“Whether students are in a classroom, a meeting or a public hearing, they must be active participants. The context must presume them to be the intelligent agents they are, capable of contributing important and essential ideas. Our students possess unique insights and powerful gifts!”

— Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO
Focus: Student Voice

(Youths in Action – Intergenerational Leadership, continued from Page 1)

was collected. When elderly folk don’t have the strength or ability to put out large objects for trash collection, the youths do it. And they patrol their neighborhoods to reduce trash and eyesores.

These young people range in ages from 14 to 20, from middle school to college. Their leadership has been demonstrated in their information campaign and their testimony before city, county and federal agencies. And they are currently collecting signatures for a large public meeting where they will provide testimony.

The youths are all ARISE volunteers and, along with their parents, are members of the ARISE South Tower Comunitario PTA. They have learned through this project what ecology means and are now proficient in terms like environmental impact. Science has become very real and comprehensible through this project.

Using an example like this, it would be quite easy for an enterprising science teacher to make connections in the classroom. The teacher could lead students to introduce the elements and the biological processes that cause such a stench; to identify the health hazards that local pollution brings; and to integrate so many other concepts that would otherwise be dull, uninteresting and unintelligible if only presented with a science textbook and a lecture.

These youth know well the pronouncements that are made about them by people who are ill informed. And it is true that these teenagers live in extremely poor neighborhoods. It is also true that they are committed, compassionate young people surrounded by supportive families and a community that is listening.

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is a senior education associate at IDRA. Comments and questions can be directed to him via email aurelio.montemayor@idra.org.

This article was written in part from information given by Lupita Perez, ARISE young staff member and supporter of the youth projects, and Eva Carranza, current and founding president of the ARISE South Tower Comunitario PTA.

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, ©2016) 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 U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.
The Role of Conversation in the Classroom –
Promoting Student Voice through Instructional Dialogue

by Paula Johnson, M.A.

The Challenge
Teachers know it is not enough to be proficient in the subject area they are teaching. They also must have an understanding of pedagogy, or how students learn, particularly across the diverse learning environments we see today. A key strength is the ability to employ instructional strategies that engage students in academic discourse. In order to assess what students are thinking, we have to get them talking. This strategy is instrumental in the development of academic vocabulary for all students, especially English learners.

Thus, there is a call for professional development that guides teachers, and in turn students, in redefining their roles in the development of knowledge (Schoen, et al., 2003). Providing teachers with professional learning in the use of instructional conversations and higher-order questioning is a critical element in laying the foundation for meaningful learning.

The Process
Instructional conversation is a form of a discussion-based lesson that develops students’ conceptual and linguistic skills through guided discourse where all students are held accountable for participation (Goldsmith, 2013). Students engage in scaffolded exchanges with their peers and the instructor to communicate their personal understandings and negotiate meaning of content on various levels. This use of student conversations supports the students’ development of academic language and vocabulary. Teachers seek opportunities to reinforce correct pronunciation, definitions and speech patterns by modeling paraphrases of student responses to guided questions (Echevarría, et al., 2012). These interactions also provide valuable assessment data that reveal errors in reasoning, computation or logic (Vanderhye & Demers, 2007).

Providing students with multiple opportunities to discuss ideas with fellow students promotes peer-supported strategic thinking.

As Johnson, et al., (2013) describe: "Substantive conversations require considerable interaction that is on task and involves higher order thinking processes during the negotiation process (i.e., drawing conclusions, challenging ideas, asking questions). The discussion can have guidance (cont. on Page 4)
Conversation plays a vital role in the modern cycle of instruction. In order for students to begin thinking like scholars, they must be placed in an environment that supports a community of practice that operates according to scholarly behaviors. Professional learning activities for teachers must include strategies that effectively increase engagement, critical thinking, and dialogue as methods of developing student agency.

Providing students with numerous opportunities to contribute to thought-provoking discussions surrounding content increases student participation and willingness to present their ideas related to topics of instruction. Moreover, as teachers improve their capacity for using higher-order questions to guide student discourse, they also are able to more readily perceive student misconceptions and redirect students with questions that allow them to revisit their thinking, dialogue with their peers, and choose a different approach or conclusion (Johnson, et al., 2013).

Student-centered classrooms that employ substantive conversations promote voice, choice and learner identity. In this type of environment, students learn to negotiate meaning through a structure that shifts the responsibility of learning from teachers to the students.

Resources

Paula Johnson, M.A., is an associate at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at paula.johnson@idra.org.

Download our list the seven strategies for instruction of English learners in science
http://budurl.com/IDRA7science

Listen to Substantive Conversation in the Classroom – IDRA Classnotes
http://budurl.com/IDRAPodcast130

Focus: Student Voice

(The Role of Conversation in the Classroom – Promoting Student Voice through Instructional Dialogue, continued from Page 3)
Students Become Leaders in their Community to Support Peers on the Path Toward College

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

A group of about 20 student leaders from the community-based ARISE Las Milpas center have been asking some key questions: Why can’t I take advanced math courses even if I already have taken the minimum required for graduation? What does it cost to attend an out-of-state college? Where are the resources for financial aid? How can we help our parents know about these things?

Carla Judith Reyna, a young adult and coordinator of youth activities at ARISE Las Milpas, has supported this group of middle school and high school students with planning, carrying out activities and recruiting persons who can be resources to them. A sophomore in college, Carla interrupted her college studies to spend a year supporting these activities.

Some of the resource people she recruited were students from their neighborhoods who had college experience. Pedro Nepomuceno (whom IDRA highlighted in our November-December 2015 issue) spoke to the students about the college experience. He has a bachelor’s degree from Texas A&M University and is currently in nursing school at the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio.

The youth leaders come from neighborhoods that have had little if any support in the past for these efforts. The students are breaking ground, ascribing to the #AllMeansAll hashtag. They agree with the goals set by their innovative school district that every high school graduate will already have earned college credit hours while still in high school. Some plan to graduate with an associate’s degree from the local community college.

One of the students, Brandon Márquez, is a sophomore at an early college high school, where he is currently taking a full load in high school along with some dual credit college courses. His Algebra II and World Geography classes are taught in Spanish. His mother co-founded the ARISE Cesar Chavez Comunitario PTA. Brandon began his volunteer work with ARISE in his colonia of Las Milpas when he was 11 years old and had just completed fifth grade.

He and his friends mentored first and second graders. They led reading activities, crafts like making bracelets, and physical games. He considers working with young children and peers an important part of leadership.

Brandon also has served as part of the youth team at his ARISE Las Milpas Center. A few years ago, his team chose to make college preparation a priority. All year, they participated in workshops and retreats to learn more. They organized and co-led meetings where counselors and college students were invited to speak to them and to other members of the community. That year culminated with a field trip to a college campus, where their guides were part of the group of college students who had adopted them as college mentors.

Brandon and his friends are active at their ARISE community center, which is located in a barrio with serious economic challenges but with an abundance of human resources and energy. They volunteer to help older folk, do area clean-up and get involved with the activities planned by the Comunitario PTA. Last year, the Comunitario PTA worked with others in the community, including the Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network, to conduct a survey in their neighborhoods to find out what families knew about graduation requirements and preparation for college. (See Bahena, 2015)

As a follow-up to the survey, Brandon and his peers participated in a Saturday event where students presented to the families about several key educational issues related to high school graduation and college entrance. The students and families were presenters in sessions about dual credit classes and why these were significant.

(Cont. on Page 6)
Focus: Student Voice

(Students Become Leaders in their Community to Support Peers on the Path Toward College, continued from Page 5)

cant; full biliteracy that results in biliteracy honors at graduation; dropout recovery that leads to college enrollment and success; and adult education that is giving their parents opportunities to learn English and continue their education.

Students were the emcees, presenters, guides and participants at this Mini Mesa Comunitaria. Adults helped with planning and preparation, and the students shone as leaders with great verve and assertiveness. Many had never presented at a conference like this, much less to adults. The student voice was powerful, informative, moving and highly motivating to all who attended.

The environment of service and community spirit that ARISE engenders clearly shows in both Carla and Brandon. They are challenging counselors and others who attempt to dissuade their peers from taking advanced courses in math and science. These youth are challenging the stereotypes of their neighborhoods and peers, saying instead, “Yes, we are college material. Yes, we can excel in difficult courses. No, we do not wish to take the easier routes much less drop out.” In doing so, they are serving their vision to earn college degrees and make their families “very proud of our accomplishments.”

From field trips to colleges, to having high school and college counselors give them tips and support, these young people are demonstrating leadership for college preparation and admission.

Resources


Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is a senior education associate at IDRA. Comments and questions can be directed to him via email at aurelio.montemayor@idra.org.

Teenage Voices

On Their Experience in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a research-based, highly successful cross-age tutoring program. With a 98 percent success rate, the program shows what happens when students suddenly feel valued for who they are and for their contributions to others.

“The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has made me a better student after I experienced being a teacher and having to take responsibility and being a role model to my students. I have learned that the way you treat them and talk to them can change the outcome of how the students act toward you and others.”

– Elijah Peña Zamora, Middle School, South San Antonio ISD

“Sometimes I stress because I think I’m not good enough… Sometimes, I would miss a day of school, and my tutees would ask me, ‘Where were you? Why didn’t you come?’ That was the moment I realized that I was a part of their lives and that they missed me. I felt important.”

– Valeria Olvera, Treviño Middle School, La Joya ISD

“My tutees have modified my life in ways that make me feel special and that I truly have a purpose… They were the first ones to notice I got glasses and new shoes. They were the only ones to look into my eyes and know that I was lighthearted on the outside, but inconsolable on the inside. I could truthfully say that they’ve been the only people to make me feel like I have a justification in this world of ours.”

– Faye Galvan, Treviño Middle School, La Joya ISD

“Since I became a tutor for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my life has completely changed, leading me to a good path… There are teachers that look at me differently, and it’s all good.”

– Lourdes Hernandez, NOW Academy, Los Angeles USD

“Becoming a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me be patient and learn how others learn. Tutoring has changed my life because I learned that all the children aren’t the same and that you need to get creative so that everyone can learn and see what you are trying to say.”

– Cassandra de La Garza, Odessa High School

[See video clips about the program at http://budurl.com/IDRAvypVid]
Implementation of New Texas Graduation Requirements Needs Further Study

Ready Texas: Stakeholder Convening Proceedings Report Released

Texas adopted substantial changes to high school curricula in 2013 (under House Bill 5). Policymakers, education and business leaders, families, and students are now faced with the question of how implementation of those changes is impacting the state of college readiness and success in Texas.

Comprehensive research is needed to understand the implications for various student groups and Texas as a whole. Some research and evaluation is already underway; other questions need to be examined.

The Ready Texas: Stakeholder Convening took place February. This convening, led by IDRA and carried out in partnership with UTeach at UT Austin, brought together education, community, policy, foundation, business and philanthropic leaders to discuss the future of post-secondary education in Texas and to provide input on the design of a statewide study of HB5 implementation. The convening was made possible through a grant from Greater Texas Foundation.

Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President & CEO, said: “We must make sure that every student has access to high quality teaching and a quality curriculum that prepares them for post-secondary education. As researchers, we play a critical role by examining policies and practices that contribute to students’ success or failure. Together, the future is in our hands.”

Participants and other stakeholders contributed questions, concerns and recommendations through the pre-convening stakeholder survey, in-person gathering, and follow up evaluation. Their insights were invaluable to understanding what stakeholders most want to know about how the implementation of HB5 is unfolding and what this implies for Texas students and post-secondary preparation, access and success. Their input will inform research on the most important aspects of HB5 and ensuring that we build on existing studies and evaluation.

Dr. Wynn Rosser, Greater Texas Foundation President & CEO, said: “What happens in Texas is important. One in 10 K-12 students in the nation is a Texan. One in 14 first-time-in-college students in the nation is a Texan. We have more kids than some states have total population. So we’re dealing with a scope and a scale that matters.”

In contrast to the new graduation requirements and removal of the more rigorous courses from the standard curriculum, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has established the 60x30TX plan, which serves as the long-range strategic plan for Texas higher education, with the main goal that 60 percent of Texans ages 25 to 34 will have a certificate or degree by 2030. The current figure is 38 percent.

Stakeholders raised key questions about:
• whether and how the implementation of HB5 might impact the overall state of post-secondary preparation in Texas;
• whether school districts have the capacity and resources to provide a full range of rigorous course options – and to offer these options equitably both within and across school districts;
• whether families and students have the information they need to navigate new requirements and opportunities and whether counselors have the resources to support them;
• whether STEM course offerings and course taking are preparing students of all backgrounds for success;
• whether curriculum tracking is an issue or not;
• what we can learn from challenges and best practices; and
• whether Texas graduates will have the preparation they need for the college and career dreams to which they aspire.

Importantly, across sectors, stakeholders seek to assure that students of all backgrounds and in every zip code have access to a curriculum that prepares them to realize their college and career aspirations. They also underscored the importance of further research that informs policy and practice.

The proceedings report released today captures highlights from the project and is available online. The report explores pathways, trends and preparation for the future of Texas; student aspirations; school district and community responses to HB5; Ready Texas survey findings and scan of research; and an overview of stakeholder input.

We look forward to continuing the conversation about curriculum quality and access and about post-secondary readiness and success for Texas students. Access to and success in higher education, in a range of fields, will help drive new innovation, discovery and creative contributions to the economy, our communities and our quality of life.
Focus: Student Voice

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