

# Teachers Pressing for Quality Teaching

## Lessons from Content Teachers of English Language Learners

by Jack Dieckmann, M.A.

### Inside this Issue:

- ✦ Checklist for preschool bilingual programs
- ✦ 50th anniversary of *Brown vs. Board of Education*
- ✦ New web site resources



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

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

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

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

behavior management system.

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

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

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

Much of the national discussion has been about *teacher quality*, pointing to the level of university preparation, state credentialing and other individual characteristics of

teachers. No doubt these are important to consider. But what seems missing from the dialogue is *quality teaching*.

School districts continue to provide teacher training, giving information to teachers about “best practices.” Most teachers are passive receivers of this knowledge, and little is known about when and how “best practices” are actually used in the classroom to engage in quality teaching.

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

### Teachers Wrestling with Their Practice

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

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achievement gaps in schools today.

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

Lest you think these are insurmountable barriers, many teachers

are taking up the challenge of quality teaching, wrestling with the dilemmas together and getting results.

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

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

Her comment reveals a dissonance between an old mindset and an emerging one about what students bring to the learning context. The teacher

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

The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2004) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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

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# Excellent Bilingual Early Childhood Programs – A Parent Guide

by Aurelio M. Montemayor,  
M.Ed.

Recently, at a school meeting, a group of parents shared with each other their vision and dreams for their children. As with most parents IDRA has worked with, these parents said they want their children to get a good education; to have many choices of professions; and to not lose their language, culture, values and faith of the family.

All of these parents want their children to be fully bilingual as adults. They were saddened to think that, without support, their children could lose their home language and culture in their journey to become successful and fulfilled adults.

All families need the support of excellent early childhood programs. For families who speak a language other than English, it is critical that they have access to excellent bilingual, multicultural preschool programs.

Bilingual education teaches English to children and gives them a chance to practice it while they also learn subjects like math and science. Good bilingual programs build on the resources that families offer. Children learn from their parents and teachers, and they have an innate capacity to

process and use several languages. Once children have mastered one language, it is easier for them to learn other languages.

## Characteristics of Good Preschools

Schools must connect directly to children's language and experiences in the home. A high-quality early childhood program respects and draws on the language and culture of the child to further the linguistic, social, and academic growth of that child. It also prepares the child for a smooth transition from being at home to life in

kindergarten and primary school.

IDRA founder and director emeritus, Dr. José A. Cárdenas, explains: "In successful programs for the education of at-risk school populations, there is a valuing of the students in ways in which they are not valued in regular and traditional school programs. In successful school programs, the student is valued, his language is valued, his heritage is valued, his family is valued, and, most important, the student is valued as a person" (1995).

A good preschool program also

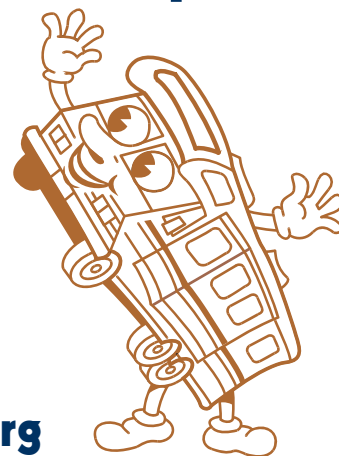
*Parent Guide – continued on Page 4*

## Take the IDRA Newsletter Field Trip!

### On IDRA's Web Site

- ✦ Read related *IDRA Newsletter* articles from 1996 to the present
- ✦ Access statistics, definitions, etc.
- ✦ Learn about Internet resources
- ✦ Find extensive useful Internet links
- ✦ Use IDRA's topical index to find what you are looking for

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



values and involves families in meaningful and respectful ways in the activities of the school.

In one exemplary school that IDRA studied, a teacher described their program: “Parents are really involved in the [bilingual education] program...Parents feel responsible. We let them know that we want them in the classroom. They are not just going to volunteer to clean or run errands...We want them to work with the students and help the teacher” (Robledo Montecel, et al., 2002).

Family participation is twice as predictive of academic learning as is the family’s socio-economic status. Parents who feel welcome in schools are a powerful resource that can better their children’s education. When schools and families work together, students succeed and communities are stronger.

Here is a checklist of characteristics of a successful bilingual preschool program. Take a look at your child’s center. (A Spanish-language version of this checklist is available online at [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org).)

### **A child-friendly school**

- The school allows for children to work in small groups and provides individual attention for each child. Individual temperaments, learning styles and language preferences are respected.
- The school provides a variety of physical activities (inside and outside) and varies instruction to maintain the interest of each child.
- The school adapts activities so that gregarious children are engaged and shy children feel safe and comfortable.

### **A family-friendly school**

- The language and culture of the family are central to the curriculum and the teaching.

- Staff members communicate with parents in a language that is comprehensible to them. They respect the parent role as first teacher of the child and prime expert on the child.
- Families are welcomed and invited to participate in school activities in a variety of ways.

### **High quality instruction**

- The school has clear goals in writing in both English and the family’s home language.
- The program addresses the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of the child and is much more than fancy baby-sitting.
- Children can work alone, in small groups and large groups, with opportunities both for self-directed and teacher-lead activities.
- Children have restful, quiet time as well as vigorous play.
- Children have opportunities to express themselves, develop motor skills, and experience literature and communication in their own language, music, science and nature.
- Children’s interests in the world around them are central to the curriculum and instruction.
- Children’s natural interests in reading, writing and counting in their own language are encouraged and responded to.
- The curriculum and materials reflect cultural diversity and represent women and men in many important roles and professions.
- Snacks and meals are nutritious, limiting sweets, fried food and junk food.

### **Excellent staff**

- Teachers are trained and certified in early childhood education and are fully bilingual in English and in the language of the child.
- The director has been a teacher and is fully bilingual in English and the

language of the family.

- The ratio of children to adults is small.
- Most of the staff members have been there five or more years.
- The staff welcomes families and visitors, communicates regularly with parents, and views the language and culture of the home as an asset to the school.
- Teachers express care, interest and respect for each child.
- Teachers are engaged with the children most of the time.

### **Excellent place**

- The classroom space is ample, attractive and scaled to the children, with places for quiet individual and large group activities.
- The outside is safe, spacious, attractive and appropriate for vigorous activities, and is well supervised.

### **What a Parent Can Do**

Using this checklist parents can have a conversation with a center director or other key person who can answer questions. They can begin by asking about the strengths of the center and by making supportive comments about those strengths. Parents can speak from a position of wanting the best for their children and assuming that both the family and the school have similar goals.

It is important to be polite but assertive about those issues of language and culture that parents feel are important. If the answers given do not convince them that this is the best place for their child, they should thank the person for the information and continue their search elsewhere.

In addition, parents can talk to other parents whose children attend the center.

If the child is already in a preschool program that does not match well with



## Position is Everything

### A Comment on *Brown vs. Board of Education*

by Bradley Scott, Ph.D.

There has been a flurry of activity around the 50th anniversary of the landmark ruling made by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954. There have been many local and national events that have taken place, including a unique event sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) in October 2003. IDRA and the other nine equity assistance centers are excited about these events for three important reasons.

The first is the fact that commemorating the *Brown* ruling allows us, as a nation, to reflect on who we were and the distances we have had to travel to fight racism and all of its ugliest forms of discrimination to acknowledge that separate schooling is inherently unequal.

In this first instance, the excitement involves the fact that many segments of society, including civic, political, education, religious, and business, are pausing to acknowledge *Brown* and what it has meant as a historical marker for the United States. The ruling created a societal shift, the effects of which are still being experienced to this very moment.

A second important reason for our excitement speaks to where we

**The real excitement rests in who we can be as a nation if we strengthen our public schools; if we keep the public talking about quality, excellent education for learners no matter where they live and who they are.**

are after 50 years of labor to create unitary schools systems where every child is afforded an equal educational opportunity and is not denied this opportunity because of his or her race, color, or national origin. The issue here is that while there have been many improvements in public education, the promise of *Brown* has not yet been fulfilled.

Robledo Montecel (2003) and others (Orfield and Chungmei, 2004; Cortez and Robledo Montecel, 2004) describe many ways in which the promise of equal educational opportunity still eludes us in practice even though the laws are essentially in place. One might almost believe that the duality and separateness of public education by race and class are an endemic part of our national nature.

If race and class are such strong determiners of one's access to quality education, it is sad at best and tragic at worst, but nonetheless absolutely critical for the legally-mandated work of the equity assistance centers to continue.

The equity assistance centers find their origin in Title IV the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. They are the oldest technical assistance entity specifically created to provide technical assistance, including training to public school systems that are desegregating and working to become unitary in the spirit of the *Brown* ruling. Regardless of their name or structure over the 40 years of their existence, it is they who have sounded the call for equal educational opportunity in public education, equity in access and treatment in public schools, and excellence for all learners regardless of race, gender, or national origin whether the call was to improve America's schools or to "leave no child behind" (Scott, 1999; Scott, 2000; Scott, 2002).

In this final instance, the excitement experienced by the equity assistance centers rests not in whom we have been or even where we are.

The real excitement rests in who

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Comment on Brown – continued from Page 5

we can be as a nation if we strengthen our public schools, if we keep the public talking about quality, excellent education for learners no matter where they live and who they are.

The equity centers designed a plan for action that will be presented at a conference in New York City at New York University. The theme of the conference is: *Brown Plus 50: A Renewed Agenda for Social Justice*. One of the sessions conducted by Dr. Bradley Scott of the IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity and Dr. Joan Dawson of the Metro Center equity assistance center, is entitled: The Equity Assistance Centers – Taking *Brown* from the Court Room to the Classroom.

This presentation will expand

upon a framework originally created by IDRA for the *Mendez* (1946) and *Brown* (1954) event that was held in San Antonio a few months ago. The framework identifies certain critical foundational and implementation issues that must be addressed for the spirit of *Brown* to work for all learners in public schools.

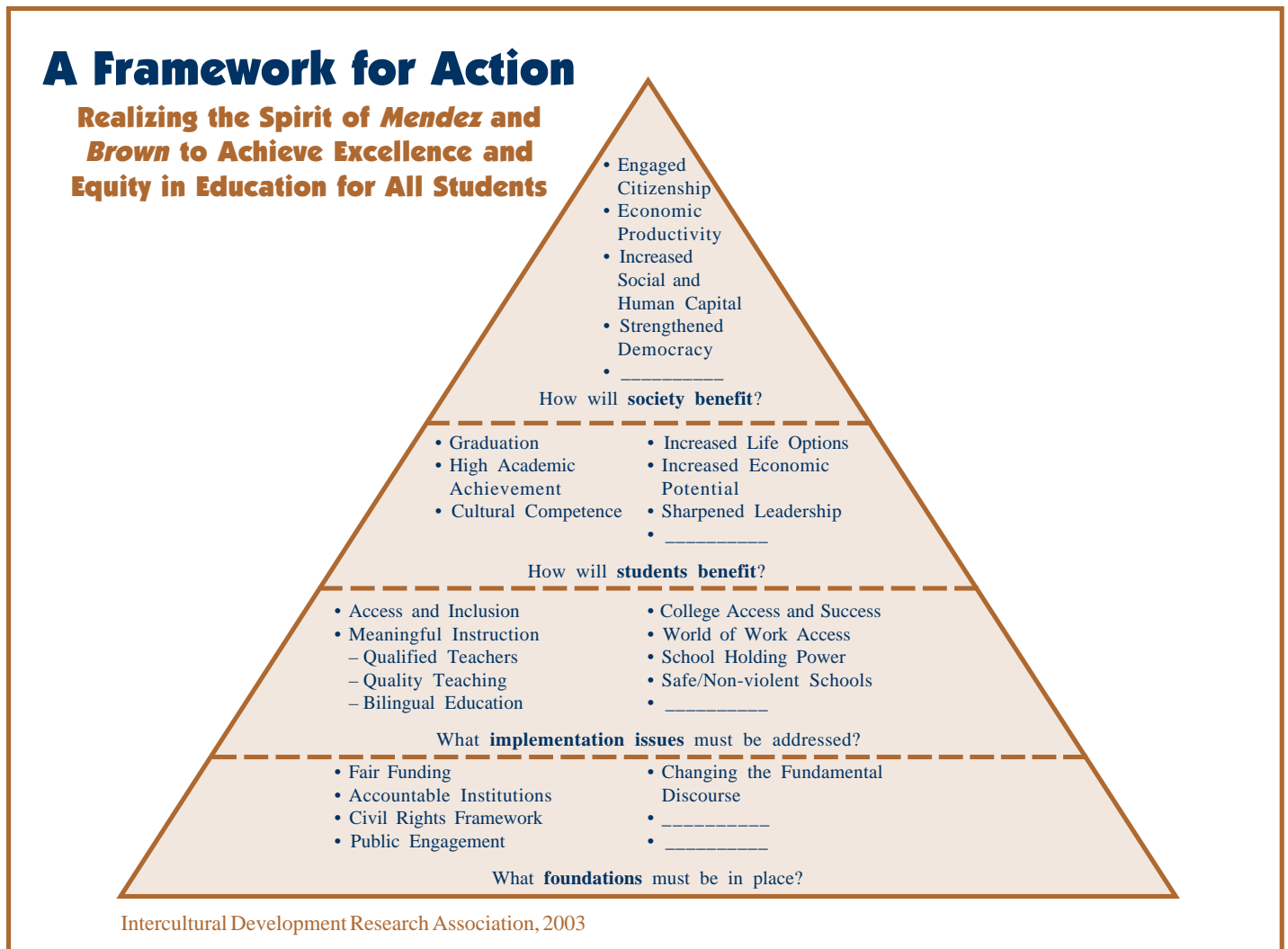
In fact, the framework clearly challenges stakeholders to understand that for students and the nation to benefit, quality, equitable educational opportunity can only be created through intensive and extensive work to address critical identified foundational and implementation issues (see box below).

It may be necessary to ask ourselves how serious we were as a nation when the original *Brown* decision was rendered in 1954. It is certainly

important to assess how serious we are now in an era of *No Child Left Behind*. It is probably most important to determine who we truly see ourselves being as this century continues to unfold. It is certain that many of the old answers we have created that have left many learners under-served, inadequately educated, and poorly prepared for life success will not serve our collective best interest if we honestly plan to leave no child behind.

Suddenly, it seems that the real question individual stakeholders need to ask themselves is on what side of the *Brown* ruling they stand. Where we stand makes a world of difference as to how we will address the questions raised in the framework. Position is everything.

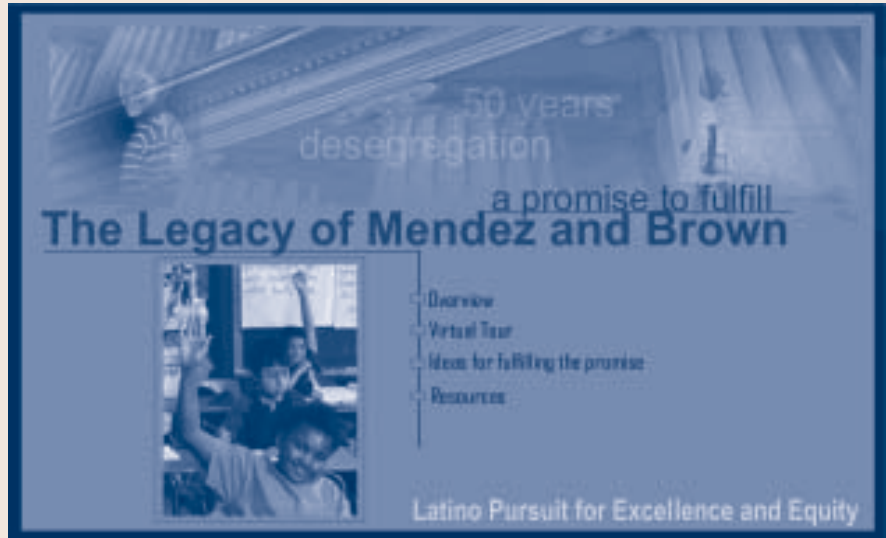
Comment on Brown – continued on Page 7



## Fulfilling the Legacy of Mendez and Brown New Web Site Launched

IDRA has launched a new web site to focus on the implications of *Brown vs. Board of Education* for Latino students and to catalyze a national action agenda for reform.

Business, education and civic leaders gathered in San Antonio in October 2003 to commemorate civil rights legislation that laid the groundwork for equity in education. This event, “The Latino Pursuit for Excellence and Equity in U.S. Public Schools – Mendez (1946) and Brown (1954) Today and Beyond,” was not just a time for reflection but one of dialogue and action. This web site is continuing the dialogue. By visiting the web site, you can:



- Get an overview of the landmark discussion of Latino and African American civil rights
- Experience the sights and sounds of the day’s events through videos and speeches
- Explore the roundtable discussions and what each group recommended
- Find out how you can learn and do more to fulfill the promise

The Latino Pursuit of Excellence and Equity is one of a series of events taking place around the country to celebrate the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and to advance its promise of quality education for all students. Convened by the Intercultural Development Research Association in collaboration with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Commission and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, The Latino Pursuit of Excellence and Equity is the only such event to focus on the implications of *Brown vs. Board* for Latino students. IDRA’s South Central Collaborative for Equity was a key sponsor and organizer of this event. This web site is created and sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Association.

*Comment on Brown* – continued from Page 6

### Resources

Cortez, A., and M. Robledo Montecel. “Texas at a Crossroads Excellent and Equitable Schools – or Merely Adequate,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2004).

Orfield, G., and L. Chungmei. *Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University, January

2004).

Robledo Montecel, M. “Fulfilling the Promise of Brown vs. Board of Education,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, November-December 2003).

Scott, B. “Who’s Responsible, Who’s to Blame?” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, May 2002).

Scott, B., and J.D. Cortez. “Equity Challenges Continue,” *IDRA Newsletter*

(San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, September 2000).

Scott, B. “From ‘DAC’ to ‘EAC’ – The Expanding Role of the Equity Assistance Center,” *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 1999).

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consciously is trying to re-pattern her fundamental beliefs and practices daily with the new premise “that students have a lot to offer.”

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

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

## ExCELS Teachers

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

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

To examine this question, we draw on IDRA’s ExCELS project, a five-

**“Bureaucratic solutions to problems of practice will always fail because effective teaching is not routine, students are not passive, and questions of practice are not simple, predictable, or standardized. Consequently, instructional decisions cannot be formulated on high then packaged and handed down to teachers.”**

– Linda Darling Hammond  
from *The Right to Learn*

year professional development project for teachers of English language learners. We focus on recurring individual teacher goal-setting, classroom action and joint reflection for their practice across a three-year period.

From this, we gain insight into how teachers view their practice, students, parents and subject knowledge. The insights inform both the problems and possibilities. They also help document the processes whereby teachers define for themselves what quality teaching means.

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

As the project has progressed, teachers have increased in leadership in substantive and practical ways: taking responsibility for project logistics (communication, calendar planning, recruitment), co-constructing the

agendas, sharing more openly about the dilemmas and successes in practice, and ultimately using the team meetings as a context to problem-solve as a group to increase the quality of their teaching.

## Teacher Goal-Setting

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

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

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

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

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

Each of these approaches serves a useful function. We distinguish our work in ExCELS from these in that we are helping teachers define individually, and refine jointly, their goals for themselves, based on a common

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principle of valuing students and providing resources to teachers to help them improve their teaching.

The box below contains excerpts from ExCELS teacher goals across three years.

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

evaluation and teacher lesson plans.

The excerpts show the ways in which teachers’ development became evident in the self-directed goals they choose to formulate. Over time, we see major shifts in teacher thinking in several areas: how they see themselves, how they see students and families, and how they see their content. In particular, we find clues about how teachers identify quality teaching issues in their teaching and how the complexity of that assessment develops over time.

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

- Moving *from* seeing students as being deficient *to* seeing students as having a wealth of individual experiences and informal knowledge that can be used to accelerate the mastery of rigorous content.

- Moving *from* general and vague ideas about “reconstructing” content and incorporating English as a second language techniques *to* becoming very specific and using concrete tools for complex instruction.
- Moving *from* using instructional strategies as the driver *to* using and adapting strategies at the service of English language learners to develop independent learners.

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

Part of the success that ExCELS has had in engaging teachers to direct their own professional learning and practice is our recognition that we are

## ExCELS Teacher Goals by Theme

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

working with caring and hard-working adults who want to do their best and who give a high priority to student achievement that results from their teaching. Our multi-year commitment to the participating campuses has allowed for two-way communication and interaction as teachers help shape the particular learning opportunities for classroom effectiveness.

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

- Ongoing communication with peers and skilled coaches about what is

and what is not working with students,

- Individual reflection on and refinement of classroom practice that is shared with peers and others in a supportive setting, and
- Commitment of support and resources to create synergy among teachers.

School leaders and those who support teacher learning can benefit from the experiences in ExCELS by including teachers in a meaningful way in the ongoing conversations about what quality teaching looks like, and equally as important is how to get there together. This article has outlined some of the insights from looking at teachers' goals over time and the conditions that we see as facilitating the long road toward quality teaching. Teachers can help us map out the journey.

*\*ExCELS is an innovative IDRA professional development program that creates learning communities of schools, families and communities for English language learners' academic success. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the project is focusing on improving teachers' capacity to address curriculum, instruction, assessment and parent involvement issues that impact the achievement of English language learners. Now in its third year of implementation, the project includes a total of 54 core content teachers (math, science, language arts and social studies) across two secondary schools. For more information contact IDRA at 210-444-1710 or [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org).*

To access some of the free ExCELS planning templates for teacher goal development, visit the IDRA web site at <http://www.idra.org/ExCELS>.

## Resources

Darling-Hammond, L. *The Right to Learn: A Teachers Pressing – continued from Page 11*

# Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In March, IDRA worked with **9,892** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **49** training and technical assistance activities and **168** program sites in **nine** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- ◆ School Finance Equity
- ◆ Parent Leadership for Education Reform
- ◆ SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Training
- ◆ How to Help My Child With Writing
- ◆ Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Valley Leadership Day

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- ◆ Corpus Christi Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- ◆ Education Service Center Region II
- ◆ Mesa Public Schools, Arizona
- ◆ Parent Child, Inc. San Antonio

## Activity Snapshot

The Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center provides an innovative results-oriented approach to strengthening partnerships between parents and school personnel in serving children, the working relationship between home and school, and enhancing the developmental progress of the children assisted in this program. Through these efforts, new collaboratives have emerged, and IDRA has become the catalyst for strengthening existing and emerging partnerships among critical organizations providing supportive services to parents and families. The project has a unique multilingual and multicultural focus, including training-of-trainers, to its approach in serving parents in Texas. The IDRA model of valuing parents as leaders promotes an emerging cadre of parents committed to positive support throughout the educational pipeline from pre-kindergarten through higher education.

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.

*Teachers Pressing* – continued from Page 10

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*Parent Guide* – continued from Page 4

the above checklist or other standards that the family considers important, parents can talk with the director, teachers and other parents to improve the program.

## Conclusion

Any center that meets licensing requirements should meet the minimum requirements for a good preschool program. Yet parents who desire a high-quality preschool program need to concern themselves not only with the critical elements for any early childhood program, but also the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the center.

A good bilingual preschool

# Did You Know?

**About \$30 billion is spent on public schools in Texas annually, with about \$12 billion coming from the state, \$1 billion from the federal government and about \$17 billion from local taxes.**

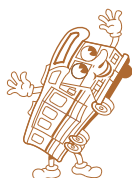
**In 2002, businesses paid about 44 percent of school property taxes, residential properties paid about 49 percent and undeveloped land accounted for about 7 percent.**

**\$91 billion in property value is lost because of exemptions for timber, agriculture and wildlife management.**

**\$238 million is lost through a legal loophole that allows major corporations to avoid paying the franchise tax.**

**\$8 billion in revenue would be lost by cutting school property taxes in half.**

**Source: Houston Chronicle, 2004**



**For more facts and statistics, go to the "Field Trip" on IDRA's web site.**

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

program is an excellent way to support the development of children in their native language and also jump-start them toward a future of fully bilingual professional adults.

*This article is adapted from "How Can Parents Identify a High Quality Preschool Program?" by Lilian Katz, director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1995.*

## Resources

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[www.texans4fairfunding.org](http://www.texans4fairfunding.org)

## Texans for Fair Funding

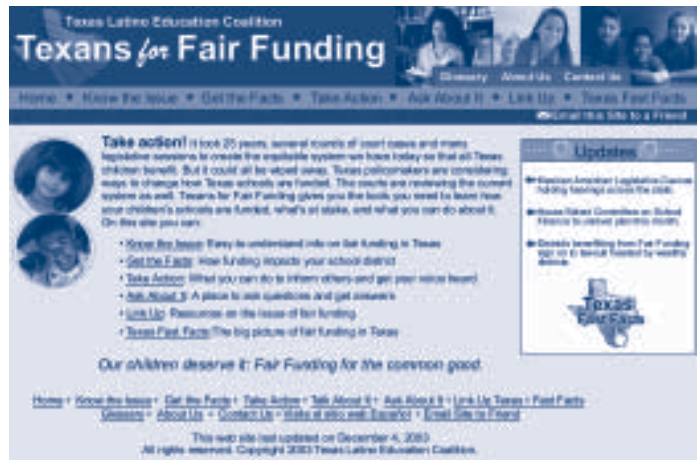
It took 25 years, several rounds of court cases and many legislative sessions to create equity in the Texas system of financing schools. But it could all be wiped away. Texas policymakers are considering ways to change how Texas schools are funded. The courts are reviewing the current system as well.

Visit <http://www.texans4fairfunding.org> to see how your children's schools are funded, what's at stake, and what you can do about it. Texans for Fair Funding is sponsored by the Texas Latino Education Coalition.

This new user-friendly web site includes interactive features like short Flash presentations to describe the Texas school finance system and its equity provisions. Visitors also can get data about individual Texas school districts, like how much state and local funds the district receives and how much could be lost if the current system of fair funding is eliminated.

Americans agree that a child's future should not depend on his or her heritage, parents' income, or neighborhood. Any new plan that is put in place for funding Texas schools must be equitable, otherwise we will go back to the days of massive unequal funding. School personnel, policymakers, members of the community and business leaders all play a role in making sure our tax dollars are used to fund schools fairly. TLEC has created this web site to encourage community action for fair funding for all children.

You can sign-up to receive updates by visiting the Texans for Fair Funding web site at <http://www.texans4fairfunding.org> and selecting "Receive updates by email."



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