# Planning for English Language Learner Success

**Alternative Responses in Teacher Learning to Reducing Achievement Gaps**

**by Jack Dieckmann, M.A., and Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed.**

Mounting accountability pressures from state and federal legislation are prompting schools to closely examine the performance of English language learners both in language acquisition and in core content areas. State education agencies closely monitor yearly student progress to ensure that English language learners are progressing and that there is significant acceleration in closing persistent achievement gaps.

While this monitoring is good practice, typical responses by school districts to the achievement gaps are inadequate, inappropriate and ineffective, especially for secondary students.

Common responses by school district central offices include a few days of generic English as a second language (ESL) strategy teacher training, sporadic team lesson planning, and counterproductive meetings to identify performance gaps through analysis of student outcome data.

In this article, each of these three responses – ESL teacher training, teacher co-planning and data analysis – will be critiqued for weaknesses in approach and implementation, followed by recommendations to strengthen teacher learning leading to the instructional improvement required to achieve excellence and equity.

## Counterproductive ESL Strategy Training

A few days of generic ESL training for a large interdisciplinary group of teachers is usually counterproductive. This generic training is often conducted by district bilingual or ESL specialists without co-presentation by content specialists who represent the courses and levels of the teachers in the audience. It usually creates more anger and frustration than new and effective content area instruction for English language learners.

A teacher training approach that distributes pieces of sheltered instruction techniques is a common superficial approach. This may stem from the belief that a few well-chosen strategies, incorporated into teachers' repertoire, will lead to English language

learning gains.

When teachers in staff development sessions observe strategies that are perceived as "just good teaching," they leave the sessions with limited knowledge about instructional adjustments they can make. Generic and facile inter-grade and interdisciplinary training sessions do not help resolve teacher gaps in effective pedagogy for English language learners and also may perpetuate complacency because the techniques modeled seem so close to what they already know and do.

Worse still is the chance that these techniques may drive some secondary teachers into deeper despair about there being any pedagogical solutions to improve English language learners' language acquisition through content mastery.

## Team Planning Without Deep Collaboration and Reflection

Time set aside for teachers to co-plan lessons is an emerging strategy that combines research around teacher

# Staff development must integrate language and learning in all content areas throughout the year and not separate language acquisition from instruction in math, science, social studies and language arts.

co-planning that is informed by sheltered instructional models. Because this response can produce "useful" teacher products (i.e., lesson plans), it engenders interest both in administrators and teachers.

While there is substantial research evidence that collaborative planning can dramatically influence teacher learning and instructional practice, the research points to long-term collaboration and deep probing to understand and apply the theories at work in a given teaching strategy (Fullan, 1998).

If a strategy is a tool for learning, teachers need time to figure out when, why and with which students the strategy will work. Sporadic co-planning

provides too limited a context for the possibility of deep reflection or for ongoing assessment of the effects of specific approaches with specific students. It also provides no strong connection between ongoing planning and instruction.

The power of co-planning is rarely optimized to a peer dialogue that leads to deeper comprehension of language and content acquisition, teaching and learning.

## Misinterpreting Student Outcome Data

Data-driven decision-making dominates public education. This now

## In This Issue...

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# Defining Our Transitional Bilingual Program

by José L. Rodríguez

Bilingual education is meant to build a bridge that helps students become proficient in their native language and English. Many children do not make it over that bridge. Often, it is not discovered until they are in the second or third grade that the student does not have a proficiency in either language.

When a third grade teacher finds students who are still classified as non-Spanish speakers and limited English speakers, then something very wrong has happened, especially if the students have been enrolled in the district since pre-kindergarten.

When teachers discover that children cannot read in either English or Spanish, they find it extremely difficult to bring the students up to grade level. Most often these students are language-minority students, or English language learners.

Many students who are entering pre-kindergarten are simultaneous bilingual and/or circumstantial bilinguals. *Simultaneous bilinguals* are students who acquired two languages simultaneously as a first language. *Circumstantial bilinguals* are students whose parents' immigration forced them to acquire their second language (Valdez and Figueroa, 1996).

Most students who are simultaneous bilinguals speak both languages for the most part. However, they may not be proficient in either language.

## Setting Principles

What can we do for these students? First, and most importantly, educators must revisit the school's bilingual models and identify guiding principles for instruction. Through research, the Intercultural Development Research Association has identified some important principles, such as the following.

- English language learners are held to the same high expectations of learning established for all students.
- Students in the bilingual education program are not exited before the third grade but are exited only upon demonstrating full English proficiency and begin on grade level in all content areas.
- Students participating in bilingual education programs since kindergarten are fully proficient in speaking English and their native language (on level) by the fifth grade; secondary-level students fully proficient in their native language in English as a second language (ESL) programs are fully proficient in speaking English after three years

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in the program. (These are not to be considered an exit criteria.)

- Students participating in bilingual education programs since kindergarten are fully proficient in reading and writing English and in their native language (on level) by the fifth grade; secondary level students fully proficient in their native language in ESL program are fully proficient in reading and writing English after three years in the program. (This is not to be considered an exit criteria.)
- Limited English proficient (LEP) students' performance in content areas (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) meet and exceed the state and/or district standards (Robledo Montecel, et al., 2002).

Texas and other states require that schools provide transitional bilingual education to elementary school students who have been assessed as being limited in their English skills (Solís, 2001). These schools have principles that guide the instruction for their bilingual students.

## Identifying English Language Learners

But many students enter school as fluent speakers of English because it is the home language for most of the time even though Spanish is also spoken in the home.

The home language survey may indicate that Spanish is the home language, which it is, but still the child has not reached proficiency. The child is then placed in the bilingual classroom, and the teacher begins the instruction in the native language. The students are often lost. Their teacher becomes frustrated because he or she does not know what language to use for instruction. This is why setting principles to guide the instruction is so important.

Identifying our English language

"When bilingual education was conceived, it was not conceived to *select and sort*. It was conceived to *bridge and build*. Our intention was to greet children at the schoolhouse door, to welcome them and to build on the strengths that they bring with them. Our intention was to bridge them into another language as they learn their subject matter."
— Robledo Montecel, 1996

learners has to be done with care so that they are placed in the appropriate program with the appropriate teacher. Bilingual teachers need to be supported and should receive the proper training in order to service their students with quality instruction.

Students of diverse backgrounds are often placed in low-ability groups where instruction is based on a limited, watered-down version of the curriculum (Vacca and Vacca, 2002). It is important to remember that not all students are the same and that one set of guiding principles will not suffice for all.

## Planning Instruction

When the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) identifies children as beginner, intermediate or advanced, bilingual teachers often have students who are at different levels of proficiency. All too often, the instruction is not differentiated to meet their needs.

Teachers will need to plan instruction and decide on how to group students accordingly so that every student will succeed. In the planning, a teacher must consider the language distribution by grade level and by subject area.

Since bilingual education has different models, teachers should know what model their school district is following and be able to explain the model to visitors. Many school districts

will say they are following a particular model, while the teachers will say they are following another.

Also, the model will change for each grade. For example many pre-kindergarten teachers will say they are doing a 90/10 model (90 percent of instruction in native language and 10 percent in English), the kindergarten teachers will say they are also doing 90/10, the first grade teacher is doing 80/20, and the second grade teacher is doing 70/30 at the beginning of the school year. At the end of the school year, the students are expected to transition to an all-English classroom. Is this reasonable? Perhaps some English language learners will transition smoothly, but many will not make the transition.

These are the students who are falling through the cracks. It is crucial that we find these students early on and place them in an appropriate program that is not watered-down, but rigorous in nature and that the students receive strong native language support.

However, the trends moving away from "tracking" students by ability and moving toward inclusive classrooms along with the increasing number of students whose first language is not English demand instruction that is strategic, with high learning expectations for all students (Vacca and Vacca, 2002).

What state and local mandated

# Are You Ready for Title III?

## Professional Development from the Intercultural Development Research Association

by Laura Chris Green, Ph.D.

The new Title III is part of the *No Child Left Behind Act,* the current *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), and replaces the previous Title VII and Aid to Immigrant Students legislation. It requires schools to demonstrate that: (1) their LEP students are making **adequate yearly progress**, (2) their **parent involvement** activities are **effective**, and (3) their **professional development** is of **high quality** and is based on **scientifically-based research**. (See the box at the top of Page 6 for a look at the new Title III).

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) has highly qualified, experienced staff who can assist you **in ways that no other organization can.** We offer professional development packages that will engage your teachers in long-term, in-depth training coupled with innovative ways of providing follow-up technical assistance.

We ground ourselves in the latest scientifically-based research and align all our efforts with state and local standards. We use cutting-edge technologies and have special expertise in working with bilingual populations. We are committed to the **IDRA valuing philosophy**, respecting the knowledge and skills of the teachers we work with and modeling continually how educators can identify assets and build on the strengths of the students and parents in their schools. Further details on our capabilities follow.

IDRA offers assistance to schools in meeting these Title III requirements through its **evaluation, parent involvement, and professional development** services.

Our Division of Evaluation Research can help with the **accountability requirements** of Title III. You will be required to report annually to your state education agency on:

- the progress LEP students make in acquiring oral and written English,
- the number and percentage of LEP students who meet exit criteria annually, and
- the progress they make on meeting state content standards (e.g., TAKS or other state-mandated assessments) for two years after they exit bilingual/ESL programs.

We can help you design your evaluation; select or create measurement instruments; collect, analyze, and interpret data; and write your final report.

Our Division of Community and Public Engagement can help you have an **effective parent involvement program** that:

- is designed to "improve student academic achievement and school performance;"
- provides parents with a "description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet;" and
- provides opportunities for parents "to participate…in decisions relating to the education of their children" (as required by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2002).

IDRA can provide you with **bilingual parent training sessions** designed to affirm the fact that all parents have something valuable to contribute to their children's education.

Our Division of Professional Development can help you provide your teachers with **high quality professional development** that is of "sufficient intensity and duration… to have a positive and lasting impact on the teachers' performance in the classroom." We offer comprehensive training packages, not just "one-shots" like the "one-day or short-term workshops and conferences" that Title III specifies as not being allowed. Title III also stresses that professional development be based on **scientifically-based research.** In the area of reading research, IDRA training is based on the seminal report by the **National Reading Panel,** *Teaching*

# A Look At the New Title III

*Title III* is part of the *No Child Left Behind Act,* the new *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). It replaces the old Title VII and Aid to Immigrant Students acts and requires schools to demonstrate that your:
- LEP students are making **adequate yearly progress,**
- **parent involvement** activities are **effective,** and
- **professional development** is of **high quality** and is based on **scientifically based research.**

The new **accountability requirements** require schools to report annually to their state education agency on:
- The progress limited-English-proficient (LEP) students make in acquiring oral and written English,
- The number and percentage of LEP students who meet exit criteria annually, and
- The progress LEP students make on meeting state content standards (e.g., TAAS) for two years after they exit bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) programs.

The act states that an **effective parent involvement** program:
- is designed to "improve student academic achievement and school performance;
- offers a flexible number of meetings, such as meetings in the morning or evening;
- [provides parents with a] description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet; and
- [provides] opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate … in decisions relating to the education of their children."

**High quality professional development** should be of "sufficient intensity and duration… to have a positive and lasting impact on the teachers' performance in the classroom." **The law specifically discourages "one-shot" workshops** stating that professional development "shall not include activities such as one-day or short-term workshops and conferences."

The law stresses **scientifically-based research,** which is defined as research that
- "Applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge…;
- Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
- Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
- Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review."

In the area of reading research, the conclusions formulated by the **National Reading Panel** in its seminal report, *Teaching Children to Read,* describe what we know about teaching beginning readers about **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development** and **reading comprehension.** We have other research evidence for the areas of comprehensive school reform, mathematics instruction, and second language learners that we use for the design and implementation of exemplary programs.

# Sample IDRA Professional Development Packages

| Title | Target Audience |
|---|---|
| Early Literacy Development for Spanish Speakers | Regular and bilingual classroom teachers, grades PK-3 |
| Making the Transition to English | Regular and bilingual classroom teachers, grades 2-5 |
| Sheltered Instruction for Secondary Students | Regular content area and ESL teachers, grades 6-12 |
| Mastering the Language of Mathematics | Math teachers, grades 6-12 |
| Parent Involvement and Leadership Development | Spanish-speaking parents of school-age children |
| Evaluation Research Services | Schools and school districts implementing Title III programs |

For more information see the fliers online (www.idra.org) or feel free to contact us at 210-444-1710 or e-mail us at contact@idra.org for further information on our services.

# Successful Bilingual Education Programs

by María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., and Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Twenty-five characteristics contribute to the high academic performance of students served by bilingual education programs. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) identified these characteristics through funding by the U.S. Department of Education. IDRA rigorously and methodically studied exemplary bilingual education programs in schools across the nation as determined by limited-English-proficient (LEP) students' academic achievement. IDRA now is helping others identify successful programs or raise the bar with their own bilingual education programs.

Amid a backdrop of great language diversity among the students and parents that U.S. schools serve are schools with exemplary bilingual education programs and extraordinary individuals who are committed to equity and excellence. This commitment manifests itself as academic success for *all* students, including LEP students. These schools refuse to make excuses for a lack of student achievement; they refuse to settle for anything less than excellence and high standards for all.

While there are many such schools and classrooms across this country, time and resources dictated that IDRA work with only 10 schools and use their lessons learned as a guide for developing criteria that others can use to assess their own programs.

This study comes at a critical time. There are 4.4 million LEP students in the United States, a persistent achievement gap between LEP and non-LEP students, and a critical shortage of bilingual education teachers with the preparation, skills and tools to ensure that *all* of their students succeed.

The primary purpose of this study was not to prove that bilingual education works – there are years of rigorous research that prove it does work when implemented with integrity. Instead, the purpose of this research study was to identify the characteristics that are contributing to the high academic performance of students served by bilingual education programs.

As IDRA visited, interviewed, and surveyed the teachers, administrators, parents and students in 10 different bilingual education programs and their schools, one thing became evident: leadership is an essential ingredient in the formula for student success. Leadership manifests itself in different ways, such as commitment to students, valuing of students and their families, and openness to innovation and change. But, one aspect was evident in all of the individuals involved with the programs: each had the ability to inspire and see what was possible.

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal write of this ability in *Leading with Soul*: "Perhaps we lost our way when we forgot that the heart of leadership lies in the hearts of leaders. We fooled ourselves, thinking that sheer bravado or sophisticated analytic techniques could respond to our deepest concerns. We lost touch with a precious human gift – our spirit" (1995). This aspect of leadership is difficult to measure but immediately recognizable. And it is this aspect that is critically needed to achieve equity and excellence for all students.

Research also finds that exemplary bilingual education programs hold school staff accountable for their students' success, while providing them with the support and tools they need. These programs also nurture

meaningful parent and community involvement. Our study of 10 exemplary bilingual education programs confirms this.

IDRA researched school- and classroom-level indicators of successful bilingual education programs. Our extensive review of other research provided a strong theoretical framework with indicators conducive to successful programs for LEP students. IDRA framed these indicators as research questions in areas of leadership, vision and goals, school climate, linkages, school organization and accountability, professional development, parent involvement, staff accountability and assessment, staff selection and recognition, and community involvement.

IDRA's primary research question for this study was, "What contributed to the success of a bilingual education classroom as evidenced by LEP student academic achievement?" In addition to the student data, qualitative and contextual research questions for other indicators emerged from our extensive review of the research and IDRA's own history in bilingual education.

To help others identify successful programs or improve their own bilingual education programs IDRA has produced *Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English* (see next page). 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, and
- Programmatic and Instructional Practices.

This research study, and the corresponding publication, highlight some of the practices in schools that enable students to grow academically and socially in their native language as well as English.

Students who speak a language other than English have the right to comprehensible instruction that fosters learning. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the failure of schools to respond to the language characteristics of LEP children was a denial of equal educational opportunity (*Lau vs. Nichols*, 1973).

The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 states, "No state shall deny equal educational opportunity on account of his or her race, color, sex or national origin by… the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional program" (20 U.S.C., Section 1703 (f)).
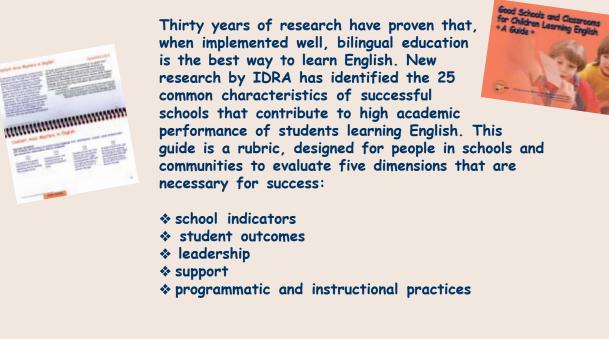
This was followed in 1975 by detailed guidelines for determining the language characteristics of students and appropriate educational responses to those characteristics.

Most recently, President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act*, in which Title VII (the *Bilingual Education Act*) has become Title III. In the 120 pages of the new Title III regulations, the term *bilingual education* is never used. It has been replaced by *English language acquisition*. But the primary purpose is the same.

One key distinction is that the new regulation does not specify the

# Indicators of Success for Bilingual Programs

| School Indicators | Student Outcomes | At the School Level: Leadership | At the School Level: Support | At the Classroom Level: Programmatic and Instructional Practices |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ Retention Rate | ✓ Oral Language Proficiency | ✓ Leadership | ✓ Professional Development | ✓ Appropriate Program Models |
| ✓ Dropout Rate | ✓ Reading and Writing Proficiency | ✓ Vision and Goals | ✓ Parent Involvement | ✓ Positive Classroom Climate |
| ✓ Enrollment in Gifted and Talented/ Advanced Placement Programs | ✓ Content Area Mastery in English | ✓ School Climate | ✓ Teacher Accountability and Student Assessment | ✓ Academically Challenging Curriculum |
| ✓ Enrollment in Special Education or Remedial Programs | ✓ Content Area Mastery in Native Language | ✓ Linkages | ✓ Staff Selection and Recognition | ✓ High Teacher Expectations |
| ✓ Test Exemption Rates | | ✓ School Organization and Accountability | ✓ Community Involvement | ✓ Program Articulation |
| ✓ Program Exiting Standard | | | | |

Intercultural Development Research Association, 2001

# 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

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Developed and distributed by the Intercultural Development Research Association
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*Bilingual Education* – *continued from Page 8*

methods for achieving such standards. The former law specified the development and implementation of exemplary bilingual education programs, development of bilingual skills and multicultural understanding, and development of English and the native language skills. Now, schools must determine for themselves how they will implement effective bilingual education programs.

As the country enters this new legislative era, it must be remembered that the civil rights of children remain unchanged. Educators must use the most appropriate tools available to ensure their students' success. One of these tools is bilingual education.

Thirty years of research have proven that bilingual education, when implemented well, is the best way to learn English. Children in such programs achieve high academic standards.

IDRA's research re-affirms what is possible when committed and dedicated individuals use research to develop and provide excellent bilingual education programs for their students.

*This article is excerpted from a series of articles that appeared in the IDRA Newsletter between September 2001 and February 2002. The series is available online at www.idra.org.*

## Resources

Bolman, L.G., and T.E. Deal. Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit Revised (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995) p. 6.

María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., is the IDRA executive director. Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., is the IDRA production development coordinator. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

# 11th Annual IDRA
# La Semana del Niño
## Early Childhood Educators Institute™
### San Antonio, Texas
### April 20-22, 2004

The 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute offers a valuable series of information-packed professional development concurrent sessions that are customized to value and capitalize on the linguistic and cultural assets brought forth by a diverse student population.

This year's event will focus on **building reading concepts and skills of young English language learners**. Topics include: literacy, technology, social development, curriculum and policy

- **Visit model early childhood centers**. These visits provide you with the opportunity to share ideas while seeing them in action. You will travel to high-performing, high-minority sites in the San Antonio area that are working effectively with diverse learners.
- **Interact with parents** to discuss ideas to form effective learning partnerships.
- **Learn in workshops** on successful bilingual programs, Spanish literacy, pedagogy and curriculum, curriculum and policy.

The action-packed schedule begins at 8:00 a.m. each morning and continues through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, and 2:30 p.m. on Thursday. The institute includes luncheon sessions on Tuesday and Thursday.

## Institute Sponsors

The Intercultural Development Research Association is pleased to bring you this 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute. Supporting IDRA projects include:

- IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (the equity assistance center that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas).
- Texas IDRA PIRC (the parent information resource center), and
- STAR Center (the comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas via a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation).

Each of these IDRA projects provides specialized training and technical assistance to schools. Information on how your campus can use these resources to improve instruction and assessment will be available at the institute, or by calling IDRA at 210-444-1710, or by visiting IDRA's web site: www.idra.org.

## Special Activity
**Parent Leadership Institute**, *Thursday, April 22*
This one-day event will concentrate on the challenges in early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. Parents and educators will share ways to focus their leadership to enhance early childhood learning.

Contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site (www.idra.org) for details and to register online.

# 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute™

# Registration Form

(Please use one form per person. Feel free to make copies of this form.)

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Fax (_____) _____

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$_____ Total enclosed          Check or PO#_____

## Registration Fees

### Early Bird Registration Fees – Before March 24

___ $175 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004*

___ $15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004

___ $60 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

### Registration Fees – After March 24

___ $195 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004*

___ $15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004

___ $70 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

*\* Includes institute sessions, Tuesday and Thursday luncheons, two school visits [for first paid registrants], and materials.*

Make checks payable to: Intercultural Development Research Association. Purchase order numbers may be used to reserve space. Full payment prior to the institute is expected.

Register **Online** with a purchase order number at *www.idra.org*

**Mail** with a check or purchase order to IDRA at 5835 Callaghan Road, #350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190, Attention: Carol Chávez

**Fax** with a purchase order to IDRA at 210-444-1714, Attention: Carol Chávez

## Hotel Information

The institute will be held at the San Antonio Airport Hilton Hotel. The hotel is offering a special rate of $101 per night for a single or double room (plus state and local taxes), based on availability. The hotel reservation deadline for the reduced rate is April 9, 2004. Call 1-800-445-8667 to make reservations. Be sure to reference the Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute in order to qualify for the special rate.

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largely mandated approach in schools gives teachers and other educational leaders timely access to large data sets for schools, classes and individual students. Even in under-resourced schools, teachers often have online access to district databases for benchmark testing results, with amazing abilities to easily generate reports by individual students or by their characteristics.

These technological and informational revolutions are, in many cases, having counter-intended effects on teacher's instructional decisions and practice. The pitfalls are facile, ill-reasoned or "all children have the same problem" conclusions drawn from the data.

One problem is the way the data is looked at. What students may demonstrate on any performance measure gives little information about what students really know. The perceived primacy of the available outcome data feeds the myth of its applicability. Many educators believe (erroneously) that the performance measure *is* the actual learning. The incorrect assumptions are: if a student answers correctly, that student understands the underlying concept; conversely, if a student responds incorrectly, that student does not understand the concept.

These assumptions effectively block alternative explanations to the outcome data that would lead to varied and in fact more accurate explanations that would in turn produce better teaching and increased student learning.

The common response to low test scores has been to increase the use of practice classwork, which has increased student boredom, reduced comprehension and resulted in student failure.

The access to large amounts of quickly-generated student test data gives the illusion that one has pedagogically useful information. Most aggregated test reports provide no inherent solutions.

On the other hand, using dramatic illustrations of English language learner gaps to conclude that intensive and extensive student drilling is the solution aggravates the problem by demoralizing teachers and increasing student failure.

The preceding data problems are in reference to highly refined, nationally and state norm- or criteria-referenced tests. Data analysis and interpretation become more problem ridden when the instruments are locally developed and drawn for various test item pools.

## The bilingual and ESL department and the content area departments must plan jointly and give mutual support.

Clearly, teacher-developed classroom assessments are useful and powerful for that teacher in that classroom. But to extrapolate those assessment items and tools to a campus- or district-wide assessment process is a different matter that requires guidance and refinement through a rigorous process.

The decisions that follow from faulty or incomplete interpretations of test scores mirror the faulty or incomplete conclusions about how to proceed instructionally. Thus, the informational infrastructure and teacher time spent analyzing student scores may not yield more effective teaching when there is not a clearer idea of: (1) what the data mean and (2) what additional data are needed to make appropriate instructional decisions.

In addition, if a test is not specifically designed as diagnostic, and most are not, the data that result are weak indicators for instructional decisions. This is probably the major abuse of student data that leads to misinformed instructional decisions.

Evaluation questions designed solely to determine students' mastery of a concept or concepts do not effectively inform instruction. A students' incorrect response does not reveal the reason(s) for the error. Unless a teacher can determine what exactly the student does know, it is extremely difficult to make any informed decision about where to take that student.

A track coach, observing a runner unable to jump over a hurdle, needs specific and individual observations to help the athlete clear the hurdle successfully and consistently. Successful sports programs use video feedback and direct observation to assess performance. Key factors the coach observes in the athlete are stride, speed, conditioning, familiarity with the course, a poorly designed hurdle, etc. Determining which factor or factors are critical barriers informs the coach about how to help the athlete adapt for success.

This type of analysis and response typically is missing from teachers' analyses of student data. The raw data given to teachers in their present forms have little similarity to the video feedback alluded to above. The incorrect and often off-target conclusion that teachers make from the data available, to a great part, stem from the fact that the simplistic picture drawn is a crude stick figure when what is needed is something akin to a video of ongoing student performance.

Thus, while the combination of approaches in teacher strategy training, co-planning lessons and analyzing student data are useful and valid for improving English language learning opportunities, we find that the implementation of these approaches may require further resources (time, money, personnel), monitoring, and

increased staff capacity.

## Supporting Teachers of English Language Learners

The following recommendations for improving how we support teachers of English language learners are grounded in concrete experiences of the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) staff and pilot programs and emerging research. They are based on the following three key principles.

- All students will learn and thrive in the classroom if provided with meaningful classroom instruction.
- All teachers can be effective with all students if supported in a process of effective planning, peer collaboration and ongoing reflection on their teaching.
- A broad array of data is a powerful tool for making effective and appropriate instructional decisions for each child.

## Recommendations for ESL Strategy Training

Effective schools institutionalize long-term support and sustained reflection time in order to expand a teacher's practice to adapt instruction congruently with the characteristics of English language learners. Staff development must integrate language and learning in all content areas throughout the year and not separate language acquisition from instruction in math, science, social studies and language arts.

Presenters, facilitators, master teachers and mentors must be chosen for (a) strong content teaching skills and (b) success in teaching English language learners. Content area teachers benefit significantly from professional development conducted by content peers who have demonstrated success with the specific classroom challenges presented by students of varied English language proficiencies (Dieckmann, 2003a).

The bilingual and ESL department and the content area departments must plan jointly and give mutual support. District-wide leadership must oversee this process and facilitate and press for collaboration while concurrently reducing department territorialism.

## Recommendations for Co-planning lessons

Lesson plans, collaboratively developed, even if in short sessions, have deeper value when these are part of an ongoing process of reflection and refinement. In lieu of pull-out sessions, teachers might co-develop or adapt a research-based rubric for an exemplar lesson plan that is responsive to English language learners (Echevarria, 2004; Robledo Montecel, 2004; García, 2003; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Teachers can refine lessons through e-mail and other electronic communications, sustaining dialogue and feedback. Teacher teams participating in an ongoing process of developing and refining exemplary lessons are afforded the *luxury* of reflection into a *regularity* for internalizing the deep characteristics of the lessons.

The consistent reflection enlightens teachers to extrapolate effective principles and strategies to other lessons. Whether online or face-to-face communication, this process also facilitates a dialogue for reflection and adaptation based on the degree to which these practices support student success.

## Recommendations for Analyzing Student Data

To offset and remedy the incorrect interpretation of student data and the lack of useful data on student learning, it is important for administrators and educational leaders to be clear with each other about the correct uses of the student data available. Large gaps in test scores should be used to generate *questions* rather than to produce quick conclusions and remedies.

Teachers must unlearn the inappropriate use of data and learn how to make more productive interpretations. Principals, staff developers and department chairs should engage with teachers in developing and investigating useful and solution-producing questions about student learning that arise from the data.

Teachers need to look at data that illuminate what a student knows, how a student goes about learning something, what is helping and what is

> ### Large gaps in test scores should be used to generate questions rather than to produce quick conclusions and remedies.

hindering. This is as rich as information about what a student *can* do as it is about the gaps in comprehension.

For instance in mathematics, an incorrect answer to a fractions test item might generate the following questions: What student work samples exist that demonstrate prior mastery? How has this student performed in class on the prerequisites to learning about fractions? What is it about fractions that may be problematic: calculations, proportional reasoning, the context of the story problem, etc.? How does the language level and linguistic complexity of the question correlate to the student level of English language proficiency? Beyond instruction, what other relevant factors are present in the classroom?

The more productive data analysis

context must include teachers:

1. Reflecting together in and out of the classroom (Dieckmann 2003a, 2003b, 2003c),
2. Keenly pouring over student work,
3. Regular conferencing with students,
4. Engaging parents as partners in the education of their children (McCollum, 2004).

All these are needed to inform the effective teaching of English language learners.

Teachers must approach available student outcome data tentatively, recognizing them as *indirect* measures of students' abilities. Low test scores are symptoms. Changes in instructional practice must come from a more nuanced examination of possible causes.

## Conclusion

We have discussed three enhancements of teacher training, collaborative planning, and productive data analysis by identifying pitfalls and making suggestions for improvement. Teachers can be meaningfully taught to improve their teaching of English language learners; teachers can be effective co-planners in joint reflection in support of the academic success of all students; and teachers can use multiple data sources to diagnose and teach English language learners effectively.

With careful, collaborative planning, appropriate resource investment, and a commitment at every level to quality instruction, school leaders can accelerate the language and content learning for students who speak a language other than English.

## Resources

Dieckmann, J. "Learning Through Teaching: New Patterns for Teachers of English Language Learners," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, August 2003).

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measures are used for guiding the instruction? Looking at the state and local mandated measures and at the information these provide about our students will assist in instructional decision making and differentiating instruction for the students.

Describing the grade level benchmarks and identifying the language in which performance levels will be measured will ensure that each student is properly placed in the best educational setting. Teachers need to be extremely familiar with the state standards and need be able to identify which of these standards transfers from one language to another.

If students learn in the primary language to recognize a main idea, find supportive details, order sequence of events, identify major characters, determine the existence of bias, or analyze emotional tone, then these thinking skills are abilities that do not ever have to be learned again (Thonis, 1982). The familiarity with the state standards and knowing what standards transfer allows the teacher to plan for instruction that will allow the students to be successful.

School districts and teachers have to be prepared to articulate to the parents the effectiveness of a bilingual program in their schools. Parents sometimes deny their children quality bilingual education because the school has not provided parents with the relevant research and descriptive information. School districts and teachers need to articulate to parents the effectiveness of their bilingual education program in their schools.

## Crossing the Bridge

Careful identification and assessment by the school leads to an appropriate placement in the best instructional program for each child. Proper staff development training and an educationally sound program with well established guiding principles also assists in achieving success for all students. Bilingual programs also must be evaluated periodically for their effectiveness.

Language-minority children must

*Children to Read.* We also draw on research done in the areas of comprehensive school reform, effective math instruction, and second language acquisition when designing our innovative professional development.

The box at the bottom of Page 6 shows some sample IDRA professional development packages.

For more information on our services see the fliers online (www.idra.org), contact us at 210-444-1710, or e-mail us at contact@idra.org.

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be allowed to cross the bridge that helps them be proficient in their native language and in English while also making a smooth transition into English instruction.

## Resources

Robledo Montecel, M. "Bilingual Education is About Bridging and Building," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 1996).

Robledo Montecel, M., and J.D. Cortez, A. Cortez, A. Villarreal. *Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English – A Guide* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 2002).

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Valdés, G., and R.A. Figueroa. *Bilingualism and Testing A Special Case of Bias* (Connecticut: ABLEX Publishing, 1996).

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# Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In October, IDRA worked with **11,172** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **54** training and technical assistance activities and **145** program sites in **14** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ✦ Strategies for Second Language Learners
- ✦ Access to College for Parents and Community
- ✦ Title III Planning
- ✦ Sexual Harrassment Prevention
- ✦ Hands-on ESL Strategies for Sixth through 12th Grade Teachers

Participating agencies and school districts included:
- ✦ Corpus Christi Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ✦ Detroit Public Schools, Michigan
- ✦ Guymon Public Schools, Oklahoma
- ✦ Harlandale ISD, Texas
- ✦ Jefferson Parish, Louisiana

## Activity Snapshot

The Bilingual Education Collaborating Alliance (BECA) is a three-year IDRA program to alleviate the severe shortage of bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL) teachers in Texas. The project supports 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 of the project is the recruitment of professionals from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries who are legal residents and can work in the United States. Eighty-five qualified bilingual and Spanish-dominant mid-career professionals and recent college graduates interested in becoming bilingual education or ESL teachers are being trained, certified and placed in bilingual classrooms as a result of the program.

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.*

# Diversity Bookmarks Collection

**http://www.idra.org/scce/DACRsrc.htm**

**Adult Education** – web sites designed for those who help adult learners learn to read and write, acquire English, obtain GEDs, etc.

**Assistance Centers** – web sites hosted by training and technical assistance providers. Good sources for schools of information for training such as research results and model programs. Includes: ERIC system, national centers and labs, standards and assessment, state of Texas, technical assistance

**Bilingual/ESL education** – web sites of interest to bilingual and ESL educators, researchers, and advocates at all educational levels. Includes: advocacy and language policy, ESL multi-resource web sites, ESL student activities collections, Spanish resources (SSL and SFL), technical assistance for bilingual/ESL education, technology approaches to bilingual/ESL

**Early Childhood** – web sites for educators who work with ages 0 to grade 3. Includes: authors, bilingual (Spanish), student activities, technical assistance, early childhood

**Fine Arts** – web sites for the visual and performing arts. Includes: kid art, museums and exhibits

**Language Arts** – web sites that promote literacy (reading and writing) development. Includes: authors, electronic books, literature, student activities, technical assistance, language arts

**Math and Science** – web sites that help teach math and science topics. Includes: earth science, general science, health and anatomy, life science, math, museums and zoos, physical science, space, technical assistance for math and science

**Multicultural** – web sites dealing with issues of equity and multicultural education as well as sites that address specific cultural and minority groups. Includes: advocacy and educational equity, African-American, Asian-American, Latino, multicultural education, Native Americans, women and girls

**Parents and Families** – web sites for parents and families and educators who work with them. Includes: college, family fun, family literacy and homework help, parenting and parental involvement, teens
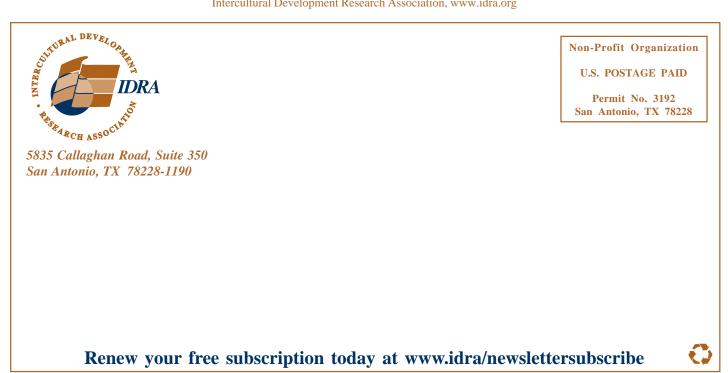
**Resources** – web sites that can provide informational and instructional resources to schools either free or through purchase. Includes: book publishers, electronic journals, grants and funding, libraries and reference materials, professional associations, software, commercial

**Social studies** – web sites that help teach the social sciences. Includes: careers and vocational, geography, government and law, history, news and current events

**Special programs** – web sites for categorical programs excluding bilingual/ESL programs. Includes: gifted education, migrant education, safe and drug-free schools, special education

**Technology** – web sites that focus on a variety of ways to use technology for general purposes or for instruction. Includes: audio resources, collaborative projects, graphics and video, integrating technology into teaching, lesson plans (many subjects), links to major lists, plug-ins and other web tools, search engines, noncommercial software, technical assistance for technology

The *Diversity Bookmarks Collection* is developed by Dr. Laura Chris Green at IDRA and is updated regularly.
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