



# Teachers Leading Teachers

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- ✦ **Creating classrooms of excellence**
- ✦ **Dynamic professional development**
- ✦ **Content teachers transform schools**
- ✦ **Tools for action**

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

Students learning English in San Antonio secondary classrooms also have been engaged in learning math, social studies and science in effective and interesting ways. From creating vocabulary cubes with pictures in a social studies class, to tearing quadrilaterals and talking about the sum of the angles from a personal perspective, and even to coaching elementary students in safety practices in a high school science lab, these Spanish-speaking students are experiencing success in class.

A group of high school and middle school teachers in this urban school district have been planning and carrying out effective teaching approaches for English language learners. Science, social studies and math teachers have been observing and coaching peers, planning in teams, communicating across campuses, planning and conducting workshops and institutes for their peers, conducting bilingual parent-teacher-student dialogues, and developing creative new materials. In short, they have been leaders.

The central office now regularly calls on them for conducting professional development for secondary teachers. They are lauded on campus as teachers leading teachers. Yet the central benefit of IDRA's project, Educators x Communities = English Language Learners' Success (ExCELS), now in its last year, is its connection to school holding power and student success.

Last November-December's issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* highlighted the IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework (Robledo Montecel, 2005). This framework targets two key indicators: school holding power – the ability of schools to guarantee graduation for all students; and student success – the academic preparation both to graduate with a diploma and to graduate prepared for college access and success. To achieve these, schools need: (1) quality teaching, (2) parent and community engagement, (3) student engagement, and (4) curriculum quality and access (see Page 11). This article highlights the teacher leadership that has emerged from the ExCELS project and that reinforces this framework.

The ExCELS project has  
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addressed teachers' needs for having effective approaches for teaching English language learners in the core content areas. These approaches are organized around: modeling, coaching, peer dialogue, peer teaching and campus planning. Over three years at a middle school and a high school in a feeder pattern, campus observation, workshops, debriefing, teacher input and presentations evolved.

As one social studies teacher said, "I used to be embarrassed to talk even at my department meetings – now I'm exhilarated to present workshops to my peers."

In the third year of the project, we focused on a process of leadership development that included extensive dialogues among the teachers who had participated the most in the project.

### The Domains of Leadership

The ExCELS teacher leader can now function in five different domains of leadership as conceptualized by the project: instruction, peer support, campus improvement, district support,

## To achieve quality schools, it is essential to include a teacher learning community and teacher peer leadership. ...students will achieve when we support effective teachers to be leaders of their peers.

and family and community engagement. If these domains could be seen as concentric circles, the center would be the effective classroom teaching that goes on every day (see Page 10).

### The Instruction Leader (Quality Teaching and Student Engagement)

The *instruction leader*: models and is willing to be observed in effective teaching of English language learners; collects student samples to illustrate the range of student language development in content and documents personal implications for instruction; and allows videotaping of lesson planning, classroom instruction and post-class debriefing. The professional development in the project included modeling of effective instruction in the actual classrooms of the project participants, observation of peers,

and debriefing and dialogue on what had been observed. As the project evolved, emergent leaders persisted in modifying their classroom instruction for English language learners. These teachers also invited observation and even videotaping of their teaching – not as super teachers but to continue to develop and be a willing model, to be observed and have a conversation with peers about the actual instruction.

The next concentric circle extends from the effective classroom instruction to the connections teachers make with each other about their teaching.

### The Peer Support Leader (Quality Teaching)

A *peer support leader*: co-plans and participates in feedback sessions with peers; and mentors colleagues on classroom instruction issues. Leaders

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The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2006) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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

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# Quality Professional Development Creates “Classrooms of Excellence”

by José L. Rodríguez, M.A.

Bad experiences often lead to low expectations. For example, at the beginning of IDRA’s Reading Early for Academic Development (READ) project, some teachers were not enthused: “I was not sure what to expect from project READ when first introduced to it. From past experiences, I figured it was going to be a couple of people coming in to look at my room and me, tell me everything they saw wrong, tell me what to change and leave me to figure out the rest on my own.”

But the READ professional development model is much more than looking at what is not working in classrooms. It is about *transforming* the teaching environment and working side-by-side with teachers to see why certain elements are not in place or why they are not working and how to make them work for both the teacher and the student.

What does a “classroom of excellence” look like? What does it sound like? This article describes how IDRA is working with 13 Head Start classrooms at four Parent Child, Inc., centers to transform them into classrooms of excellence.

## Training Based on Needs

Through IDRA’s Early Reading First project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, IDRA has created these classrooms of excellence. In keeping with IDRA’s mission of “creating schools that work for all children,” the professional development model used in READ was carefully crafted to include coaching, mentoring, reflecting and applying. IDRA’s professional development causes participants to take a new look at persistent problems and equips them to take action that produces positive outcomes for all children.

Because of rigorous professional development and the implementation of a strong scientifically-researched reading curriculum, the READ students’ standardized mean score on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III has moved from 79 to 92, which represents one standard deviation toward the national mean.

The purpose of the Early Reading First program is to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive and early reading skills for reading success. When READ entered the four PCI

centers, the first step of the professional development model was to evaluate the environment and the teaching practices at each of the centers. IDRA used the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) toolkit to specifically address the role of environmental factors in early literacy and language development. The ELLCO consists of a three-part toolkit that is designed to help administrators, principals, supervisors and program directors gather crucial data needed to strengthen classroom quality and build better literacy programs, both by improving teacher development and comparing their practices with other teachers (Smith and Dickinson, 2002). The children also were assessed using the Get it, Got it, Go!, the Pre-Pals (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) as well as the *Test de Vocabulario en Imágenes Peabody* (the TVIP is the Spanish version of the PPVT-III). Teachers were interviewed and responded to a professional development survey that described their own professional growth and the level of competency

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knowledge they would like to achieve by the end of the project.

The Literacy Environment Checklist indicated that there was a 50 percent gap between the observations and what the tool considers exemplary. The largest discrepancies occurred in the “writing about the room” and the “book use” sections of the toolkit. The least discrepancy occurred in the actual existence of materials. The implication was that more needed to be done in the use of the existing resources for the improvement of literacy skills (reading and writing).

### Curriculum

The ELLCO data collected and analyzed informed the professional development plan for the teachers. Immediate professional development began on the five components of early literacy: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The *HeadsUp! Reading* accentuated the professional development sessions. *HeadsUp! Reading* is an early literacy course for educators of young children, focused on strengthening crucial early childhood literacy skills.

*HeadsUp! Reading* delivers high quality, research-based education via satellite television directly to early childhood programs across the United States taught by a diverse faculty of experts in early childhood and literacy (National Head Start Association, 2005). A report from the U.S. Department of Education entitled *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers* finds that few beginning teachers nationwide are receiving adequate mentoring (Lewis, et al., 1999).

### Mentoring

Throughout the project period, a mentor observed the teachers and modeled lessons for them. She spent

half a day with the teachers and offered suggestions. The role of the mentor is a vital component for our model. Summers, as cited by Boreen, et al. (2000), states research indicates that mentoring new teachers can increase their students’ motivation and critical thinking skills. Our mentor is a retired teacher with a wealth of information for the teachers and students.

The mentor used the ELLCO data to transform the environment into one that nurtured the students’ learning. Once the environment changed so did the way the teachers taught. One READ teacher stated: “At the start of this project, I didn’t know what to expect. Going through months of professional development sessions, things started to make sense. I was acquiring information and taking it back to my school. As I used the knowledge I was gaining I started to see change in the children. Children were getting excited about reading. I had one parent who said, ‘I didn’t know my child could read.’ After that, she [the parent] told me that she made time to help her child read. I was very excited to hear that.”

IDRA’s professional development model not only gives the teachers the proper tools to use, but also assists teachers in using those tools. And now

we are seeing the results through teacher transformation and student success.

### Planning for Instruction

Another important piece of the model is planning for instruction. On the first Saturday of every month, the teachers meet at the PCI resource room to create the literacy centers needed for the month. These meetings have evolved into a learning community where teachers share ideas and discuss the latest ideas in professional development.

### Parent Involvement

Parents-as-partners is another important component of our professional development model. Parents are seen and valued as the child’s first teacher and received professional development on setting up “centers of learning” in their homes. Parents were informed on what the students were learning and how they could support them at home. Family field trips to the San Antonio Children’s Museum and to the San Antonio Public Library have enabled families to spend quality time with their children in different settings. At the library, the children and their

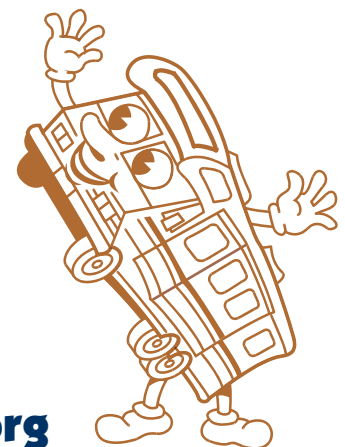
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# Teachers Pressing for Quality Teaching

## Lessons from Content Teachers of English Language Learners

by Jack Dieckmann, M.A.

*Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the May 2004 issue of the IDRA Newsletter.*

Some jobs, like teaching, might look simple from a distance. Teachers plan activities for their students, make copies of worksheets, keep track of grades and gold stars, plan a few field trips, and update their bulletin boards with every changing season. And of course, teachers make exciting plans for those long summer vacations.

Ask any teacher if this is an accurate picture of the life of a teacher. You will get a completely different perspective!

The core of teaching in schools involves a relationship among three elements: teachers, students and something to learn. That “something” is typically knowledge and skills to be mastered by students. More recently, that “something” has become a highly detailed and externally defined set of state content standards.

Because these elements seem obvious, teaching, as a practice, is often seen as solely technical and straightforward. It involves some compilation of instructional strategies, well-prepared lectures, perhaps a few hands-on activities and a classroom behavior management system.

Thus, to a casual observer,

teaching just does not seem that hard. Explain things clearly and get the students ready for the state-mandated test. This simplistic view seems to underlie recent policy trends for softening the definition of what background a person needs to be certified to teach.

In contrast, researchers and reflective practitioners who have studied teaching are adding depth to help us understand the complexities of what it takes, on a daily basis, across a career, to be an effective teacher (Lampert, 2001).

But what does effective mean? Among some experts, it is common to hear “we know good teaching when we see it,” but we have limited tools for developing the teacher competencies needed for effective practice. This is especially true for developing effective teaching practice for language-diverse learners.

Much of the national discussion has been about teacher quality, pointing to the level of university preparation, state credentialing and other individual characteristics of teachers. No doubt these are important to consider. But what seems missing from the dialogue is quality teaching.

School districts continue to provide teacher training, giving information to teachers about “best practices.” Most teachers are passive receivers of this knowledge, and little is known

about when and how “best practices” are actually used in the classroom to engage in quality teaching.

This article reports on one of the many school partnerships that the Intercultural Development Research Association has established to create schools that work for all children. It takes many elements working together to create and maintain such schools. Here, we focus on quality teaching, the heart of instructional practice.

### Teachers Wrestling with Their Practice

Historically, much of the work done in professional development assumes that teachers need to be “fixed” and that they are singly responsible for the educational achievement gaps in schools today.

No doubt teachers can make a huge difference for students, but there are multiple, competing and sometimes contradictory priorities that teachers have to contend with. For example, teachers are expected to meet every student’s instructional needs while at the same time keeping pace with a closely monitored page-by-page scope and sequence determined by central office. Teachers also must make instruction relevant every day to the wide range of students in the class even though the tightly prescribed

*Teachers Pressing – continued on Page 6*

curriculum has only the high-stakes test as its fundamental organizer and driving force.

Lest you think these are insurmountable barriers, many teachers are taking up the challenge of quality teaching, wrestling with the dilemmas together and getting results.

Here are the words of one teacher thinking about her practice, “I’m working hard every day to change my mindset and remember that my students have a lot to offer each other and should be allowed to direct their own learning.”

This is a self-developed goal from a teacher working with IDRA on an ongoing basis. The statement is remarkable in several ways. It illustrates a teacher’s actions to increase the quality in her teaching.

Her comment reveals a dissonance between an old mindset and an emerging one about what students bring to the learning context. The teacher consciously is trying to re-pattern her fundamental beliefs and practices daily with the new premise “that students have a lot to offer.”

This statement, if acted upon genuinely, has tremendous potential for re-configuring the relationships among teacher, students and learning tasks. The teacher is not simply stating a platitude, but has already determined an outcome for her students that they “should be allowed to direct their own learning.”

Even though the teacher assumes the challenge of rethinking her practices and keeping old habits at bay, we must remember that she also must contend with institutional forces that maintain the status quo. These factors are discussed in more detail elsewhere in other articles (Dieckmann and Montemayor, 2004).

## **ExCELS Teachers**

What type of professional learn-

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# **Tools for**

## **Quality Teaching Leads to Success**

Abundant studies show a connection between teacher preparation and student success. In other words, the more qualified the teacher, the greater the chances that our children will succeed in school. Excellent teachers make a huge difference in the academic achievement of students.

Yet we are faced with the fact that our schools tend to be more successful at teaching White students than Hispanic and other minority students. The achievement gap is even larger for this country’s 4.4 million children who speak a language other than English. These children are being taught in some capacity by 1.3 million teachers. But only 154,000 of these teachers have had eight or more hours of preparation in the last three years on how to teach these students.

These teachers want to do a good job. But many do not have opportunities or support to prepare themselves adequately. This is just one example of how one group of students is being affected by the lack of qualified teachers.

The good news is that this problem has a solution. We have the expertise to develop the qualified teachers that are needed. To be successful, it is important, however, that the public understand the issues and become actively engaged in creating a scenario where every student, regardless of color, national origin, religion or gender, is taught by a qualified teacher.

## **A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing**

**Developing Leaders** – Each month, IDRA works with more than 10,000 parents, educators, principals and school board members to expand educational leadership and effectiveness, and to increase community and institutional support for quality teaching. As examples of this work, IDRA’s Transitions and T-TEXAS initiatives, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, are providing accelerated teacher certification programs that increase the number of fully-qualified and credentialed ESL/bilingual teachers working with English language learners in “high-need” schools. To learn more about the Transition and T-TEXAS projects, see the April issue of the *IDRA Newsletter*, “Promoting Excellence in Teaching Through A Highly Qualified Teaching Force.”

IDRA’s MathSmart! training offers secondary school math teachers innovative technology-based strategies to make math come alive in their classrooms. See <http://www.idra.org/Services/mathsmart.htm>.

*Tools for Action continued on next page*

# Action

**Conducting Research** – IDRA embeds research-based models of content delivery and pedagogy into all professional development. For example, through its Reading Early for Academic Development (READ) project, IDRA is establishing a scientific foundation for policy and practice by creating centers of excellence for diverse children. Our research is showing dramatic results among participating children. See story on Page 3.

**Informing Policy** – IDRA’s ongoing analysis and testimony on school finance, teacher certification, bilingual education and English language learning has long been a resource to policymakers, community members and education leaders. In addition to informing public policy, IDRA works to improve education policy, for example, recommending actions that universities can undertake to recruit, teach, and certify bilingual education teachers and to foster their leadership in bilingual and bicultural education.

**Engaging Communities** – During the Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute, IDRA hosts a special full-day institute for parents to concentrate on early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. More than 150 parents participate with a panel of experts on state policies, home and school curricula, and leadership development. They then work together to develop a concrete plan of action for exerting leadership in early childhood education.

## What You Can Do

**Get informed.** At the local level, by finding out from school principals and teachers themselves, if teachers in your children’s schools are certified in the subjects they teach. (For more information, see *Pláticas en Acción: Quality Teaching*, <http://www.idra.org/pirc/platicas/qualityteaching.htm> published by IDRA’s Parent Information Resource Center). To learn more about the status of teacher certification, see State Board for Educator Certification in Texas at <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/default.asp>.

**Get involved.** Promote teacher certification and quality instruction by working with your schools and public officials if teachers in your local area lack adequate training or certification and need additional training, preparation and support. Advocate teacher preparation and professional development that ensures teacher competence in teaching diverse students. See “Seven Principles for Effective Professional Development for Diverse Schools,” by Dr. Abelardo Villarreal at IDRA (June-July 2005; <http://www.idra.org/News-ltr/2005/Jun/Lalo.htm#Art1>).

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ing experiences lead to this kind of intense teacher commitment, as seen in this teacher’s statement, to value all students even when it challenges established teaching patterns? Why do we not see, generally, this kind of renewal even though teachers attend many interesting workshops with good information? We can look at ExCELS, one of IDRA’s ongoing professional development projects for some key insights.\*

ExCELS supports and coaches secondary teachers as partners in targeted school reform. A central project question is, “How might classroom teachers initiate and sustain moves in their practice (to include planning, instruction, assessment and parent engagement) toward increasing quality for English language learners?” ExCELS explores and documents the implications for those who support teacher development.

To examine this question, we draw on IDRA’s ExCELS project, a five-year professional development project for teachers of English language learners. We focus on recurring individual teacher goal-setting, classroom action and joint reflection for their practice across a three-year period.

From this, we gain insight into how teachers view their practice, students, parents and subject knowledge. The insights inform both the problems and possibilities. They also

*\* ExCELS is an innovative IDRA professional development program that creates learning communities of schools, families and communities for English language learners’ academic success. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the project is focusing on improving teachers’ capacity to address curriculum, instruction, assessment and parent involvement issues that impact the achievement of English language learners. Now in its third year of implementation, the project includes a total of 54 core content teachers (math, science, language arts and social studies) across two secondary schools.*

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help document the processes whereby teachers define for themselves what quality teaching means.

Throughout the life of the ExCELS project, we have documented critical efforts and incidences in teacher training (Dieckmann, August 2003), classroom demonstrations (Dieckmann, March 2003; Dieckmann, May 2003), and parent partnerships for learning (McCollum, 2003). Teachers gain professional knowledge and support in improving their practice through summer institutes, peer observations, Saturday sessions and parent-student-teacher conversations.

As the project has progressed, teachers have increased in leadership in substantive and practical ways: taking responsibility for project logistics (communication, calendar planning and recruitment), co-constructing the agendas, sharing more openly about the dilemmas and successes in practice, and ultimately using the team meetings as a context to problem-solve as a group to increase the quality of their teaching.

### **Teacher Goal-Setting**

Throughout our community-building work with teachers, we have asked them to develop individual teaching goals for English language learners. Teachers wrote and shared about their problems and about attempts and successes in their practice in a variety of formats, including through e-mail, individual conferences with project staff, campus and content groupwork sessions, at-large project meetings, parent-teacher-student dialogues, and ongoing conversations with teacher peers.

One teacher shared her experiences with the project at the Texas state parent conference last year. The participants in the session were excited because they were given transcripts of what teachers, parents and students

actually said about the event.

Many teachers form goals for a variety of reasons. Some form individual goals about improving their teaching, for example, “This year, I want to try more collaborative learning.”

More and more, teacher goals are moving toward achievement rates, such as, “This year, my goal is to have 80 percent mastery on the state test.”

A few teachers engage in goal-setting as part of an annual teacher evaluation process, where administrators check up on teachers to track their progress on goals.

Each of these approaches serves a useful function. We distinguish our work in ExCELS from these in that we are helping teachers define individually, and refine jointly, their goals for themselves, based on a common principle of valuing students and providing resources to teachers to help them improve their teaching. The box on Page 9 contains excerpts from ExCELS teacher goals across three years.

A brief thematic analysis of the teachers’ goals points to some of the adjustments teachers made in their thinking and in their teaching. The content of ExCELS teacher training has remained fairly stable, revolving around the major tenets of sheltered instruction: motivating tasks, cooperative learning, comprehensible input, building language skills and higher-order thinking skills. Our data set includes many elements such as field notes, e-mails, sidebar conversations, meeting notes, teacher reflection forms, evaluation and teacher lesson plans.

The excerpts show the ways in which teachers’ development became evident in the self-directed goals they choose to formulate. Over time, we see major shifts in teacher thinking in several areas: how they see themselves, how they see students and families, and how they see their con-

tent. In particular, we find clues about how teachers identify quality teaching issues in their teaching and how the complexity of that assessment develops over time.

The major indicators of teachers’ moving toward quality teaching are:

- Moving from seeing students as being deficient to seeing students as having a wealth of individual experiences and informal knowledge that can be used to accelerate the mastery of rigorous content.
- Moving from general and vague ideas about “reconstructing” content and incorporating English as a second language techniques to becoming very specific and using concrete tools for complex instruction.
- Moving from using instructional strategies as the driver to using and adapting strategies at the service of English language learners to develop independent learners.

### **Enlisting Teachers in Helping to Understand and Achieve Quality Teaching**

Part of the success that ExCELS has had in engaging teachers to direct their own professional learning and practice is our recognition that we are working with caring and hard-working adults who want to do their best and who give a high priority to student achievement that results from their teaching. Our multi-year commitment to the participating campuses has allowed for two-way communication and interaction as teachers help shape the particular learning opportunities for classroom effectiveness.

In our experience with the process of supporting quality teaching through professional development, three major elements have facilitated the shifts we see in teachers’ thinking and practice as evidenced in teacher goals, classroom observations and

*Teachers Pressing – continued on Page 9*



other data sources:

- Ongoing communication with peers and skilled coaches about what is and what is not working with students,
- Individual reflection on and refinement of classroom practice that is shared with peers and others in a supportive setting, and
- Commitment of support and resources to create synergy among teachers.

School leaders and those who support teacher learning can benefit from the experiences in ExCELS by including teachers in a meaningful way in the ongoing conversations about what quality teaching looks like, and equally as important is how to get there together. This article has

outlined some of the insights from looking at teachers’ goals over time and the conditions that we see as facilitating the long road toward quality teaching. Teachers can help us map out the journey.

### Resources

Darling-Hammond, L. *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

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## ExCELS Teacher Goals by Theme

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Moving <i>from</i> seeing students as deficient <i>to</i> seeing students as having a wealth of individual experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Figure out how to motivate learners</li> <li>• Use data to see what my students’ do not know</li> <li>• Involve parents in their child’s education</li> <li>• Plan a cultural festival to engage students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop lessons that reflect the interests of my students</li> <li>• Provide a more relaxed, structured, fun and challenging learning atmosphere</li> <li>• Get rid of my “high school” mentality that too many “A’s” mean my course is not rigorous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop more knowledge of students’ background and interests</li> <li>• Help students verbalize their learning goals and personal achievements</li> <li>• Develop students’ ability to take charge of their own learning and express themselves verbally</li> </ul>
Moving <i>from</i> general <i>to</i> very specific teaching actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn “what to do” with non-English speaking students</li> <li>• Learn about Hispanic and Cambodian cultures</li> <li>• Work on an activity for the cultural festival</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on teaching cognates and figurative language through visuals and Tejano music</li> <li>• Communicate better with my English language learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students more opportunities to evaluate their own learning and express themselves</li> <li>• Concentrate on providing activities for students to verbally contribute</li> </ul>
Moving <i>from</i> using strategies as the driver <i>to</i> using strategies at the service of learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use more vocabulary activities and graphic organizers</li> <li>• Use “book talk” at least once every nine weeks</li> <li>• Use reciprocal teaching at least once a semester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use and manage more successful group activities to develop concepts and language</li> <li>• My teaching style is too teacher-centered and teacher-directed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design instruction to include cooperative learning and active practice with new information</li> <li>• Include more cooperative learning, build self-efficacy and provide opportunities for success</li> </ul>

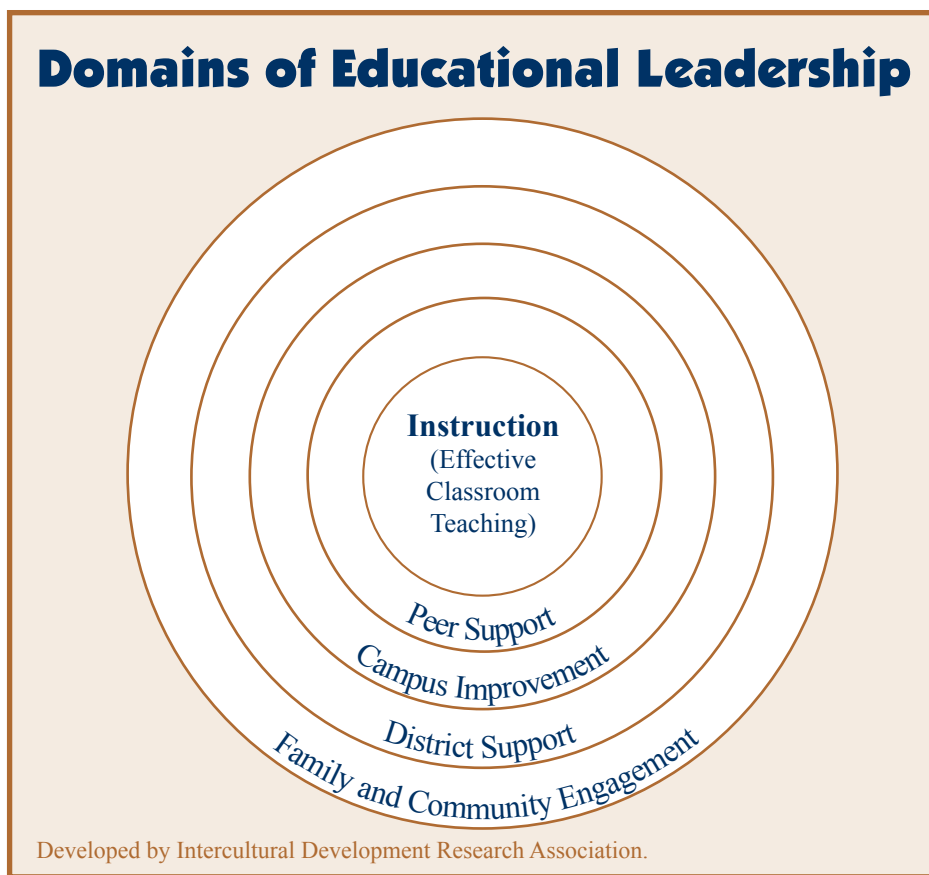
in the project volunteered to participate in a variety of ways with their peers: as coaches to teachers new to teaching or new to teaching English language learners; and as co-planners with other teachers in attempting to be more innovative in their teaching and to find new ways to help students learn. The teacher leaders were willing to maintain a focused dialogue over time on their successes and challenges with students specifically selected as case studies. Conversations focused on classroom management, teaching approaches and maintaining a deeper understanding of student characteristics, especially student strengths and assets.

The third circle of the series is an extension to the campus at large, beyond peer teachers to administrators, counselors and other support personnel.

### **The Campus Improvement Leader (Curriculum Quality & Access)**

The *campus improvement leader* meets with a campus committee that includes administrators, counselors, and other campus staff to improve policy and practice in support of English language learners' academic success and monitors progress. The teachers as leaders communicated with campus administrators and other personnel on a variety of topics: instructional issues in sheltered English classes, scheduling of students with the most experienced teachers, feedback on effective English as a second language (ESL) instruction, and planning for parent events. The teacher leaders took steps to influence the whole campus to accelerate the academic success of English language learners.

The fourth circle extends the teacher's leadership to the district at large and even beyond the boundaries of the district to teachers and other educators from other districts.



### **The District-Level Teacher Leader (Quality Teaching)**

The *district-level teacher leader*: conducts professional development workshops for representatives from all secondary campuses; supports development of resources that benefit all secondary campuses; and supports the ESL and bilingual education departments to improve instruction of English language learners in the whole district. One of the greatest tangible successes the leadership team members testify to is their newfound ability to present to other teachers. These classroom teachers are now sought out presenters for professional development days and get high marks for their command of the content area, the practicality of their presentations, the dynamic hands-on approaches, and their ability to relate to their peers who attend these workshops.

This has enabled the school district to mine the riches of the many

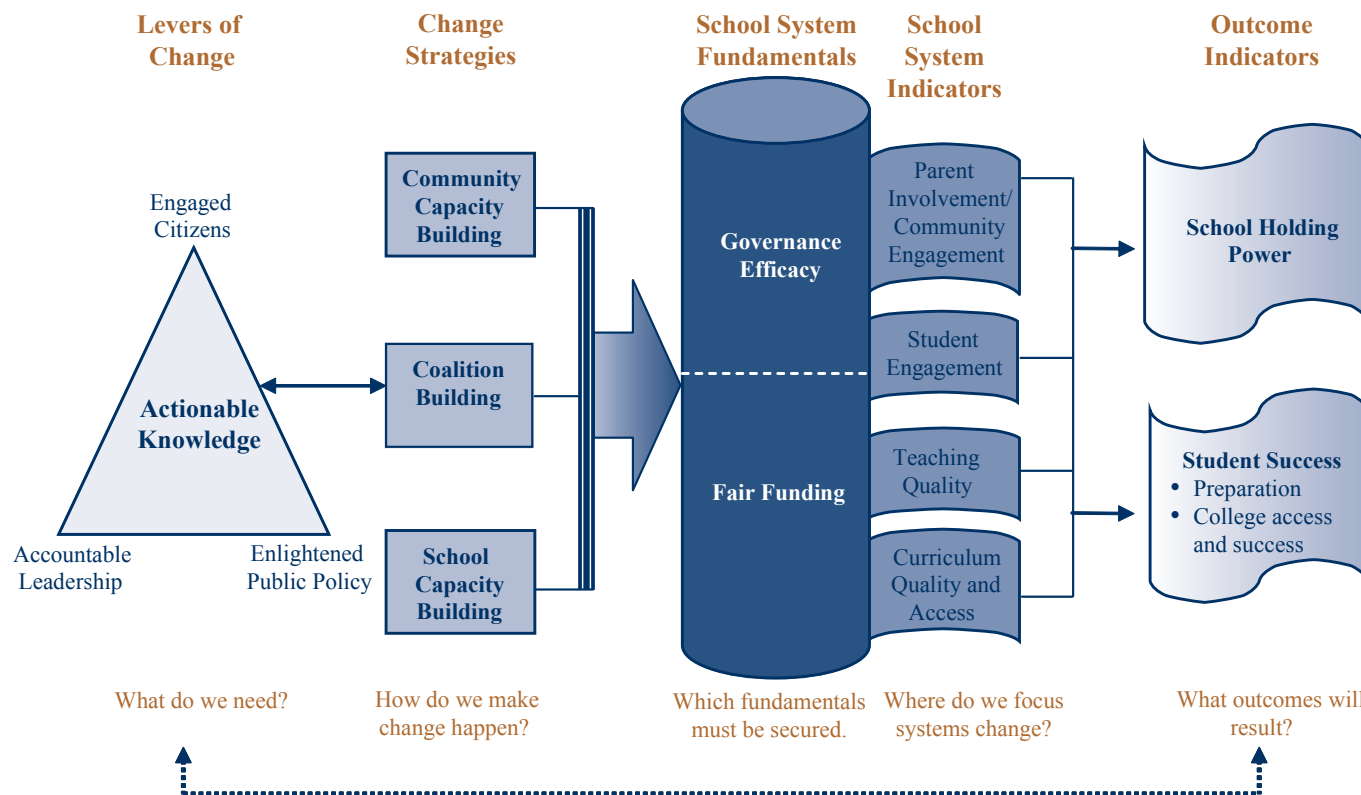
effective classroom teachers who can now plan, carry out and evaluate effective professional development.

The final circle actually permeates all rather than following in a linear fashion because the connections of the teacher leader to the parents of his or her students is parallel to the effective daily instruction and is reinforced through a variety of means of communication with families and the broader community.

### **The Teacher Leader with Community (Parent & Community Engagement)**

Finally, *teacher leadership with community* means that the teacher organizes, supports and carries out family-student-teacher dialogues; and engages community organizations, the private sector and other groups in support of excellent education for all children.

# Quality Schools Action Framework



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Teachers Leading – continued from Page 10

## Learning Community Research

These leadership domains and activities have emerged from the practice in the ExCELS project, but are also supported by some of the research literature in the learning community concept: “Historically, teacher learning communities emerged during the 1980s when Rosenholtz (1989) brought teachers’ workplace factors into the discussion of teacher quality, suggesting that teachers who felt supported in their own ongoing learning and classroom practice were more committed and effective than those who did not receive this confirmation. This research demonstrated that support through teacher networks, cooperation among colleagues, and expanded professional roles increased teacher effectiveness in meeting student needs. Likewise, Rosenholtz found that

teachers with a high sense of personal efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom approaches to promote school improvement and to remain in the teaching profession” (Pearce, et al., 2002).

In fact, this model has proven to be effective and long-lasting, especially compared to sporadic workshops, lecturing and dicta from above, and even more urgently, from trying to browbeat teachers to push up student test scores. To achieve quality schools, it is essential to include a teacher learning community and teacher peer leadership. Other key elements will still be needed. Nevertheless, students will achieve when we support effective teachers to be leaders of their peers.

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Teachers Leading – continued on Page 12

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## Educators x Communities = English Language Learners' Success

ExCELS is an innovative IDRA professional development program that creates learning communities of schools, families and communities for English language learners' academic success. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the project is focusing on improving teachers' capacity to address curriculum, instruction, assessment and parent involvement issues that impact the achievement of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students.

The project is comprised of five components that contribute to student success, as supported by the literature:

- Training for Capacity Building
- Technical Assistance for Classroom Support
- Teacher Mentoring
- Teacher-Parent Partnership
- ESL Learning Communities

## Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In February, IDRA worked with **3,825** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **58** training and technical assistance activities and **134** program sites in **11** states plus Brazil. Some topics included:

- ◆ Math Smart!
- ◆ Parent Leaders: An Untapped Resource in Education
- ◆ Bilingual Education Policy
- ◆ Eliminating the Achievement Gap
- ◆ Library Use Skills

Some participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ Gregory Portland Independent School District, Texas
- ◆ National Dropout Prevention Center, South Carolina

### Activity Snapshot

Given great disparities in higher education access and success of Latino students, IDRA created a Texas initiative called InterAction, which was supported by the Houston Endowment, Inc. The initiative included a series of policy action forums leading into a statewide seminar that presented the policy solutions identified by forum participants who represented three communities of interest—the border, urban, and rural areas. The first forum included K-12 educators, college and university leaders, and community and business advocates. Participants used a framework for dialogue by IDRA that identified seven distinct areas of opportunities for reform: preparation, access, institutional persistence, affordability, institutional resources, graduation, and graduate and professional studies.

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.*



# A Call to All Texans

## Increase School Holding Power: Inform, Connect, Act

Intercultural Development Research Association • April 11, 2006

Recently, national media – from the Oprah Winfrey Show to *Time* magazine – are spotlighting the national crisis of students dropping out of school.

Since 1986 when IDRA conducted Texas' first statewide study of high school dropouts, Texas schools have lost over 2 million students. That's like losing a student every four minutes.

Schools lose almost half of their Hispanic students, close to half of African American students, and one in five White students.

Schools must make it a high priority to strengthen their student holding power.

Together, schools, parents, students and policymakers can make a difference in strengthening school holding power.

Schools must have the capacity to prepare every student for graduation and college. We must ensure:

- All students are valued.
- There is at least one educator in a student's life who is totally committed to the success of that student.
- Students, parents and teachers are provided extensive, consistent support in ways that allow students to learn, teachers to teach and parents to be meaningfully involved.

Band-Aid solutions are not enough. We must secure:

- Equity and excellence in schools to contribute to individual and collective growth, long-term stability and advancement.
- Statewide credible counts of student dropouts, shared accountability and evidence of measurable improvement.
- Institution-based solutions that embrace family and community participation and draw on the strengths and contributions that students and their families bring.

Learn more about how you can join us in making a difference for children. Visit [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) where you will find:

- IDRA's "Quality Schools Action Framework" for systems change
- Latest state trends in attrition with county-level data and graphs
- Seven Lessons from Texas on what's behind the numbers
- Vital components of successful dropout prevention and school holding power

Weak school holding power affects every Texan. It robs our children of their futures, our communities of their talent, and our state of its economic vitality.

### **Together we can create schools that work for all children!**

Find out more! IDRA has undertaken more than two decades of research on attrition (<http://www.idra.org/Research/Research.htm>); designed and implemented the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (<http://www.idra.org/ccvyp/index.htm>), which has served more than 23,000 youth who had been considered at risk of dropping out and helped schools keep 98 percent of participants in school; and launched the Graduation Guaranteed/Graduación Garantizada initiative ([http://www.idra.org/attrition/index\\_shp.htm](http://www.idra.org/attrition/index_shp.htm)), a statewide summit on school holding power, convened with LULAC on November 4-5, 2005, that links school and community partners to strengthen school holding power.

For more information on national coverage and dropout data, see the Alliance for Excellent Education (<http://www.all4ed.org>). See also the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>) and the Public Education Network (<http://www.publiceducation.org>).

**Visit [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)**

# Tools for Creating and Evaluating the Rigor and Quality of Alternative Route Certification Programs

*Adela Solís, Ph.D.*

Teacher quantity and teacher quality are two related issues receiving much attention today. Expert researchers and practitioners alike agree that access to a qualified teacher is about the most important determinant of student achievement. Alternative certification is one approach to expanding the pool of professionals who can become highly qualified teachers. Although many states now staff their schools with teachers prepared through alternative certification routes, there is a growing concern about the quality and relevance of the programs to produce excellent teachers, especially teachers to serve the teaching fields with the most needs – math, science, special education and English as a second language and bilingual education.

This concern has stimulated inquiry into what comprises effective practices in alternative certification. Common themes have emerged from research on effective certification programs pertinent to general alternative certification and especially for specialization in ESL and bilingual education. Key questions for which answers are being sought from research are: What models are being implemented? What constitutes a rigorous but efficient program? How effective are they in preparing highly qualified teachers? What are the policy implications?

Below are some key resources and literature citations that provide up-to-date information useful in answering these pressing questions and in creating and evaluating quality programs.

## **IDRA Resources**

### **An Action Agenda for Effective Accelerated Preparation of English Language Learners**

*(R.G. Rodríguez and A. Villarreal. IDRA 2004)*

This action agenda offers insights and recommendations gathered from IDRA and other researchers' work regarding best practice and excellence in alternative, accelerated programs. The document addresses changes needed at the institutional levels kindergarten through grade 12 and higher education to bring positive practice to scale in high-need communities. See excerpt in the May 2005 issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* at <http://www.idra.org/Newsletters/2005/May/Rosana.htm#Art3>.

### **Certification and Endorsement of Bilingual Education Teachers: A Comparison of State Licensure Requirements**

*(E. Midboche. IDRA and ASU, 1999)*

This document details the requirements for certification and endorsement for prospective bilingual education teachers in seven states with high concentrations of limited-English-proficient (LEP) children – Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, New York and Texas. Specifically, the following questions were researched: What are the prevailing requirements for becoming a licensed bilingual education teacher in the United States? How do these requirements compare and contrast among selected states? To what extent are the use of specific competencies and standards for measuring them been adopted in bilingual education? (No ISBN, 78 pages, \$22) See <http://www.idra.org/alianza/pubs.htm#pub3>

### **México Normalista Teachers as a Resource for Bilingual Education in the United States: Connecting Two Models of Teacher Preparation**

*(J.E. Petrovic, G. Orozco, E. González, R. Díaz de Cassío. IDRA and ASU, 1999)*

This publication provides an international comparative perspective on teacher preparation in Mexico and the United States, with a special focus on the preparation of bilingual education teachers. Its primary audience consists of teacher educators, program administrators, international transcript evaluators, and registrars in the United States working with students (professionals) who have prior teacher preparation in the Mexican system and are interested in teaching in the United States. (No ISBN, 100 pages, \$28) See <http://www.idra.org/alianza/pubs.htm#pub1>

## **Other Resources**

### **Alternative Certification: A Review of Theory and Research**

*(Learning Point Associates and North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002)*

In this document, NCREL provides educators and policymakers with up-to-date information on alternative certification issues and practices. The document includes

*Continued on next page*

these components: introduction, background and history, research and evaluation, characteristics of effective programs, conclusion and references. <http://www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/html/altcert/index.html>

### **Being an Effective Mentor: How to Help Beginning Teachers Succeed**

(K.F. Jonson. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press, Inc., 2002)

This book provides mentor teachers and other mentors practical ideas on how to mentor and support new teachers. It is a useful guide with examples of how, when and what to do to ensure that new teachers receive appropriate guidance so that their students can succeed academically.

### **Literature Review of Research on Alternative Certification**

(Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 2004)

This publication of the National Education Association is a thorough and timely publication that documents the latest evidence pertinent to the need (shortage and teacher quality), the politics and policies informing current programs, and the component of effective programs (recruitment, retention, program goals, design and others). The main purpose of this work is to aid practitioners' understanding and help them to create the best design and implementation of such programs. Full text posted at <http://www.teach-now.org> with permission from NEA.

### **Preparing Quality Educators for English Language Learners: Research, Policies and Practices**

(K. Tellez and H.C. Waxman [Eds]. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006)

This collection of papers focuses on preparing quality teachers in the areas of English language learning. Researchers describe the challenges facing teachers and programs who are not up-to-date on the educational needs of English language learners. It emphasizes

programmatic and instructional improvements that would make the preparation of teachers of English language learners a successful endeavor.

### **Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should and Be Able to Do**

(L. Darling-Hammond and John Bransford (Eds.), Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2005).

This book was written for teacher educators in traditional and alternative certification programs. It addresses the key foundational knowledge for teaching and discusses how to implement that knowledge in the classroom. It provides specific insights and recommendations on teacher skills and understandings, including knowing how people learn, how children acquire language, and how to deliver strong subject matter teaching.

<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-078797464.html>

### **Transitions to Teaching Program for Accelerated Teacher Preparation**

IDRA has established effective alternative certification programs through three Transitions to Teaching projects funded under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. These projects are increasing the number of fully-qualified and credentialed ESL/bilingual teachers working with English language learners in high-need schools. The projects support teacher preparation and certification through alternative teacher certification routes for bilingual and Spanish dominant career-changing professionals and recent college graduates – in fields other than education – who desire to enter teaching and have a specific interest in bilingual education. A special focus is the recruitment of professionals from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries who are legal residents and can work in the United States. Using three key components (early identification and recruitment, pre-service training for certification and placement, and sustained in-service training/professional development and support) these projects are impacting seven colleges and universities and more than 11 high-need school districts.

<http://www.idra.org/Projects/atcindex.htm>

*Professional Development* – continued from Page 4  
parents acquired library cards and were encouraged to visit the library frequently. Parents now bring books to share with the teachers and students. Before each of the field trips, our READ

family liaison prepared a lesson for the children and for the parents. Parents and their children received information about the field trip beforehand and were given an agenda of things to look for during the field trip. Time was provided

after the field trip for the parents and their children to discuss their excursion and complete the given assignment.

*Professional Development* – continued on Page 16

## Making Classrooms of Excellence a Reality

Upon entering a classroom of excellence, one sees the children working in small groups in different areas. The teacher is at the teaching table working on phonological awareness activities or introducing students to guided reading. The assistant teacher is working with another small group introducing the students to different writing strokes through artwork. Two other small groups are in the library area reading books, in the dramatic area engaged in dramatic play or in other areas of learning available to them. Before breaking up into small groups, the teachers have shared a book with the children and have established the climate for the day. All these activities are done in an exciting, fun way that the children are enjoying.

A teacher commented: “I would teach my children some stuff like basic alphabet, colors and numbers, but now I’m teaching literacy and mathematics. Best of all I’m accomplishing all of these things without stressing the children or myself. Project READ has not only improved my teaching but that

of my teacher assistant as well, and we make a fabulous team.”

Before the READ project, teachers used whole-group instruction, and then the children chose the area they wanted to go to. Most of the children chose to go to the art center, block area and the house area. While at these areas, the children often played by themselves, and very little interaction occurred between teacher and student. Now the teachers decide which areas to open during the morning, and students follow rotations. Within 90 minutes, all children have gone through each of the centers. This enables the teacher to work with each one of the children and to monitor their progress to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive and early reading skills for reading success.

Another teacher stated: “As a parent first and a teacher, I would have liked to have my own child to experience Project READ first-hand. As a Project READ teacher-in-training and a student who is seeking a teaching certificate, I can say that this training is the kind of training that every teacher should receive in college.”

IDRA’s READ professional development model is looking at what is and what is not working in the classrooms, and transforming the teaching environment into one that is conducive to learning. Working side-by-side with teachers and guiding them has been one of the most important elements of our professional development model.

## Resources

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- Smith, M.W., and D.K. Dickinson. *User’s Guide to the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit* (Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2002).

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