accepted.

"Being a scientist can open doors to opportunities that you may never have dreamt of or even considered."

– Patricia Hall, M.S., one of the scientists featured in *Minority Women in Science: Forging the Way*





14th Annual IDRA

La Semana del Niño

Early Childhood Educators Institute™

April 24-26, 2007 • San Antonio, Texas • Airport Hilton

Designed for

- ❖ Early Childhood Educators
- ❖ Administrators
- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Parent Educators and Liaisons

The Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute offers a valuable series of information-packed professional development sessions that are customized to value and respond appropriately to the linguistic and cultural assets of a diverse student population.

Participants Will...

- ❖ Examine the importance of early literacy for English language learners.
- ❖ Develop appropriate and culturally-relevant pedagogy.
- ❖ Explore research-based effective practices in early childhood education.

Centers of Learning

- ❖ Visit sites with unique bilingual early childhood programs!
- ❖ Discover how they are sustaining success!
- ❖ Learn about best practices in action!

Building Quality Early Childhood Education

This three-day institute will focus on pedagogy, curriculum and strategies. Scheduled sessions include building quality early childhood instruction, shared and guided reading, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, writing, math and science. Sessions are presented by early childhood educators, consultants and IDRA staff. These sessions will enable you to learn best practices and to receive tools that you can immediately use in your classroom. CPE credit is available. Topics to be addressed include:

- ❖ state requirements and policies
- ❖ practical, quality instruction
- ❖ effective school and home partnerships

Learn to create environments that encourage children to explore, experiment, question, wonder, create and play as they acquire literacy, numeracy and skills for school success. Educators and parents will have opportunity to see features of quality early childhood settings. Valuable tools for setting up centers of learning will be shared.

Keynoters

Dr. Rosalinda B. Barrera



Rosalinda B. Barrera is dean of the College of Education at Texas State University-San Marcos. Previously, she was a faculty member and administrator at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she served as associate provost with responsibilities in diversity and educational access. There she also led

the Center for Democracy in a Multiracial Society (CDMS), a research, policy and outreach unit focused on promoting multidisciplinary and multicultural initiatives across the campus and community. A former classroom teacher and public school administrator, Barrera has a doctorate in curriculum and instruction, taught at New Mexico State University and has published two books and numerous professional articles addressing the language and literacy education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

Dr. Elena Izquierdo

Dr. Elena Izquierdo, associate professor, University of Texas at El Paso, is a linguist by training with a doctorate in linguistics and bilingual education from Georgetown University and is an educator in practice. Her research and professional specializations focus on second language acquisition theory and practice, biliteracy development, issues in the education of English language learners and school reform. In addition, she was the principal of a nationally-recognized two-way dual language elementary school in Washington, D.C., and became director for language minority affairs where she led the district into federal compliance in services to language-minority communities. She is an author and trainer for teachers and administrators.



Institute Sponsors – Supporting IDRA projects include the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity and the Texas IDRA PIRC (the parent information resource center).

Registration and hotel information is available online at www.idra.org or by calling IDRA at 210-444-1710.

Pre-Conference Institute

Monday, April 23, 2007

This special pre-conference institute is a trainer of trainers session for early childhood trainers, lead early childhood teachers and program directors. The session will be built on IDRA's unique training of trainers model, *WOW (Workshop on Workshops)*. The model uses research about adult learners and defines the trainer's role based on those assumptions. It includes principles of training, a process for planning a workshop including assessment needs, setting objectives, designing activities and structuring the workshop as a whole, and workshop evaluation. This pre-conference institute is designed to give you an extensive eight-hour training session in the skills to train others to build the foundation for preschool literacy.

Registration details are online at www.idra.org. Eight hours of CEU credit is available.

Video Conference

Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Partners for School Accountability

Colaborando para la Responsabilidad Escolar

This two-hour video conference is for parents and parent educators across Texas. Participants will share insights and experiences in this interactive session, conducted in English and Spanish, focusing on accountability under the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

To register your video conference site or to find a participating location near you, contact Lena Guerra at IDRA 210.444.1710.

Parent Leadership Institute

Thursday, April 26, 2007

This interactive, bilingual institute will provide a forum for parents, parent liaisons and educators to discuss the important leadership role for parents in children's school success. This institute provides wonderful networking opportunities for families.

Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In February IDRA worked with **4,290** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **35** training and technical assistance activities and **121** program sites in **13** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Atlanta Public Schools, Georgia
- ◆ Lake Hamilton School District, Arkansas
- ◆ Socorro Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ University of Central Oklahoma, Oklahoma

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◇ Addressing Hostile Environments
- ◇ Early Childhood Lesson Demonstrations
- ◇ School Funding Equity
- ◇ Effective English Language Learner Instruction through Engagement

Activity Snapshot

Federal law requires school districts to provide gender equitable instruction to students. Recognizing its need to ensure that materials are free of gender-bias, one district in south Texas called upon the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity. The South Central Collaborative for Equity is the equity assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The center provided training to personnel in the school district to ensure that all children have more complete access to curriculum without the burden of cultural, linguistic and social bias that may occur in instructional materials. As a result, teachers in the district are better equipped to identify and respond to such bias.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- ◆ public school teachers
- ◆ parents
- ◆ administrators
- ◆ other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- ◇ training and technical assistance
- ◇ evaluation
- ◇ serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- ◇ publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710.

New!



IDRA

Classnotes Podcast

Free!

IDRA has launched a new podcast series designed to be a tool for public school teachers and administrators as well as to provide insights into key issues in education in the United States.

Online Now



Episode 9: “Fostering Gender Equity in the Classroom” – Frances Guzmán, M.Ed., discusses where gender inequities tend to show up in classrooms and how educators can make changes to ensure equity for girls and boys.



Episode 7: “Serving Migrant Students” – Dr. Adela Solís discusses common misconceptions about educating migrant students and strategies educators need to use to serve them successfully.



Episode 8: “Framing Systems Change for Student Success” – Dr. Robledo Montecel outlines promising strategies to improving achievement in high poverty schools.



Episode 6: “The Need for Cross-Race, Cross-Sector Dialogues” – Dr. Rosana Rodríguez and Frances Guzmán join Dr. Bradley Scott, director of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, to discuss how this cross-sector and multiracial dialogue approach is creating lasting partnerships between African American and Latino communities, using education as common ground for collaboration.



www.idra.org/podcasts

A podcast is an audio file that can be downloaded to your computer for listening immediately or at a later time. Podcasts may be listened to directly from your computer by downloading them onto a Mp3 player (like an iPod) for listening at a later date. The IDRA Classnotes podcasts are available at no charge through the IDRA web site and through the Apple iTunes Music Store. You can also subscribe to Classnotes through iTunes or other podcast directories to automatically receive each new podcast in the series when it is released. Classnotes is free of charge.



5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

Permit No. 3192
San Antonio, TX 78228



*Creating schools that work for all children,
through research • materials development • training • technical assistance • evaluation • information dissemination*