



# Learning Angles with English Language Learners

## The Discipline of Noticing

by Jack Dieckmann, M.A.

This is the second in a three-part series on the role of language in teaching mathematics to English language learners. The first article presented a thumbnail sketch of a specific lesson modeled for a group of middle school teachers who have English language learners combined with other students. (The article was printed in the March issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* and is available online at: <http://www.idra.org/Newsltr/2003/Mar/Jack.htm#Art1>).

In the lesson described in the first article, some of the student comments were: “We were right!,” “Let’s hurry up and test the shapes to see if we are right!,” and “All the angles put together make a straight line!” The buzz and the excitement in the lessons illustrated that mathematics can be generated from student actions and reflections on those actions.

English language learners and their teachers can all benefit from the learning inherent in their own actions (i.e., the tearing up and joining of vertices of triangles and quadrilaterals). There are many angles for students to learn

and teachers to teach. This second article in the series documents the remarks, perceptions and learning among the teachers observing the lesson that was the focus of the first article. Furthermore, this article illustrates the “discipline of noticing” the reflections of teachers about teaching what they observe (Mason, 2002). These reflections are integrated into teaching practice.

### Debriefing the Lesson

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) hosted an event recently for teachers participating in its ExCELS project. ExCELS (Educators x Communities = English Language learners’ Success) is an innovative professional development program that creates learning communities of schools, families and communities for English language learners’ academic success. Two secondary schools in San Antonio are the partner schools in this U.S. Department of Education Title VII program.

Below is an account of ExCELS teachers that reflects the kind of shared teaching experiences and professional

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conversations held in the program. These experiences and conversations lead to a deepening of teachers’ ability to notice and serve English language learners.

The lesson, documented in the previous article, happened during a regular 50-minute class period. The trainer was modeling the lesson with another teacher’s sixth-grade class. There were four teachers observing the class. The teachers and the facilitator met immediately after the class for a 45-minute debriefing session. Teacher and facilitator comments for the three lessons – triangles, quadrilaterals and assessment – are summarized below.

### Triangle Lesson

The first teacher reflected, “As teachers we often to forget to tell students *why* we are teaching what we’re teaching.”

Establishing relevancy is important though usually excluded from a math lesson. When the teacher does not help students make connections, it

## These experiences and conversations lead to a deepening of teachers’ ability to notice and serve English language learners.

perpetuates students’ perception of math as capricious and arbitrary.

Another teacher said, “I didn’t realize that we could integrate metacognitives in the lesson with all types of students.”

Another added, “I see now how a language objective helps me make sure that my students can *communicate* the mathematics they’re learning.”

Lesson objectives must integrate math content objectives, language objectives and metacognitive objectives. This integration is essential for academic language development.

A teacher stated, “All the students were talking about the math problem.”

Small group work gave students opportunities to practice and listen to English language conversations with peers and with the instructor. Language is the means for learning the content and facility in using the language, but

the main focus is on the mathematical ideas. Careful construction and facilitation of mathematical tasks allows for meaningful conversation where language is a vehicle for developing content-based ideas in natural student talk.

Another teacher observed, “It seems that the students’ favorite part was in tearing up the triangles and quadrilaterals.”

Materials that students can use and tear up are useful in teaching geometric concepts.

### Quadrilateral Lesson

A teacher commented, “The review was beneficial because it got everybody to retrace their steps and think about what they had done.”

The mini-review helps students connect the activity to the mathematical

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# Promoting Student Leadership on Campus

## Creating a Culture of Engagement

by Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., and Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

Student leadership is an integral part of student success. It should consist of more than just a student representative sitting in a meeting where student voices hold a low priority and sometimes get lost in the “wisdom” of experience.

Student leadership is the ability of the student body to influence major decisions about its quality of education and learning environment. Influencing major decisions requires a “listening” and a “valuing” and the incorporation of the ideas that students propose.

This article provides a set of principles and ideas on how to incorporate the voices of students in the planning and decision-making processes of educational institutions.

### Student Leadership Helps Students Succeed

Educators, families, and communities often focus on new efforts at mutual collaboration, engagement, and accountability but fail to include student perspectives in this dialogue. It is not surprising that students interpret the landscape within schools and colleges as void of opportunities for engaging them as key members of the

planning process.

What is needed to complete our picture of engagement is recognition and commitment to support emerging student leadership in the process of improving school holding power and broadening access and success from K-12 through higher education.

Long-term research from the Harvard Assessment Project is revealing that building connections between school and community life contributes to more fulfilled college graduates (Light, 2001). This is a powerful message to people who run schools and colleges (deans, presidents, chancellors, academic vice presidents, principals and faculty) that students who find ways of connecting their curricular and extracurricular activities are the most satisfied.

Another important message is the need to create opportunities that encourage students to engage internally in dialogues about improving institutions and externally in activities within their communities. This can begin in elementary school and continue through high school and into higher education.

Youth and educational institutions must each do their part to ensure

effective leadership development. Youth can be more effective in the planning and decision-making processes when they are informed and base their pro-activity on a clear vision of their role and their commitment to a more inclusive and humane world. Youth must exhibit a genuine desire to make a difference in this world. Youth must insist on a strong educational background that prepares them for a demanding and difficult world. Youth must acquire the skills to lead and be effective team players in a more interdependent world.

Educational institutions that are genuine in their desire for student input must make an investment to nurture and enhance the wisdom of their youth. They must provide opportunities for students to become leaders with the skills to advocate inclusiveness and equality that leads to a strong and united country.

### Student Leadership Helps Schools Succeed

Emerging student leadership is an invaluable resource to our educational institutions and

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communities. We should ask ourselves whether we are opting to keep students invisible and quiet on campus or are we advocating their involvement in decision-making and supporting meaningful student leadership.

Students can help us keep the focus clear in our planning by asking the key question regarding any educational environment – is this relevant preparation for my future life?

Yet students are seldom asked to join in the discussion about improving schools and colleges. Students interviewed in some of the current research reported that they are seldom, if ever, consulted about issues, and that time with advisers is too short or non-existent.

## **Guiding Principles**

While there are no cookie-cutter practices that ensure student leadership for all settings, there are some guiding principles that underlie a commitment on the part of educational institutions to support emerging youth leadership and youth engagement with community.

What can schools and campuses do? Below are seven guiding principles and some practices that can create educational environments that foster emerging student leadership and strengthen ties with families and communities.

## **Schools Must Acknowledge the Role of Family and the Extended Community**

For many minority students, especially those who are the first in their families to attend formal schooling or college, the role of family and extended community is vital to student success and leadership development. It is an important source of motivation and achievement because many of these students recognize that their achievement reflects the extended family (Fries-Britt, 2002).

Many Hispanic students and Black students are vitally aware that they are underrepresented in many fields. This can naturally inspire them to do better and to be conscious of the need to be engaged with their communities.

Research shows that family and community involvement are critical for all students. To the extent that parents and families are encouraged to become familiar with and engaged in the activities of campus, they are able to be more effective in their support of leadership development from elementary school through college. Campuses can support and encourage student contacts with their families and extended communities. Likewise, they should encourage participation of family members and community in the activities on campus.

## **Schools Must Recognize and Value Students for their Contributions**

Below are ways schools and colleges can recognize students.

- Begin by establishing relationships with students, student-led campus groups, and youth organizations to invite and listen to student voices.
- Involve students in identifying needs and assessing opportunities for leadership development.
- Offer a diverse menu of opportunities to receive input from youth on a variety of educational issues.
- Formalize the importance of student input through student representation on committees.
- Encourage student participation during the school day as well as after school and on weekends.
- Host meetings during flexible hours to allow for student schedules.
- Publicize the work of students and their ideas as a regular part of school and college newsletters and bulletin boards.

- Offer space to student organizations for performances, art shows, youth leadership symposia and other activities, create local funds to advocate student leadership activities, and invite multi-generational opportunities to talk about leadership from many perspectives that honor and incorporate local leadership, values, culture and diversity.

## **Schools Must Support Extracurricular Youth Activities in Communities**

Young people working in their community, volunteering, or lobbying for support for their organizations learn political skills and valuable lessons about how to move through and with the “system.”

With their peers and with others, they learn to assess their products and their activities, youth come to understand that quality evolves, and they can learn leadership skills about the importance of revision, attention to detail, and pride of individual and group effort (McLaughlin, 2002).

Emerging student leaders learn about the joy of giving back and civic responsibility. Their unique perspectives can energize efforts and bring greater clarity and new dimensions of accountability to planning efforts. Campuses can increase opportunities for students to work with faculty and with other students in problem solving, policy review and planning.

## **Schools Must Collaborate with Effective Community-Based Organizations Supporting Youth**

It is important to consider which community-based organizations or clubs are the most effective partners for schools and colleges in fostering youth leadership. In making your selection, consider that high quality

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youth organizations are youth-centered and respond to diverse skills, talents and interests of students. They build on strengths and choose appropriate materials and activities that reinforce a positive approach. They reach out to all youth and provide personal attention through focused activities.

Embedded within the organization’s programs are activities that build a range of life skills. The adults within effective youth organizations recognize the many kinds of knowledge and skills youth need to succeed in school and life, and they deliberately try to provide them. Effective community-based organizations focus on building relationships among youth, adults, and the broader community. They are

sensitive in honoring the diversity of race, language and culture within the broader community.

### **Schools and Campuses Must Make Youth a Line Item in the Budget**

In order to seek out and underwrite committed individuals and enable their work supporting student leadership, sufficient funds must be in place. Students quickly learn about the support and constraints of their schools and colleges. If this is a priority for a campus, financial support for leadership fostering activities and student groups must be evident in the budget.

Given the current climate of limited funding, students have ineffective voice and claim upon

educational resources, and therefore organizations need to make this commitment evident.

Implicit is the erroneous assumption that youth leadership is the responsibility of families and communities rather than educational institutions. Effective campuses recognize that student leadership development is school and community development.

### **Schools Must Support Student-Led Campus Groups**

Many student-led clubs, organizations, and campus groups provide a platform to support emerging student leadership as well as focus on engagement with community. An example is Movimiento Estudiantil

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## **Creating a Climate for Student Leadership – A Survey**

Use this checklist to assess how your campus is supporting student leadership and for planning next steps. Involve students, administrators, faculty and families in the process.

<b>Action</b>	<b>What We Are Doing</b>	<b>What Can Be Done</b>
Acknowledging the role of family and extended community		
Recognizing and valuing student contributions		
Supporting extracurricular youth activities in communities		
Collaborating with community-based organizations supporting youth		
Supporting student leadership in the budget		
Supporting student-led campus groups		
Creating a shared vision of student engagement		

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Source: Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)

Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA).

Recent research by Anthony Antonio (2001) and Daryl Smith et. al (1997) find in reviews of the literature that organizing and supporting student groups with attention to race and ethnicity can have educational benefits.

For example, student organizations that are specifically designed to support students of color appear to contribute to those students' retention, adjustment, and attachment to their institutions. Schools and colleges can encourage students to use their social support groups as academic support groups and provide counseling and advisors to help foster and fund these activities.

### **Schools Must Create a Shared Vision of Student Engagement**

In order to create an “intentional” environment that supports youth leadership, a shared vision and commitment to do so must first be in place. Leadership and passion often go hand in hand, therefore, the commitment and enthusiasm of everyone, especially key administrators involved, brings essential elements of stability and momentum necessary to sustain campus efforts.

Supporting student leadership needs to be seen as a shared mission to achieve and be held accountable for. To accomplish this, policies and practices need to be in place to support youth leadership. Ongoing assessment of progress toward that mission needs to occur, with adjustments toward that goal made regularly and progress reports to that end shared among all stakeholders, including students.

### **Thinking and Doing**

In his book *On Organizational Learning*, Chris Argyris speaks to the dichotomy of thinking and doing as theories of beliefs versus action (1999).

## **Promoting Student Leadership on Campus: A Guide for Creating a Culture of Engagement**

This guide, written and produced by IDRA, is helpful for creating a culture of engagement that includes student voices in the educational change process. Students can help keep the focus clear in planning for academic success. This booklet offers ways to involve students in decision making and supporting meaningful student leadership. It also provides a way to measure success and plan activities that recognize and value students for their contributions by analyzing what is working, what is holding us back and what can be improved. (No ISBN; 15 Pages, 2002) \$6 or free online at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).



Basically, students would say that educational institutions need to “walk their talk” – they cannot purport to be about student success and not involve students in the dialogue.

In order to do this, the theories of beliefs can be helpful in closing the gaps between our talk and our action. If we can think out loud in a safe environment, we can begin to understand the scope of how things really work in our educational environments through the eyes and ears of students, and we can take appropriate and effective actions to move toward our desired results.

Through honest dialogue with students, we can know where we are and plan together with them where we want to go in supporting leadership. A positive approach usually follows this pattern:

1. Be open and honest to promote healthy exploration of the topic at hand.
2. Allow everyone to contribute their best thinking and respect their

ideas.

3. Continuously check-in to see what is working.
4. Create a reward system that values student leadership and shared decision-making.
5. Follow through with actions – only make promises you can keep.

As educators, community members and families, we must ask ourselves what support systems our students need to develop leadership for the future. The answer will require many perspectives coming together to move beyond our traditional approaches. Involving students now will help foster the kind of leadership for transformation that is needed, not only for our educational systems, but for our communities and for the world.

What do you think? We welcome feedback about our article and invite you to share your success stories about what your school or campus is doing to foster student leadership. Let us know through our *Lazos* technical assistance

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# Texas' Third Grade TAKS Assessment

## Is "Better Than Expected" Good Enough?

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

The Texas Education Agency recently released results from the March 2003 administration of the state's new mandated assessment – the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. The new test is purported to incorporate higher levels of difficulty than the state's prior exam – the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, which the TAKS replaced.

Much of the attention to the results of the new exam has been grounded in the recognition that student promotion to the next grade level was tied to successful performance on the new exam. Though "promotion gate" exams such as TAKS have been used in other states for several years, the 2003 school year was the first in which passage of the test would be mandated in order for students to be promoted to the next grade.

In Texas the automatic in-grade-retention provisions are to be phased in – with passage of the test required for students enrolled in third grade in the current year. Starting in 2004-05, students who fail the third grade or the fifth grade TAKS will be automatically retained. By the 2006-07 school year, students in third, fifth, and seventh grades will be subject to the automatic retention requirements.

**Until educators and the public recognize that more effective alternatives to retention exist and are viable, students will continue to bear the brunt of dysfunctional state policies.**

While the law stipulated that final decisions regarding promotion will be made by a school "grade placement committees," it requires that only a unanimous vote by the committee members (to include the campus principal, the teacher, and a parent) can prevent retention. This virtually ensures that the great majority of students failing the TAKS will be retained.

Local and state officials closely monitored this year's third graders and their performance on similar tests since last spring. Prior results suggested that a large number of students would fail to meet the state's passing standard on the third grade exam.

Given this dire prediction, school administrators successfully lobbied for the TAKS performance results' impact on the state's school accountability system be set aside for one year. Thus regardless of student outcomes, TAKS

results would not be used to rate school performance in 2002-03. Though school administrators were granted a one-year reprieve from the consequences of TAKS performance, students were not given comparable relief.

Concerns with potentially dramatic increases in the number of students who would fail to meet state passing standards led the state to seek recommendations from an expert panel on where to set its passing standard. For the third grade level, the panel recommended that students correctly answer 24 of 36 questions (or 67 percent) to achieve a "passing" score on the TAKS. Final decisions on the passing score however were left to the elected State Board of Education.

After reviewing the panel's recommendations and assessing the implications of setting the passing score at numerous levels, the State Board of Education voted to phase-in the panel's recommended level. For the 2003 TAKS administration, the board opted to require students to correctly answer only 20 of 36 questions correctly (56 percent), which translated to two standard errors of measurement (-2SEM) below the panel recommendation.

### Third Grade TAKS Results

The table on Page 8 presents a summary of third grade students' results developed by the TEA. A recent

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## Third Grade TAKS Results, 2003

Student Category	Number of Students Tested	Percent at 2SEM	Percent at 1SEM	Percent at Panel Recommended Level	Percent at 2SEM Spring 2002 - TAKS Field Test	Percent Met TAAS Minimum Spring 2002
All Students	262,595	<b>89%</b>	86%	81%	85%	87%
African American	40,334	<b>82%</b>	77%	71%	75%	80%
Hispanic	103,289	<b>85%</b>	80%	74%	81%	83%
White	109,375	<b>96%</b>	94%	91%	93%	94%
Economically Disadvantaged	135,942	<b>84%</b>	78%	72%	78%	81%
Limited English Proficient – English TAKS	38,517	<b>77%</b>	70%	63%	n/a	77%
Limited English Proficient – Spanish TAKS	23,075	<b>82%</b>	75%	67%	n/a	n/a
Special Education	12,783	<b>84%</b>	80%	74%	n/a	82%

\* Bold number reflects the percentages passing TAKS using the current State Board of Education passing standard of 2SEMs below the panel recommended level. Source: Texas Education Agency, 2003.

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statistic noted by TEA and reported in the media was that 89 percent of all third graders had met the minimum standard established by the state board for the spring 2002 third grade TAKS. This was higher than the 85 percent who had scored at comparable levels in the TAKS field test conducted in the fall of 2002.

The Intercultural Development Research Association suspects that the growth in the percent passing may be attributable to both an expected increase in student learning produced by additional months of instruction and intensive TAKS preparation efforts implemented by school districts over the interim period.

All groups scored at levels higher than predicted in the spring 2002 TAKS field test, with low-income pupils reflecting a six-point difference between the field test percentage and the percent scoring at 2SEM during the spring 2003 administration (78 percent vs. 84 percent).

It is noteworthy to examine the difference in passing percentages had the State Board of Education decided

to adopt the passing levels recommended by its expert panel. Had the higher standard been used, statewide, only 81 percent would have passed the TAKS, and the passing rates for the various sub-groups would have dropped significantly.

While the passing rates for White students would have remained above 90 percent (93 percent at the panel standard vs. 96 percent at 2SEMs below it), the passing rates for students who are African American, Hispanic or low-income would have dropped by over 10 points, all falling into the 70 percent range.

The gap in performance suggests school efforts will have to be scaled up in the future, particularly if the minority and economically-disadvantaged student levels are to be increased to levels comparable to the lower passing standard adopted in 2003.

More importantly if the higher passing standard had been in place, almost 50,000 third graders (19 percent of the 262,600 test takers) would have been at risk of being retained in grade in 2003. Of that total, 40,300 African American students tested (29 percent)

would have faced possible retention. Among the 103,289 Hispanic students tested, 26,800 (26 percent) could have been retained in grade.

The potential overall 19 percent retention rate compares to a 5 percent retention level reported for all third graders in 2001, according to TEA retention reports. This in turn represents a 280 percent increase in potential retentions that could have resulted from the application of the automatic retention requirements if the panel-recommended pass rates had been used this year.

### Lowering the Bar

While lowering the bar was useful in deflecting the negative affects of state-mandated retentions based on a single test score, local schools will have to see notable improvements in passing rates, particularly among their low-income and minority pupils, to escape the eventual negative consequences of the controversial state policy.

In 2004-05 the passing standard will be raised to a level that will require

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# Girls Work for Gender Equity Through Technology

by **María Aurora Yáñez, M.A.**

“I will be a stronger person mentally and physically,” said a young woman at the gender equity issues program held by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA). The program encouraged young Latinas to talk openly about gender issues while exposing them to technology. It culminated in a video conference for 18 young women from two middle schools in San Antonio.

The need for women to be educated in a challenging, non-hostile environment where men do not dominate the conversation has been established theory by gender research for some time (NCES, 1997). This same principal applies to women and their access to and use of technology.

IDRA implemented this gender equity issues program that integrated computers via PowerPoint presentations, video conference technology and conversations in an interactive approach that strove to motivate, stimulate and invigorate young women.

IDRA staff surveyed the 18 students to determine topics of importance to them. The students responded that, as young women, they are frustrated by not being able to get involved in sports like boys, by teachers

not understanding kids, by not being able to explain things to their teachers and by being picked on.

The young women also indicated they were interested in learning more about sexual harassment prevention and women in occupations. IDRA staff met with the young women and discussed their topics of concern. During this initial meeting, the young women were briefed on the program and its objectives. The program was designed for the students to identify gender equity issues in school settings and present them to their peers during a video conference and for them to

identify viable solutions for the identified issues.

During a second meeting, IDRA staff continued the previous conversations and helped the young women practice for their video conference. The participants were also asked to complete the PowerPoint projects they would subsequently present during the video conference. All activities were structured to stimulate cooperation, interaction, dialogue, teamwork, public speaking, higher order thinking and creativity while providing hands-on experiences

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“Women have an interest in participatory education. Many teachers use the sage-on-the-stage model, with the expert informing others about what the expert thinks the others need to know. The teacher has knowledge that he or she imparts to the students. Fundamental knowledge about communication processes is disregarded by many teachers who think about teaching as a pitcher-and-cup action. The teacher pours forth the information which will be received by the students. In this system student participation often is determined by counting (or guessing) the number of times a student asked a question or answered a question. This is as dynamic as it gets. Boys are more likely to be raised to think this is how the system should work – hierarchical control of knowledge. They go through this process and then many of them get to do it themselves as teachers, managers, or bosses. Along the way, they get to talk more in the classroom, because boys are more likely to raise their hands more quickly and are called upon more often.”

– “Critical Visions of Educational Technology,” Suzanne de Castell, Simon Fraser University, Mary Bryson, University of British Columbia, Jennifer Jenson, Simon Fraser University, <http://www.shecan.com>.

with laptops and digital cameras.

The video conference was held by connecting one of the middle schools with a university facility. The young women were grouped into triads and were asked to discuss and subsequently report on what they had learned regarding gender issues throughout the program. Below are some of the responses:

- Women need to be encouraged to pursue fields in math, science and engineering.
- Women need to be encouraged and guided toward doing better in school and getting a college degree.
- Young women need to speak up for themselves.
- Young women need to pursue good paying jobs.
- Young women need to have confidence in themselves.
- Young women need to avoid giving up their goals just to please others.

Prior to the conclusion of the video conference, the students were asked to discuss what they would do differently as a result of their participation in the program. They listed the following:

- Respect their bodies and do their best in school and accomplish their goals in the future;
- Speak out about things in their lives;
- Respect themselves; and
- Be more independent.

After the video conference, the middle school Latinas indicated that they appreciated the chance to participate in a video conference and to share their ideas. They also found learning about sexual harassment useful and enjoyed being so talkative and outgoing. Participants liked knowing they were supported and enjoyed the opportunity to get to know young women from other schools.

The reason the video conference and the exercises before and after it were so successful is because the

## Recommendations from AAUW's Educational Foundation Commission on Technology, Gender, and Teacher Education

- **Transform pink software:** Software does not need to be specifically designated for girls or boys. Software for both classroom and home should focus on the many design elements and themes that engage a broad range of learners, including boys and girls, and students who don't identify with the "computer nerd" stereotype.
- **Look to girls and women to fill the IT job shortage:** Girls are an untapped source of talent to lead the high-tech economy and culture. Curriculum developers, teachers, technology experts, and schools need to cultivate girls' interest by infusing technology concepts and uses into subject areas ranging from music to history to the sciences in order to interest a broader array of learners.
- **Prepare tech-savvy teachers:** Professional development for teachers needs to emphasize more than the use of the computer as a productivity tool. It must give teachers enough understanding of how computer technology works and its basic concepts so that they are empowered users.
- **Educate girls to be designers, not just users:** Educators and parents should help girls imagine themselves early in life as designers and producers of new technology. Engage girls in "tinkering" activities that can stimulate deeper interest in technology; provide opportunities for girls to express their technological imaginations.
- **Change the public face of computing:** Media, teachers, and other adults need to make the public face of women in computing correspond to the reality rather than the stereotype. Girls tend to imagine that computer professionals or those who work heavily with information technology live in a solitary, antisocial world. This is an alienating – and incorrect – perception.
- **Create a family computer:** Among other things, place computers in accessible home spaces. Think about shared or family-centered activities on the computer, rather than viewing its use as an individual or isolated activity.
- **Set a new standard for gender equity:** Equity in computer access, knowledge, and use – across all races, sexes, and classes – cannot be measured solely by how many people use e-mail, surf the Internet, or perform basic functions on the computer. The new benchmark for gender equity should emphasize computer fluency: girls' mastery of analytical skills and computer concepts and their ability to imagine innovative uses for technology across a range of problems and subjects.

American Association of University Women. *Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age.* (Washington, D.C.: AAUW, 2000) <http://www.aauw.org/2000/techsavvy.html>.

# The Power of Partnerships

## How Alianza is Reshaping Bilingual Teacher Preparation

by **Rosana G. Rodríguez,**  
Ph.D.

Theoretically, schools and universities are designed to serve students and communities. Too often though, this is not the case. But the Alianza partnerships between universities and communities across the United States and Mexico are vibrant examples of how effective bridges expedite the teacher preparation and certification process and respond to a growing population of English language learners.

### The Call and the Response

As the number of Latino youth in the United States increases, there is a critical shortage of people who are prepared and certified to teach students who are learning English. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that one-third of teachers lack college preparation in the main subject areas they teach, and even less have preparation in their subject areas using English as a second language (ESL) techniques.

As a result, less than half of the country's 3.8 million children who are learning English are being served in bilingual or ESL programs. And even fewer are enrolled in well-designed, well-implemented programs taught by certified teachers who speak their

**To date, 70 Alianza graduates are positively impacting more than 6,000 children in bilingual classrooms and reducing the shortage of bilingual education teachers in Texas alone by 10 percent.**

language.

It is against this backdrop that Alianza flourishes. This binational effort funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation is enabling more than 300 teachers to become leaders in bilingual and bicultural settings. To date, 70 Alianza graduates are positively impacting more than 6,000 children in bilingual classrooms and reducing the shortage of bilingual education teachers in Texas alone by 10 percent.

Participating universities in several states are expanding their bilingual curricula to include courses of study and practical experiences that enhance the abilities of teachers, parents, administrators, school board members, and community leaders to collaborate effectively. Alianza is also enhancing the capacity of Latino and non-Latino students and educators to speak Spanish and work in cross-

cultural environments—abilities that are essential to success in the 21st century.

Alianza targets teacher aides who are bilingual, traditional students in teacher-preparation programs in universities, and *normalistas* who are legal U.S. residents who were teachers in Mexico. Alianza also equips educational systems to prepare teachers and other educators to perform effectively in bilingual, binational and bicultural contexts.

The Alianza group of universities and educators met in San Antonio in March at the University of Texas at San Antonio Downtown Campus. Sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) and the UTSA College of Education and Human Development, the group of educational innovators met to showcase successes and share lessons learned with other states.

Honored at this event was Professor José Angel Pescador, former Consul General of Mexico in Los Angeles and former Secretary of Education of Mexico, who received a proclamation from the City of San Antonio at a special reception (see article on Page 13).

Topics discussed during the conference included: outreach and recruitment, academic support and language preparation, admission and transcript validation, financial support,

*Power Partnerships – continued on Page 12*

bi-national collaboration, institutional change and community relations.

This article focuses on highlights of steps taken and others needed to create institutional changes that have positive influence within campuses. These in turn, can result in innovative and positive changes in teacher preparation for Latino and other bilingual communities.

### Creating a Circle of Influence

The Alianza universities were committed from the beginning to creating changes from within their campuses that would acknowledge and tap into the excellent resources that can be found in teachers trained in other settings. This process, although difficult, paid great dividends in creating the types of lasting bridges that propelled effective partnerships between local schools and college campuses. Some of the common elements of these partnerships included the following steps, depicted in the diagram in the box at right.

*Recruit.* Expand the pool of teachers with an understanding of Latino students. In the case of Alianza, this required a pro-active look at the resources within the local community, teacher aides, and former teachers who were underemployed and working in other settings.

*Create.* Develop opportunities for school districts to partner in teacher preparation and placement. Alianza universities engaged in a process of early identification of elementary school campuses that would serve as training grounds and ultimately receiving classrooms for the teachers once the certification process was complete.

*Engage.* Invite communities and families to participate in the recruitment, preparation and placement processes. Alianza universities recognized the potential that engagement with community can have in fostering the type of long-term leadership that can

revitalize surrounding communities. They took active steps in reaching out to build trust and create effective partnerships with schools and communities in the surrounding areas.

*Innovate.* Design a student support program to meet all teacher certification requirements. Campuses invested the necessary resources to recognize that a plan of study needs to be individualized for each teacher in order to expedite the certification process and maximize learning.

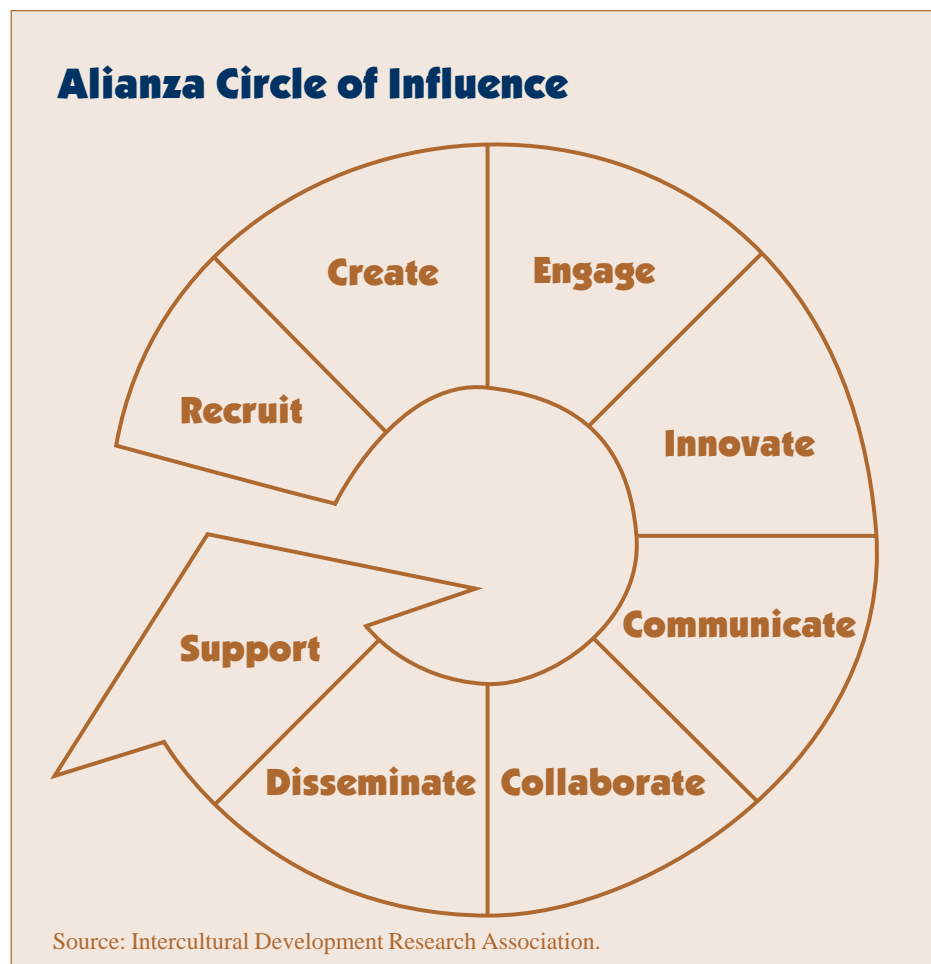
*Communicate.* Connect institutions across borders to facilitate credentialing. Alianza universities identified “sister institutions” in Mexico and developed effective relationships to receive and translate transcripts, analyze coursework equivalencies, and provide support for each incoming teacher candidate.

*Collaborate.* Foster meaningful alliances among institutions. Alianza

partnerships included IDRA, the Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation, university partners in both countries, local school districts, Alianza teachers and evaluation consultants to create change, make necessary adjustments in the journey and measure success.

*Disseminate.* Support and assess teacher success holistically with research and best practices. A holistic approach that recognizes and values language, culture, and history is firmly imbedded in the teacher preparation and certification process for Alianza partners. Methodologies used proven theory and practice to maximize student success. Throughout the journey, Alianza partners are committed to sharing lessons learned among a broad audience of key stakeholders including educators, community, business and policymakers.

Power Partnerships – continued on Page 14





## Former Secretary of Education for Mexico Honored in San Antonio

Mr. José Angel Pescador, former Secretary of Education for Mexico and former Consul General for Mexico in Los Angeles, was honored at a recent reception because of his exemplary leadership in education. The reception was hosted by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), the Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation and the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

As Consul General for Mexico in Los Angeles, Mr. Pescador identified the need to find qualified bilingual education teachers in non-traditional areas. Less than half of this country's 3.8 million children who are learning English are being served in bilingual or English as a second language programs, and even fewer are in well-designed, well implemented programs taught by teachers certified to educate these students.

Mr. Pescador recognized the potential of *normalistas* in our communities to fill this need and formed new partnerships between teacher preparation programs in the United States and Mexico. *Normalistas* are individuals who have teacher certification in Mexico and are now legal U.S. residents. Many are working in service jobs due to the barriers they face in obtaining certification to teach in this country.

IDRA expanded this visionary concept and created Project Alianza to reach more *normalistas* across the U.S. Southwest as well as teacher aides who are bilingual and traditional students in teacher preparation programs in universities. The project is equipping educational systems to prepare teachers and other educators to perform effectively in bilingual, binational and bicultural contexts.

The Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation has worked to strengthen collaboration between the United States and Mexico, has created powerful learning experiences in Mexico for Alianza participants and has fostered sister university relationships between schools in the two countries.

Alianza is enabling hundreds of teachers to become leaders in bilingual and bicultural settings, impacting thousands of children in bilingual classrooms. There are more than 300 Project Alianza students becoming leaders in bilingual and bicultural settings. Seventy Alianza graduates are positively impacting more than 6,000 children in bilingual classrooms and reducing the shortage of bilingual education teachers in Texas alone by 10 percent.

"Mr. Pescador has found ways throughout his public life to make a difference in educational institutions," said Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA executive director. "Alianza has become a vehicle for utilizing the human, social and economic capital that is so rich in many of our communities."

Eight universities in the United States, including the University of Texas at San Antonio, are expanding their bilingual curricula to enhance the abilities of teachers, parents, administrators, school board members and community leaders to collaborate effectively.

"As one of the leaders in educating teachers in Texas, UTSA is committed to increasing the much-needed supply of bilingual educators," said UTSA President Ricardo Romo. "Our institution joins all of San Antonio to honor Mr. Pescador for his leadership and dedication to education."

Project Alianza is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The other participating universities are: California State University at Bakersfield; California State University at Long Beach; Southwest Texas State University; Texas A&M International University; Texas Women's University; University of Texas at El Paso; and University of Texas – Pan American. Arizona State University is participating in a research capacity.



For more information on Alianza visit the web site (<http://www.idra.org/alianza/default.htm#Alianza>) or contact Linda Cantu at IDRA (210-444-1710).

## Recommendations for Improving Teacher Preparation for a Diverse Student Body

The Alianza partnership is a living example of how effective partnerships can transform schools of education, enrich communities and respond to student needs. Working together they are growing the next generation of leaders who can make a positive difference in our nation's future.

Following are lessons that can be learned from the Alianza experience and shed light upon future steps to be taken by others interested in improving teacher preparation for the future.

- Schools of education must place high value on teacher education for a diverse student population and support this work within their institutions.
- Schools must share successful approaches for recruiting and retaining Latino teachers in teacher preparation programs in states with emerging numbers of Latino students.
- We must expand the body of research and knowledge about preparing Latino educators with key stakeholders in education, community and policy.
- We must compile a comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that enhance the preparation of educators who teach Latino students.
- Schools of education must prepare educators to serve Latino students and other students from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Schools of education must identify and recruit teacher candidates from alternative and non-traditional pools, such as *normalistas*, instructional assistants or professionals in other fields.
- We must develop holistic assessment and support programs

for educators that rely primarily on the demonstration of knowledge and performance in the classroom.

- Schools of education must provide consistent support for individuals when they enter a teacher education program to complete all requirements for certification and work in the classroom.
- Schools of education must disseminate innovative strategies that prepare teachers for Latino and other minority students for teacher educators, both in school districts and in universities.
- Schools of education must create meaningful partnerships between schools, communities and universities to support teacher recruitment, preparation, and placement, allowing prospective teachers to study theory and practice throughout their training while they apply prior experience.
- Schools of education must develop a corp faculty across disciplines with the primary responsibility for reshaping teacher preparation.
- Schools of education must hire faculty for their teacher education programs who are experienced, well prepared and knowledgeable about effective strategies for Latino and other minority students.
- Schools of education must work in conjunction with schools and communities to tap alternative pools of teacher candidates in order to develop a cadre of teachers who are more experienced, more culturally diverse, and more understanding of Latino and other minority students' needs.
- Schools of education must expose teacher candidates to K-12 classrooms with Latino and diverse student bodies early in their preparation.
- Teacher education programs should build competencies that emphasize all aspects for developing Latino student self-esteem and motivation.

- We must continue to foster strong alliances and networks with key institutions across borders dedicated to improving teacher recruitment, preparation and placement for our changing demographics.

The implications of these steps and recommendations will be transformative changes for institutions and communities. Renewal of the teacher preparation programs using the Alianza model will foster connections and collaborations across borders that result in communicating innovative strategies, quality teacher preparation and greater success for all students.

For more information about Alianza or about setting up a program at your campus visit the IDRA website at [www.idra.org/alianza](http://www.idra.org/alianza).

## Resources

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students correctly answer 22 of 36 questions (61 percent) correctly, a passing score equal to one standard error of measurement below the panel recommendation. By 2005-06 the state will require that students meet the panel's original recommended 24 correct answers out of 36 items (67 percent) to achieve a passing score.

As this same group of students encounters high-stakes assessments in the fifth grade and then later in the eighth grade, it will be important to compare their dropout and graduation rates to comparable students educated before these assessments were required.

As crucial will be monitoring the extent to which schools use TAKS performance as the primary basis for retention decisions, actions that may be reflected in the proportion of students that the grade placement committees decide to promote despite the single test score. If large proportions of students are indeed retained in grade, advocates will need to step up efforts to modify what many believe is a well intended, but dysfunctional state policy.

## Harmful Effects of In-Grade Retention

Despite widely held assumptions that it is beneficial to students, hard data on subsequent student

achievement following in-grade retention indicates that merely holding students back does little to improve future learning. In fact, for the majority of pupils, being retained produces harmful effects that have been found to be related to future underachievement and for many increasing the probability of dropping out of school (McCollum et al., 1999; Cárdenas, 1990).

Until educators and the public recognize that more effective alternatives to retention exist and are viable, students will continue to bear the brunt of dysfunctional state policies. Enamored with the notion that the simple act of testing students improves student learning, many people continue to ignore the fact that it is teaching – not merely testing – that produces the outcomes reflected on assessment measures. How many students will be sacrificed at the altar of standardized testing in Texas and other states will depend on how long parents and communities continue to tolerate it or demand more effective alternatives.

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*Power Partnerships – continued from Page 14*  
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participants were encouraged to view themselves as knowledgeable individuals who had valuable information to share. They were also encouraged to explore, use and interact with technology in ways that allowed them to be in control. The comments from the participants demonstrate the kind of increased self worth young women will need to address many of the gender-related challenges and concerns raised.

One student stated, “I will be stronger, outspoken, self-sufficient and get a good education.” Another said, “I will respect my body, go where I want to go and reach my goals.”

## Resources

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## Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In March, IDRA worked with **11,300** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **86** training and technical assistance activities and **145** program sites in **11** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ Fair Funding for Public Schools
- ◆ Focusing on Language Acquisition and Instructional Renewal (FLAIR)
- ◆ Coalition Building
- ◆ Alianza Networking Conference “Showcasing Success”
- ◆ Action Research

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Harris County Department of Education, Texas
- ◆ Grand Rapids Public Schools, Michigan
- ◆ Brownsville Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Jefferson Parish Schools, 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.



conjecture and verification process of knowing and doing mathematics.

One teacher said, “The students were hurrying to test out the hypothesis with the quadrilaterals.”

Students’ restatements reinforced predicting-testing-validating as mathematical inquiry and meaning-making.

Another teacher said, “I had never seen these students thinking like mathematicians.”

Routinizing the process of mathematical exploration facilitates grasping increasingly complex mathematical shapes and properties.

A teacher stated, “There was anticipation in the air and the room was buzzing with ideas.”

Another added, “Students were excited because the task was doable and yet not obvious.”

When you awaken students’ mathematical minds with creative challenges, a natural momentum emerges that reflects piqued interest and is student-inspired and student-driven.

## **Student Assessment**

A teacher stated: “As the lesson unfolded we were curious to know if students were really ‘getting it.’ We wrote a series of test questions similar to the required state test to determine if students could apply what they learned to standard measures. Some questions were conceptual and others computational.”

First, the lesson emphasized general pattern identification rather than the computation of the sum of the angles. The lesson worked even if only half of the students answered the conceptual questions correctly. Second, what was taught and what was being measured were not aligned. Third, students will need more time to practice the skills of finding a missing value.

Just as the students were

engrossed and participatory in the geometry lesson, so the observing teachers were engaged in the process to the point of co-creating a mini-quiz before the end of the lesson and actually administering it. When staff development allows teachers to co-create and implement a lesson and its assessment, it is of secondary importance whether the teacher additions are totally congruent with the lesson. Although, in this case, the mini-quiz was not well aligned with this lesson, it did represent a sincere collaborative effort and a valid quest for evidence of learning.

The quiz’s emphasis on computation rather than the original plan to have the students write about what they learned was directly connected to the high-stakes testing that teachers are required to consider as a critical indicator of student learning. A more didactic or rote approach would be more efficient for narrow, computational purposes but at the expense of student self-discovery and mathematical discourse.

Along with the fact that some of the students were English language learners and language development had to be integrated into the math learning, the search for meaning and underlying

principles has a more lasting and powerful intellectual impact than the short-term memorization of meaningless formulas and disconnected procedures. The third and last article of this series will expand on these ideas.

## **Discipline of Noticing**

The “discipline of noticing” is a groundbreaking approach to professional development that gives special attention to a possibility for the future, highlights a possibility in the present moment, and uses what has been *noticed* in order to prepare for the future (Mason, 2002). A teacher’s sensitivities and awareness are essential to enhancing his or her professional practice. The discipline of noticing is akin to reflective practice with particular specifications (Schon, 1987).

The debriefing notes above illustrate a systematic way of noticing instructional practices and outcomes. The experience in its proper place is a powerful professional development context that is also practical, accessible and empowering to the teachers as a learning community on their campus.

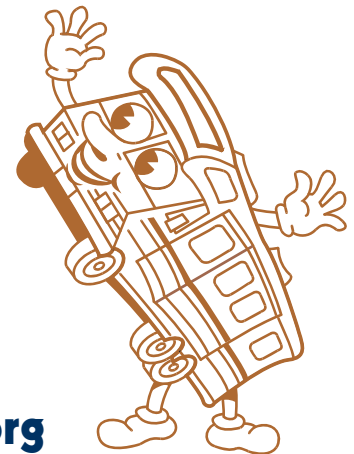
This focus on noticing is  
*Learning Angles – continued on Page 18*

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somewhat like experiential learning and can have anywhere from four to six levels of questioning. For our purposes, the observers:

- Give attention to experienced, common moments in teaching;
- Connect what is observed with their own experience, distinguishing what is already in their repertoire with what is new or different; and
- Apply new practices to their own teaching.

Teachers make instructional choices based on their available teaching repertoire. They are, in a sense, limited to this repertoire. The innovation of the discipline of noticing is in having teachers take what they notice as critical incidents, examine them in detail with peers, and plan for new ways that they will confront these issues when they encounter them in the future.

Thus, the noticing is always in relation to planning to behave in a new way in their practice. These opportunities provide a common classroom experience that can become, through a facilitated dialogue, the object of reflection, questioning and experimentation of alternative classroom practices.

Whatever system is applied, it is important that the debriefing proceed from an initial verbalizing of “what happened?,” to “what feelings came up?,” to hypothesizing of “why did these things happen?,” to ultimately “what does this mean for me and my teaching?”

### **Classroom Teaching as a Medium for Professional Development**

Professional development that takes place in a workshop, for example, without students present, can approximate the classroom experience through videos, written cases studies or simulation with some of the teachers

## **A vibrant community of learners then is one that is guided through mutual observation of successes with their own students, mutual aspiration to improved teaching, and ongoing dialogue.**

role playing students. Those who have a lot of experiences in workshops and seminars know that one big barrier, mostly unspoken, in some teachers’ minds is the assumption that it will not work with “my kids.” Even when a master teacher is an effective communicator, it is not until the participants see that master teacher illustrate “good” teaching with their own students on their own campus that the “ah-ha” of learning happens.

In the ExCELS project, a major component of professional development is to bring the teachers into a colleagues’ classroom and model particular approaches. Though the lesson could possibly not work as planned, —everything observed is material for reconstruction, analysis and application. Classroom teaching itself as a medium for professional development brings the experience closer to home and physically and intellectually reduces the distance from the observation to the application (Bass et al., 2003).

By locating the work of teacher learning within one of their own classrooms, teachers are more open to implementing strategies they have seen in action. This is akin to the attraction of hands-on workshops at conferences, but it also has deeper benefits and consequences. It gives teachers hope when they see students succeeding in ways that they have not seen before. It opens up the infinite possibilities in peer observations, sharing and support. With sufficient guided practice, it can establish a systemic regularity of reflective dialogue that does not require an external expert to enhance the teaching practice.

### **Community of Learners**

Traditional teaching has given teachers extensive independence and autonomy but has also encouraged isolation and has led to the stereotype of a teacher who taught the same way for 20 years. The current dilemmas of classroom teachers include: pressure overload from external accountability measures, isolation, groupthink colored by pessimism, untapped competence and narrowness of teaching roles (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Teacher isolation has created paranoia about being observed and has also relegated those teachers of poor, minority and English language learning students to despair about the children ever achieving. In this context, teachers cannot be moved easily by brilliant presenters at conferences or by reading books about other teachers’ successes. If change will come about and pessimism will shift to optimism, we have to provide dramatic, immediate and authentic experiences.

A vibrant community of learners then is one that is guided through mutual observation of successes with their own students, mutual aspiration to improved teaching, and ongoing dialogue. The isolation is removed through the collegial experiences. The lowest common denominator mentality and groupthink are replaced by the infusion of new successful practices, mutual challenges for greater success, and an expanded repertoire of teaching approaches that is accessible to the whole learning community.

### **Specific Relevance to English Language Learners**

One challenge for teachers when they are beginning to focus on English language learners is an artificial duality that separates effective language learning techniques from effective content approaches. When considering the needs of English language learners, it is not useful to consider language acquisition strategies without at the same time considering the concepts required in the content-area lesson such as geometry.

When considering a geometry lesson in angles, we must hold several learner needs simultaneously. They have to view language as one of several critical dimensions that interact to form the learning context. In this way, teachers look not to *compensate* for language differences, but to understand the role of language in the learning of math, and through that understanding consider a wider array of instructional choices that use language to develop meaning in math.

So, in addition to math vocabulary, we need to consider the movement

**When considering the needs of English language learners, it is not useful to consider language acquisition strategies without at the same time considering the concepts required in the content-area lesson such as geometry.**

from concrete to abstract and from conjecture to generalization so that a set of paper triangles the student will manipulate, tear and re-glue (which can be considered an English as a second language technique because it is multi-sensory and tactile) is also an important approach for all students regardless of language ability. Having students arrive at an experiential discussion of pattern is based on the premise that all students will understand the definition of a pattern and retain it in long-term memory if it is arrived at from a cumulative sharing of patterns.

Just as students in the lesson on

angles were most convinced about the properties of angles when they handled and compared them themselves, so the teachers in this project were able to understand what new elements they could incorporate into their own teaching when they saw various elements of math, language instruction, student experience, manipulatives and small group conversation, seamlessly integrated with a group of their own students. All learners learn deeply through meaningful experiences that are close to home.

**Role of the Facilitator or Model Teacher**

This process requires a teacher that can walk the talk. He or she must model teaching in other teachers' classrooms. The teacher must have strong command of the content, a wide spectrum of approaches to teach the content, and the ability to deal sensitively with English language learner needs in the content lesson. To guide the reflection for the community of learners, the facilitator must be reflective in

practice, open to feedback, and understand the levels of questions necessary to deepen the level of reflection.

The facilitator has a dual responsibility: to teach the students effectively and to illustrate specific aspects of teaching to the observing teachers. This is more than just teaching a good lesson while being observed by other teachers. The facilitator plans with the consideration of marking critical aspects and incidents in the lesson for didactic teacher training goals.

Furthermore, the facilitator or

model teacher must notice, mark and bring to consciousness incidents, student responses and anything that took place in the lesson serendipitously that provides a teachable moment for the teachers observing. Both pre-planned and instantaneous in-the-moment instructional decision-making becomes grist for the mill in the debriefing.

**Conclusion**

During this exercise, teachers observed, shared observations, and reflected and saw new possibilities. As this community of teachers moves toward becoming a community of learners, there is a renewed hope and commitment to improve the achievement of all their students, especially those who are learning English as a second language.

In the next article in this series, we will review the challenges of incorporating this approach in the daily life of a middle school.

**Resources**

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*Student Leadership* – continued from Page 6  
web page at [www.idra.org/enlace](http://www.idra.org/enlace).

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