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ABSTRACT

This theme issue includes four articles that focus on teaching and learning strategies to benefit all students, including limited-English-proficient, minority, economically disadvantaged, and at-risk students. "Would You Read Me a Story?: In Search of Reading Strategies That Work for the Early Childhood Classroom" (Hilaria Bauer) discusses how educators of the very young need to provide linguistically meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning environments to enable children to become literate and biliterate. "Los Regalos del Cuento: Accelerating Biliteracy with FLAIR" (Juanita C. Garcia) describes how IDRA's Project FLAIR improves literacy and reading skills through an integrated program that motivates children to read and write by helping them discover the simple joy of reading. "Questions and Examples for Technology in Schools" (Joseph L. Vigil) answers teachers' common questions about technology and gives examples of technology uses in education. "Ethical and Other Considerations on Theory and Practice in Bilingual Student Teaching Seminars" (Olga G. Rubio) describes how collaborative, reflective practices lend themselves to creating a sense of community among future bilingual educators. Unrelated to the theme, "School Finance Equity and Property Tax Changes" (IDRA Information Update) describes proposals to change the Texas school funding system and presents criteria to assess whether proposals will improve the quality of education, increase equity, and provide property tax relief. "Growing Interest in Dual Language Programs" is a sidebar that describes these programs' aim to develop high levels of student proficiency in first and second languages. (TD)

INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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Would You Read Me a Story?: In Search of Reading Strategies that Work for the Early Childhood Classroom

Hilaria Bauer, M.A.

Inside this Issue:

In his latest State of the Union Address, President Clinton proclaimed, "Every child in America should be able to read by third grade." The statement was an echo of statements he made throughout his 1996 electoral campaign. Other officials have issued similar decrees such as, "All kindergarten students should be able to read by the end of the school year." Nowadays, it seems that whoever wants to obtain public approval and support has to demonstrate that he or she holds high education expectations for all children. Yet is it enough to provide a deadline for when students must be able to read in order for this to happen? Those who have taught children to read at many different levels know that it requires more.

Some of the responses to these proclamations have included school restructuring, implementation of more technology, and public service announcements using popular television figures to promote reading, staying in school and academic achievement. School districts have turned to the business world for ideas about setting goals, embracing a unified philosophy and developing mission statements. Teams of educators, parents and community representatives gather together periodically to revise these established goals, philosophies and mission statements in order to ensure that a solid education is imparted within their district or campus. However, many children are still not reading, and many teachers and parents are still frustrated.

After some analysis, it is apparent that even the best-intended resolutions do not hold their weight in practice. Thus, if we believe certain educational maxims, we must implement practices that correlate with our philosophical views regarding education.

One of the most popular phrases included in these views is, "All children will start school ready to learn." This phrase has become synonymous with positive attitudes and "good" teaching. Assuming that "all children should be ready to learn," many schools have converted pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms into junior versions of first and second grade. Many parents have embraced the idea by pushing their children to learn to read as early as possible in order to be "ready" for school. The emphasis on academic skills such as identifying letters and knowing how to count before starting school has prompted many to believe that those children who are not able to perform those "readiness" skills are not guaranteed success in their educational experience (McCollum, 1994).

Consequently, this notion has prompted a movement led by those who believe that readiness can be measured. According to Elizabeth Graue, readiness has often been conceptualized in the literature and policy arena as a characteristic of a child that must be assessed to determine whether that child can benefit from certain school experiences (1992). Thus, those who are not able to perform within certain levels in readiness metrics need remediation and are deemed unready (McCollum, 1994). So, in practice, schools say that, "All of those children who are ready to learn can learn." The implication is that the other children need remediation. But do they really?

In my experience as a teacher, I have found that all children *can* learn, and all children *do* learn. Some children learn about

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IN THIS ISSUE

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, copyright ©1997) 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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the wonderful world around them, about how smart they are, and about adults who guide them in their inquiries and interests. Other children learn that there is something wrong with them. They learn that school is not ready for them. They experience school as a foreign place, where they feel alienated and uncomfortable. Some children learn very early that they need to be pulled away from the rest of the class because they are unable to identify this letter or that number. I have always been fascinated by young students who tell me they are in tutoring because they "still don't know the letters." They know exactly what it is they cannot identify.

Children construct meaning from their experiences. The work of Piaget and Vygotsky posits that development occurs as a result of the child constructing meanings through interaction with the environment (McCollum, 1994). Children learn what they experience.

In the area of literacy, successful programs have proven that children who experience reading and writing become literate (Beach, 1996). Learning to read and write does not seem to be an issue of whether the child is ready or not. Some of the students I taught in first grade who tested low in readiness metrics were able to pick up reading and writing as they experienced these activities in class. One of the girls who could not memorize the alphabet told me that to her reading was like putting a puzzle together. Once she was able to figure out the clues, she was one of the better readers and writers in the class.

When children are given the opportunity to experience literacy activities in the classroom, they learn that language is represented on many levels. Children who read and write in pairs or small groups realize that "breaking the code" requires creativity and persistence.

What kind of program prepares children for literacy activities? A developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten and kindergarten program does this. In such a class, students interact with each other. They ask

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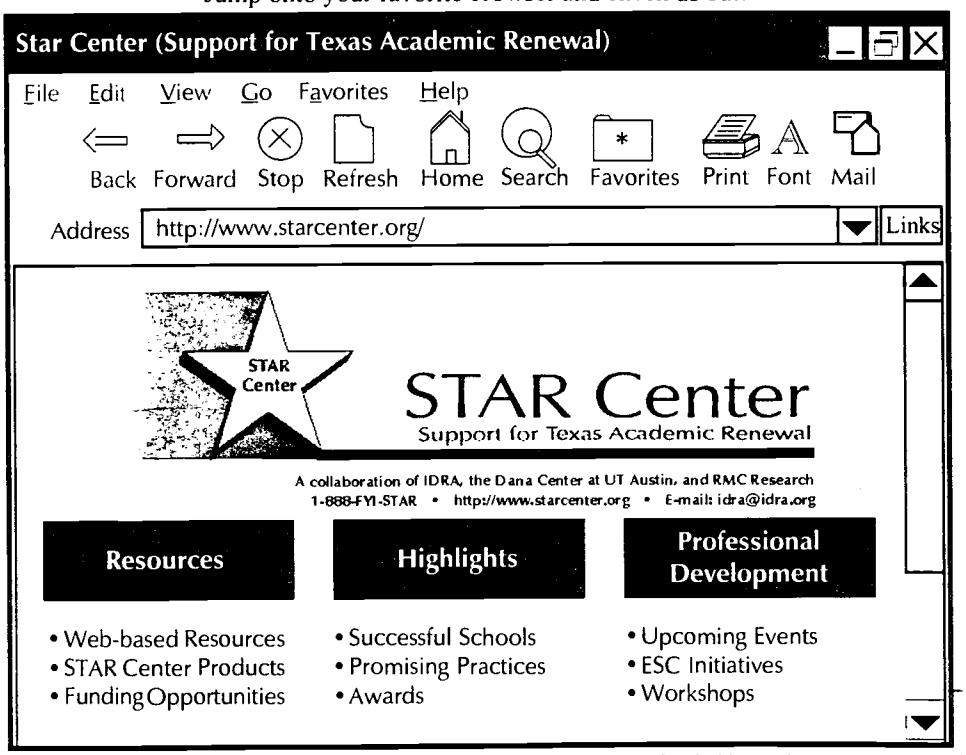
VISIT THE STAR CENTER VIA THE INTERNET

The STAR Center is pleased to announce its new World Wide Web site:
http://www.starcenter.org
TENET users can access this site from the TENET banner.
Here you'll find STAR Center resources, articles, research results, policy alerts, conference information, and a convenient directory of links to other sites.
Jump onto your favorite browser and check us out!



The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas.

Los Regalos del Cuento:
Accelerating Biliteracy with FLAIR

Juanita C. García, M.A.

Recently I taught some reading lessons to a group of Hispanic and African American students at an elementary school located in an impoverished neighborhood in Dallas. This opportunity reinforced my love for teaching.

Through IDRA's Project FLAIR (Focusing on Language and Academic Instructional Renewal), I was able to share my knowledge and enthusiasm for children's literature with a task force of teachers, their students and the school librarian in hopes that they would share my excitement for books that capture children's hearts. As educators we are so concerned with teaching the skills of reading that we sometimes forget to help children discover the simple joy of reading (Hack, Hepler and Hickman, 1987).

Project FLAIR's goal is to increase cognitive growth and academic achievement for all students, including language minority students, through an intensive *language across the curriculum* program. Frequent story time during the day provides students with opportunities to hear the rich and varied language of literature and to respond to these stories from their world, their surroundings and what they know. The best bilingual children's literature is the springboard for creative reading and writing. Inspired by trade books with visually captivating illustrations and thought provoking engaging stories, the students unleash their creativity and walk in the shoes of book characters (Green and García, 1997a).

At IDRA, we believe that students learn to read by reading and learn to write by writing. Research shows that children need extensive practice with authentic reading and writing tasks if they are to become fluent, confident users of both their first and second languages. Therefore, motivating students to read and write is critical to their success.

I worked with a participating campus, an inner city elementary school, to analyze and evaluate its instructional program and to determine how well it reflects the best practices recommended for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The task force of committed teachers and an enthusiastic librarian developed annual goals and objectives designed to improve language minority student achievement. They then selected a set of instructional strategies for monthly training on that campus. The strategies the teachers are being trained to implement are based on the latest research in the fields of bilingual/English as a second language (ESL) education and language arts education.

As educators we are so concerned with teaching the skills of reading that we sometimes forget to help children discover the simple joy of reading.

Armed with a collection of developmentally appropriate trade books in Spanish and English, I demonstrated cooperative structures for language arts lessons that foster positive interdependence, ensure individual accountability, promote equal participation and increase simultaneous interaction. The activities are designed to prepare students for a text (the *into* phase), guide them through it (the *through* phase), and extend it into creative writing, the visual and dramatic arts and all the content areas including math, science and social studies (the *beyond* phase) (Green and García, 1997b).

The teachers choose from a variety of high-quality trade books enthusiastically acquired by the librarian for the school's collection, and they replicate the strategies and techniques demonstrated in the classroom.

To me the most pleasurable part of the project is working with the children and sharing the magic and joy a story can bring. The following is a description of two lessons, one in a primary classroom and the other in an intermediate classroom, that illustrate how language minority students can beengaged in reading.

"What would you do if you woke up and found a bear using your toothbrush?" I asked a spirited group of first graders as I prepared them for a story about two greedy bear cubs that were so greedy they would try to outdo each other in everything including how much water each could drink, until a fox outsmarted them with a piece of cheese and taught them both a lesson.

"I'd go back to bed!" exclaimed one student.

"I'd break his teeth!" declared another.

"What toy would you share with your friend, the bear?" I asked as I held a stuffed bear cub.

"My Barbie," announced a green-eyed Margarita.

"My fast car!" claimed one of the many precocious boys.

The children were having fun mixing around the room to music and finding a partner to discuss their answers with. They did an outstanding job in following directions and participating. I could see their bright, happy faces eager to continue.

The lesson then moved to another *into* text strategy: *anticipation and reaction*. This is an excellent way to activate students' thoughts and opinions about a subject that will be studied or a story that will be read. The strategy attempts to enhance students' comprehension by having them react to a series of carefully held beliefs. This is a motivational technique to get students involved. The curiosity that is aroused can only be resolved by reading the text. The reaction part of the guide is revisited after reading to validate their pre-reading stance (Williams and Whisler, 1990).

"A fox is smarter than a bear," I said. Half the students reacted with a thumbs up for agreement and the other half with a thumbs down for not agreeing. Each is given an opportunity to participate and share their beliefs.

"Drinking a lot of water causes your tummy to ache," I said. Almost all the class went thumbs down on this one.

"No! How can water cause your stomach to hurt?" was the comment I heard the most. Puppets, creative dramatics and role play were used to get the written and oral message of the statement across to the children.

"Bears like to eat cheese," was another anticipation and reaction statement. All thumbs went down.

"Bears like to eat honey!" declared a pair of witty boys. By this time I knew I had captured their emotions and they were ready

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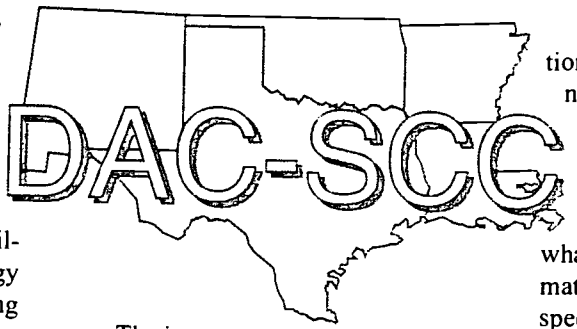
QUESTIONS AND EXAMPLES FOR TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Joseph L. Vigil, M.S.

School administrators, educators, parents, prospective employers and students are seeing the need and importance of technology. This new vision has made the subject of technology the main focus of various conferences across the nation. In Washington, D.C., earlier this year, the National Forum for Migrant Children and Youth integrated the technology issue as participants examined issues facing migrant families and suggested steps to improve their quality of education. The event's sponsor, the Interstate Migrant Education Council (IMEC), wants equal access to technology for migrant students and sufficient training for teachers and parents in technology in order to ensure the effective integration of technology into migrant students' learning.

As we enter the 21st century, the knowledge of technology will be a key to success for our students. They will need exposure to technology – even in fields that are outside the traditional office. For example, an occupation in mechanics will require the use of computers to troubleshoot automotive problems and to work with many of the new car models. Employers are asking schools to ensure that students learn how to communicate and work together more efficiently, appreciate and understanding technology, and be able to apply technology to solve problems or produce products.



The importance of technology learning is evident, but schools attempting to fulfill this need are finding barriers. Technology is more accessible in some schools than in others. Rural schools and schools with high minority populations typically have little access to technology tools. We must continue to foster an understanding of the importance of technology learning, and we must ensure that all of today's children are provided with the tools they need for tomorrow's successes in their education and careers.

Frequently Asked Questions About Technology in Schools

As I participated in the IMEC conference, I heard several questions that have been asked in other settings as well. Below are a few with some answers.

Will technology and the use of computers in my classroom enhance my teaching?

Technology and computers are additional tools available to teachers. The way new technology is integrated into the existing curriculum to enhance student learning is the key. Teachers who have been successful with integrating technology into their instruction look at what they are trying to teach the students and match the appropriate technology to that specific discipline. These successful teachers also have a good mentor support structure in place to see how other educators have used technology within their content area.

What if my students who know more about computers realize that I am not computer literate?

This is a great opportunity for teachers to learn from students. Students enjoy and gain self-esteem when they feel that they are the experts in an area. Students can serve as teachers for the teacher and other students, empowering students who may normally be shy and not engaged in learning.

I am a rural teacher with only one computer in my classroom. How can I compete with urban schools that have entire computer labs?

Do not try to compete. Make do with what you are actually fortunate to have. There are many classrooms with only one computer. Be creative with how you use the computer and circulate students in groups to use the computer, much like you would move groups of students through learning centers. A lot of work and thought can be done by students before they actually get to the computer station. For example, students can brainstorm their searching strategies before they get on-line. Once information is obtained, files and data can be downloaded and evaluated by students at their desks. (A great reference for teachers who have only one computer in the classroom is *Great Teaching in the One-Computer Classroom*, by David A. Dockterman)

Also, technology does not just include computers but also calculators, science and chemistry equipment, tape recorders, overhead projectors and even chalkboards. These forms of technology can be taken out of drawers and closets and be used by students to enhance their learning and experiences.

I am a teacher from a rural school

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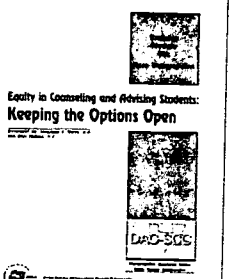
DESEGREGATION ASSISTANCE MODULE AVAILABLE

Equity in Counseling and Advising Students: Keeping the Options Open

by Josephine F. Garza, M.A., and Alva E. McNeal, M.A.



This training module is designed for trainers to assist classroom teachers and school administrators. It provides cross-cultural counseling practices that can be used when working with culturally diverse populations. Use this tool to help participants become familiar with counseling roles that promote equity in a multicultural society. Participants can also review strategies for cross-cultural counseling by applying them to situations that will maximize effectiveness when working with culturally diverse populations. This 40-page module comes with session outlines, a pre/post test, and handout and transparency masters (ISBN 1-878550-40-3; 1997 Second Edition; $8.50).

Available from IDRA at 5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190; 210/684-8180; fax 210/684-5389; E-mail: idra@idra.org.

GROWING INTEREST IN DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

In the last decade there has been a growing interest among schools across the country in bilingual education programs known as *dual language* programs. In Texas, the trend has been particularly strong during the last five years due to support from the federal government and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). According to a directory of dual language programs compiled by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, there are at least 38 schools in the state that currently have dual language programs and another 16 schools that have programs in the planning phase.

Two-way programs are full-time dual language programs that use two languages, one of which is English, for instruction. Ideally, these programs are composed of elementary or secondary students, half of whom are native speakers of English, the other half of whom are native speakers of the other language of instruction. Subject matter is learned through both the native and second languages, enabling students to become proficient in a second language and continue developing skills and proficiency in their native language.

The two-way model is designed for students to develop high levels of proficiency in their first language and in a second language, for academic performance to be at or above grade level in both languages, and for students to have high levels of self-esteem and positive cross-cultural attitudes.

To help each other implement or create dual language programs, many school representatives have participated in networking conferences that have been held each year since 1994. The most recent of these conferences was held in December 1996 and was sponsored by the STAR Center, the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas. More than 200 teachers, program administrators, technical assistance providers, teacher educators, parents and community members gathered together to expand their expertise on dual language programs. They discussed how two-way developmental bilingual education programs work, theoretical and practical considerations of 50-50 and 90-10 program models, and state and federal support for developmental bilingual education programs.

The keynote was given by Dr. Felipe Alanis, TEA deputy commissioner. Other presenters were Dr. María Seidner of the Texas Education Agency, Dr. Olga Rubio of Columbia University, Dr. María Quezada of California State University at Long Beach and Mary Cazabon of Cambridge (Mass.) public schools.

The response was so positive that another networking conference is being held this month in Houston. Delia Pompa, director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, and Dr. María Seidner are presenting along with Dr. Virginia Collier of George Mason University, Rosa Molina of San Jose Unified School District and Dr. Howard Smith of the University of Texas in San Antonio. This conference is co-sponsored by the Houston Independent School District, the Texas Education Agency, the STAR Center at IDRA and IDRA's Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative.

A third conference will be held in El Paso on May 31, hosted by the Ysleta Independent School District.

The STAR Center is supporting bilingual education programs, particularly two-way programs, by providing technical assistance in program design and instructional strategies training. The STAR Center is also helping them implement programs within schoolwide campuses, coordinate funds and programs, enhance family and community involvement, and address standards and assessment. For more information, call the STAR Center toll-free at 1-888-FYI-STAR or visit the center's Internet web site at "www.starcenter.org" (see page 2). The STAR Center is a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation.

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who wants to be able to have access to new technology including computers for my students. What can I do to ensure that our school does not get left behind?

Administrative support is necessary for a school to acquire new technology including computers for instructional use. Principals and even superintendents often need to be persuaded that technology and computers are needed in order to provide quality instruction and experience for students. Administrators then must find a way to purchase the equipment needed. Partnering with local businesses is one example of how many districts are able to fund such an endeavor. Partnerships with NASA and others have also been used to supply equipment to schools that agree to participate in certain projects including weather studies. Initiatives such as *Netday '97* have helped schools organize a day when systems and Internet access are installed in schools by community volunteers.

Are schools required to provide access to technology to their students?

Long ago, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the lack of equity in teaching tools in schools and stated in *Green County vs. School Board of New Kent County, Virginia,* that school districts must *actively work* toward desegregation in *every facet of school operation* – racial composition, faculty, staff transportation, extracurricular activities and facilities. These have become known as the *Green Factors*. Since 1968, these six factors have been used by the federal courts as a basis for determining the degree to which equal educational opportunity and "unitariness" exists in a district under review by the court (IDRA, 1996).

Examples of Technology Use

Students should be encouraged to use technology as a multipurpose tool for communication and creative expression. The Internet is a great example of how students can improve their English and have an appreciation of their own culture while sharing ideas with students from other parts of the world. Schools can have a world wide web page created by students for their school that reflects the creativity and multicultural diversity found in their school. This enables students to learn to appreciate other cultures while appreciating their own.

One district in San Antonio has technology included in its portrait of what a graduate should know. The district's statement under technology reads, "Our graduates will effectively utilize today's technologies and adapt that knowledge to future

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REFLECTIONS

Dr. Olga G. Rubio

ETHICAL AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON THEORY AND PRACTICE IN BILINGUAL STUDENT TEACHING SEMINARS

For the past four years I have been preparing bilingual teachers in graduate studies at Teachers College, Columbia University, both at the masters and the doctoral levels. It is timely for me to talk about my own journey in the field and to discuss ethical and other considerations that emerged for me as I coordinated bilingual student teaching seminars. Working with an increasing number of teachers who have no professional teaching experience, I realized the need for explaining theories of cooperative learning and community building in my seminars. I then wondered how we could ask student teachers to create a community of learners through using cooperative learning styles without first creating a sense of community among bilingual student teachers in our own seminars.

Dual language programs incorporate a network of educators who share a common philosophy of socializing academically competent biliterate and bilingual children. The goals of successful dual language programs call for the concurrent development of a child's native language and English for at least five years or through middle school. It is critical, however, that teachers plan collaboratively or in grade-level clusters. Sharing a vision of the ideal bilingual and biliterate classroom subsequently involves preparation and planning. This became a priority for me in preparing future teachers.

In trying to create a vision of the ideal classroom and a sense of community in student teaching seminars, I decided to share my own journey in bilingual education with my students. Sharing my own experiences provided a social and historical context for all other discussions on bilingual classroom teaching. Identifying myself as a member of the network also provided the grounding for future applications of cooperative learning styles and community building. Students were asked to write and talk about their own philosophies on promoting academic biliteracy and bilingualism. As a reflective practitioner, I wondered if I could expect student teachers to reflect on their own social, political and cultural selves, to record and interpret those reflections, and subsequently to apply those observations to their classroom practice if I, myself, did not also reflect and interpret my own teaching practices. Certainly not, I decided.

Community building calls for reciprocity between the facilitator/teacher and the learner/student. Thus, these reflections on my development as a bilingual teacher sparked other conversations concerning the significance of assessing and planning for the range of linguistic proficiency in bilingual children. Later, students witnessed how reflecting on their own cultural understandings prepared them to observe and listen to their own students authentically.

Culturally responsive education remains mere theory unless we systematically include our own cultural experiences and those of our students at the core level of curricular planning. Reflecting on cultural contexts that shape classroom behaviors permits the bilingual teacher to see and discuss relationships between observations of students' languages, beliefs and views to their own methods of teaching. What role can reflections play in teaching children to be bilingual and biliterate in two languages? How can journals and diaries empower a bilingual teacher?

Critical pedagogy, as first suggested by Freire (1972) and later reinterpreted by other scholars, seemed important in getting our students to interpret everyday language and behaviors. Moreover, these ponderings enabled an examination of the role of power and status in daily interactions. The charge of reflective/critical pedagogical practices by using anthropological tools, such as diaries or journals, is that it allows us to "make the familiar strange" (Erickson, 1989). To deconstruct one's own social class, gender and ethnic values seems central to those of us who argue that universities and colleges must resonate and reflect the culture of the communities that surround the schools. Now more than ever teachers are challenged to track their own experiences and empower themselves with literature that enriches their consciousness and informs them and their students about the multi-ethnic lives of others. Through journals and interactive processes we can accomplish some of these goals.

From Civil Rights to Multiculturalism

Historical context was another consideration in grappling with the need to establish a common ground in the student teaching seminar. And how do historical events shape the lives of educators today? When I flash back to the 1960s, I remember how I first heard about bilingual education at a "speaker's corner" at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas, in 1967-1968. Victor Nelson-Cisneros, now an associate dean at Colorado College in Boulder Springs, passionately deliberated on how Mexicanos/Chicanos in South Texas had always been penalized for being "Mexicanos/Chicanos" and for speaking Spanish first, English second. He argued that by not having educational access to Spanish or a written history that accurately portrayed Mexicanos in the Southwest, we could never really claim a genuine education – or as I see it *"ser bien educados"* [to be well educated in the cultural sense].

These messages, heard as an undergraduate, fueled a passion in me that until then was outside my level of consciousness. Not until the option was presented in the context of a range of possibilities, did empowerment begin for me as a young Chicana. Growing up as a Spanish speaker in the Rio Grande Valley, I knew the power of communicating with my parents, grandparents and relatives from Mexico. So I set out to participate in the new world that we were constructing. When I initiated my teaching career in 1969 in San Antonio, I was

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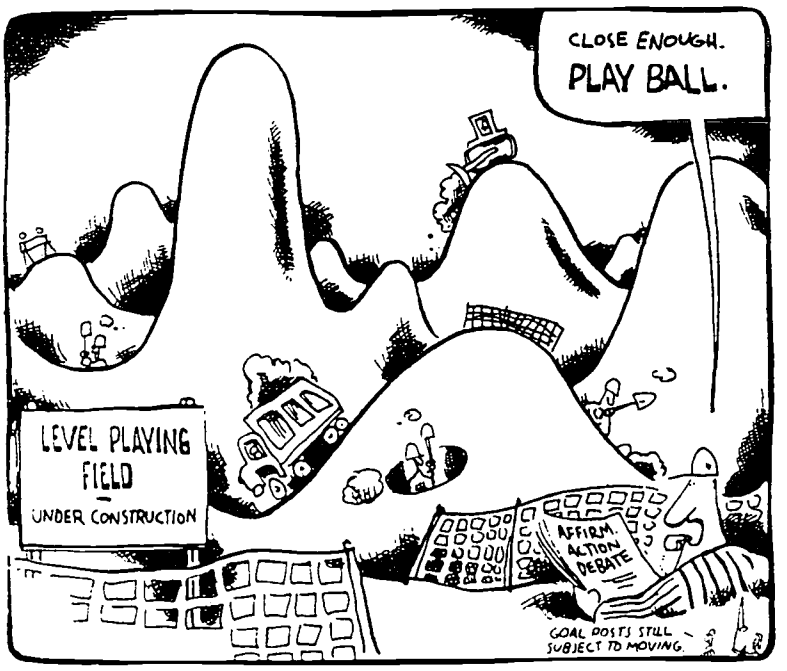
motivated by a mission that having two languages was an asset, that all Mexicanos should have a right to maintain Spanish and English, and more importantly, that it was our right to maintain and develop bilingualism.

The historical and political realities of our students are different. How do we get student teachers to connect with the past? Twenty-seven years later, I found myself expanding my earlier *language as a right* policy perspective to a policy that views *language as a resource*. That means that if I truly accepted bilingualism and multiculturalism as a way of fostering a more participatory democratic society, then it followed that monolinguals should also have the opportunity to become bilingual. I found myself preparing young bilingual teachers, some of whom were ethnic members of their own target groups and some who were not. Yet these students are living during the most socially, politically conservative period in the history of this country. Most have not been part of a civil rights movement, or a *"a causa."* They are second or third generation students, who may come from lower-middle or middle-class backgrounds. More importantly, today's society values individualism more than ever. Students tend to be products of an individualistic-competitive environment where collaboration and cooperative learning styles must be fostered (Rubio, Rodríguez, Márquez-López and Goodwin, work in progress).



Collaboration and Community Building in Teacher Education Seminars

The old adage that there is no good theory in education that is not also good practice, is a fitting concept for today's educational needs. No matter how significant the scholarship on language and educational policies and practices, it is only through reflective methods, such as those suggested by Freire (1972), Schon (1987), Moll and Vélez-Ibañez (1990), Pérez and Torres-Guzman (1996), Rubio, Rodríguez, Márquez-López and Goodwin (work in progress) and others that we can remain focused and rigorous in promoting academic biliteracy and bilingualism. The younger graduate students enrolled in many of our classes are products of the information age with realities that contrast sharply to many of us who are "baby boomers." But, young graduate students require that their trainers also be reflective in their practices. To train reflective leaders, we must explicitly discuss our observations and interpretations of daily praxis. We must engage in case studies of our own teaching practices and in collaboration with colleagues. As reflective practitioners, we must also remain committed to asking all the pertinent questions about fostering excellent teaching practices for first and second language learners. We must talk about those methods and approaches that do not work openly and challenge ourselves to be thoughtful in the ways of constructively criticizing ourselves.

In my student teaching seminars, I use reflective journals and engaging projects to enable students to collaborate with each other and to empower themselves, to learn from bilingual children and to actively listen to each other in the analysis of their reports. These interactive tasks appear to nourish the goal of fostering a sense of community in the student teaching seminar.

Finally, I believe that what is different for me now as an academic is that I understand that collaborative, reflective practices lend themselves to create a sense of community among future bilingual educators. If we want reflective-critical thinking bilingual teachers, faculty must also collaborate in creating a strong community of bilingual teacher leaders.

Resources

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School Finance Equity and Property Tax Changes

In a recent announcement, Texas Gov. George Bush unveiled a proposal to reduce local school property taxes and to replace the lost revenue with an increase in sales taxes, motor vehicle fees and a new business tax. The heart of the property tax reduction proposal calls for all of the following:

- Increase the homestead exemption (the portion of the value of a home that can be exempted from local school property taxes) from the current level of $5,000 to $25,000.
- Require all school districts to reduce their local property tax rates by 20 cents (i.e., a district with a tax rate of $1.20 per $100 of property value would cut taxes to $1.00).
- Exempt business inventories from local school taxes.
- Increase state taxes to replace property tax cuts.

Many educator groups have expressed serious concerns about the real effects of such tax changes. One major reservation is whether using billions of dollars in new state funding to merely maintain the status quo is the best way to allocate limited state resources.

A second concern raised by school groups focuses on the proposed very restrictive limits on future taxes that might prevent individual districts from addressing things like large increases in enrollment or unforeseen future needs.

There is a related proposal that has been drafted by representatives of the state's wealthiest districts regarding the state recapture provision. *Recapture* refers to the provision of the Texas school finance system that was created in 1993 in response to court rulings that found the system inequitable and, thus, unconstitutional. Currently, property wealth in the state's wealthiest districts is used to help support educational equity across the whole system.

Though often mischaracterized, the recapture provision was not highly popular. The 73rd Texas Legislature explored many other alternatives and examined numerous formulas, and it concluded that the use of the recaptured funds was the best option available to neutralize the great differences in revenue-raising capabilities found among Texas school districts.

Before recapture, some property wealthy districts were able to generate thousands of dollars from local property tax bases with a very low tax effort. Many low wealth districts had high tax rates that still generated less money. Recapture provided a cost effective way to neutralize these wealth and related revenue differences.

A second benefit of recapture was that it allowed the state to tap into all of the property wealth of the state, particularly wealth concentrated in a few school systems and thus available to only a handful of children fortunate enough to live in the state's wealthiest school districts. While an estimated 92 districts contribute to the recapture fund, more than 950 other districts receive money from the fund. In other words, 5 percent of the students in the state get less money because of recapture, while 95 percent of all students benefit from what is provided.

The latest proposal calls for eliminating, or substantially reducing, this pool of money from districts and replacing it with other state money. But if the state eliminates the recapture provision, it will have to create a new mechanism to ensure that the inequalities in local district tax bases do not cause the gross differences in revenues that caused the system to be declared unconstitutional in the first place.

Other proposals that have been mentioned in policy deliberations include:

- increasing the basic allotment, which is the fundamental building block of the Texas public school funding system;
- changing the manner in which compensatory, bilingual education, gifted and talented programs, and migrant education programs are funded;
- modifying the state's funding formula to increase the yield acquired from each cent of tax effort; and
- altering funding levels for transportation allotments.

Lost, so far, in the public discussion of these proposals is the fundamental goal of excellent education for *all* children in Texas. From an equity perspective, IDRA recommends that all proposed school finance and property tax policy changes be evaluated on the basis of the following guiding principles:

- **The changes should have a *positive* impact on the level of school finance equity created by the existing funding system.**
- **School property tax changes should recognize and make provisions for current and historical above-average tax rates and districts' property wealth per pupil.**
- **Alternative tax measures need to be more progressive than the current school property tax approach (i.e., do not require lower income families to pay out a higher percentage of their income).**
- **Alternative tax measures must be as stable a revenue source for education as are local property taxes.**
- **Proposed changes in special program weights should not diminish the resources available to educate students and adequately address each of their unique characteristics.**
- **Some provision must be made for state participation in facilities funding. Such a provision should make a separate allocation for facilities, rather than forcing school districts to choose between using Tier II funding for programs or for facilities.**

While we do not intend for this list to be all inclusive, it does include some of the key criteria that many of us will use to guide an assessment of the adequacy of the various alternatives being considered.

Is it possible to improve the quality of education for all students, increase equity and provide property tax relief? Yes, it is possible, but the plan must be carefully crafted and extensively analyzed by all interested parties.

Before tinkering with what is a very delicately balanced school funding system – or fixing what may not be broken in the property tax area – Texas should question whether the proposed "solutions" really address all of the problems or whether they create new problems that may be much harder and more expensive to fix later.

This information update was distributed to policy makers focusing on this issue last month. Additional updates will be provided in the IDRA Newsletter. *For more information, contact IDRA by phone at 210/684-8180 or by E-mail at idra@idra.org.*

IDRA Workshop On Workshops (WOW)

June 3-4, 1997
San Antonio, Texas
$150 plus $50 for meals

This two-day experience spurs participants to become **more effective presenters**. The workshop uses an experience-based model that has practical application for you in your job. Current, research-based principles provide a context for participants to collaborate in creating informative, practical and engaging presentations. The *WOW* is **highly participatory** and directly addresses participants' needs and challenges. During the *WOW*, participants will:

- ✓ Experience a **complete process** for planning and conducting workshops.
- ✓ Review **principles of adult learning**.
- ✓ Contrast **needs assessment** approaches.
- ✓ Write and refine workshop **objectives**.
- ✓ Design innovative **activities**.
- ✓ Practice and **expand facilitation skills**.
- ✓ **Network** with other professionals.

The *WOW* is facilitated by Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., lead trainer in IDRA's Division of Professional Development and creator of the highly popular *WOW*. With more than 25 years of professional training experience, he can teach your staff or group the techniques every trainer needs to conduct meaningful workshops!

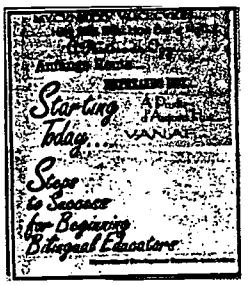
The cost is $150 per participant. This includes all training materials and personalized instruction, plus a copy of the *WOW Workbook* (a $25 value). Designed for people who are responsible for conducting training and workshops, the *WOW* is particularly useful for participants who bring workshop titles and materials that they want to work on.

To schedule a WOW *for your group, call Rogelio López del Bosque or Aurelio Montemayor, 210/684-8180.*

An IDRA Best Seller!

Starting Today . . .

Steps to Success for Beginning Bilingual Educators



What's Included ...

For far too long, school districts have allowed new teachers to "sink or swim" during their first year of teaching. This manual was developed to prevent new bilingual teachers from "sinking" during the stressful first year in what can be a most rewarding profession. *Starting Today* provides *concise information* on topics relevant to the bilingual classroom. Each section provides information that you will need at your fingertips during your first days, weeks and months in the classroom.

- ✓ **130-page practical guide with vital information that new bilingual classroom teachers need to become effective teachers.**
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Technology in Schools - continued from page 5

applications for the enhancement of human capabilities and quality of life." The goals are that each student will do the following:

- understand the ethical role and impact of technology upon society,
- accept the responsibilities associated with living in this technologically oriented information age,
- identify when and how to use technology to solve a problem or produce a product, and
- use technology as a multipurpose tool for communication and creative expression.

In another example, technology can be used effectively as a teaching tool when working with monolingual students. Through its Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative, IDRA is working with a middle school in Houston to provide consultation on integrating technology in instruction to enhance student learning for all children. Bosnian students arriving at the middle school were having trouble learning about geometric shapes in their math class. The computer helped by providing the students with three-dimensional drawings of the geometric shapes and allowed the students to construct these shapes themselves. The computer served as a universal approach to teaching math, and all students benefited from the computer's applications. The instructor was so pleased with the results of using the computer in his newcomer's classroom that he wants to integrate the computers in other subjects as well.

The new millennium is quickly approaching. All students need exposure to technology in their education in order to succeed in education and in the workplace. Some earlier articles to reference in the *IDRA Newsletter* include:

- "Teachers and Instructional Technology: Wise or Foolish Choices" by Dr. Laura Chris Green (November-December 1995).
- "Technology, Teachers and Early Childhood" by Aurora Yáñez-Pérez (April 1996).
- "Content in Context: Technology That Makes Sense in Education" by Dr. Felix Montes (June-July 1996).

There are also resources, tips and case studies that are available via the Internet. Visit IDRA's world wide web site at idra@idra.org.

All students – including migrant, limited-English-proficient, and English as a second language students – will benefit greatly from the appropriate integration of technology into the curriculum.

Resources

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HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IDRA ACTIVITIES

In February, IDRA worked with **4,831** teachers, administrators and parents through **74** training and technical assistance activities and **103** program sites in **nine** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

- Tax Reform and Public School Finance
- Mentor Training
- Standards-based Reform and Parent Involvement
- Gender and Race Equity for Math and Science
- Communicating with Parents
- Dual Language Education Study Group

Activity Snapshot

The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas by providing support and technical assistance services to the Texas Education Agency, regional service centers and local school districts in the state. The STAR Center uses six general approaches to the delivery of technical assistance services such as conducting interactive videoconferences that reach a wide audience of educators and parents, including all 20 education service centers and school districts in Texas. For example, the one-hour videoconference, "Perspectives of Successful School Wide Campus Math and Science Programs," provides tips for elementary and secondary teachers on making math and science "real" and exciting for students. The STAR Center is a collaboration of IDRA, the Dana Center and RMC Research.

Participating agencies and school districts include:

- South San ISD, Texas
- La Joya ISD, Texas
- Mexican American Legislative Caucus, Texas
- Oklahoma City Public Schools
- New Orleans Parish
- Dallas ISD, Texas

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 210/684-8180.

Would You Read - continued from page 2

questions, negotiate meaning and solve their own problems. Consider children involved in dramatic play. They create their own plot, develop their own characters and find their own predictable solutions. All of those behaviors are the foundations of understanding reading. Kindergarten students who are allowed to write in any kind of media begin to understand that language can be represented graphically. Another clever student of mine said the following on the first day of first grade: "I'm so glad now I'm going to learn to write with words, drawing pictures takes too long." I wonder if this is how humankind transformed from using pictures to using hieroglyphics and then letters.

This young student had made a very powerful connection: Words reflect the real world and they serve a practical purpose. The context created in the classroom allows students to experience a high degree of *literacy activity*, enabling children to utilize language for many different purposes.

Different types of environments lead to different ideas of what it means to be literate (Dahl and Freppon, 1995). Children who experience literacy activities take on the tasks of reading and writing as they relate to their own purposes, connecting them with their personal experiences. On the other hand, some classrooms are centered on literacy skills, where the emphasis is placed on children learning to use the conventions of spelling, word recognition and mechanics. I have seen whole hallways plastered with papers that show the same grammatically correct, properly punctuated sentence in all of the 20 proudly displayed papers. Yet, when these students are asked to give their version of the story in their own words, they cannot.

Researchers Dahl and Freppon found that children are more motivated to engage in literacy activity experiences than in literacy skills (1995). Classrooms that provide opportunities for literacy activities allow children to learn not only to express their thoughts and interests, but also to acquire the conventions of language usage by focusing on children's interests as they read and write.

I overheard the following comment in a second grade class while peer tutoring was going on: "You can't write that because it doesn't make sense. Try to write your sentence more clearer." And, yes the young man said "more clearer." These two children were experiencing the art of writing. Children need to experience linguistic rules in a meaningful way.

The key to creating an environment conducive to the acquisition of literacy is to design a classroom that is not only rich in print, but that also provides children with the opportunity to interact and use language in a meaningful way. A print-rich environment should include object labels, pictures, language experience charts, posters, signs, thematic displays, literature selections and other opportunities for children to interact with print on their own terms (Penny-Velázquez, 1994).

An environment conducive to literacy experiences is designed to provide meaningful reading and writing activities that appeal to the interests of the students. Children are allowed to read and write on their own terms at first and then are guided through developmentally appropriate tasks to identify the conventions of written language.

All children can learn, and all children do learn. As educators of the very young, we need to provide the environments that enable children to become literate and biliterate. Providing linguistically meaningful and developmentally appropriate activities for all young children will ensure high literacy levels for all children without monitoring a cut-off date.

IDRA executive director María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D., and two Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program participants read together at the introduction of the program's expansion into four schools in Puerto Rico. This spring, the program began in San Juan working with tutors at *Escuela República de México* and *Escuela Manuel Elzaburu y Vizcarrondo* intermediate schools and with tutees at *Escuela República del Brasil* and *Escuela Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*. The Puerto Rico Department of Education held a news conference in February announcing that it is partnering with The Coca-Cola Foundation and Coca-Cola Puerto Rico Bottlers to bring the program to the four schools.

Resources

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Dahl, K.L. and P.A. Freppon. "A Comparison of Inner-city Children's Interpretations of Reading and Writing Instruction in the Early Grades in Skills-Based and Whole Language Classrooms," *Reading Research Quarterly.* (1995) 30: 50-74.

Graue, M.E. *Ready for What? Constructing Meanings of Readiness for Kindergarten.* (Albany, N.Y.: University of New York, 1992).

McCollum, Pam. "Examining the Three R's: Readiness, Redshirting and Retention," *IDRA Newsletter.* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, April 1994).

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COMING UP!

In May, the *IDRA Newsletter* focuses on instructional technology.

Los Regalos - continued from page 3

to listen to the story.

With the older children, we moved into a monster theme to prepare them for the story *Monster Mama* by Liz Rosenburg. This is a story about a fearless little boy and his devoted monster mother who live in a cave at the back of a house. The story develops when bullies pick on the audacious Patrick Edward and make fun of his mother, and he explodes. The story ends with everyone realizing that "monster mama" is not a real monster but an affectionate, caring mother.

Students responded to pre-reading questions that helped them make connections with their personal experiences and feelings to similar experiences and feelings of characters in the book, and they were given an opportunity to write a short answer to one of the questions.

"Have you ever done something nice for someone you love?" After discussing their answers in pairs, students shared their answers with the rest of the group.

"I cooked dinner for my parents' anniversary," a student uttered proudly.

"I gave my girlfriend a ring," another announced boldly.

"Have you ever gotten angry because someone hurt the one you love?" I asked. This pre-reading question revealed some terrifying experiences. One student was angry because someone beat up his mother. Another somber looking male student shared he had just lost his grandmother to a drive-by shooting.

"Last month my grandmother died. She got shot with a gun. I was sad and called 911. I'd hope she'd make it. She didn't and we had a funeral."

To me this served as a reminder of the violence these children live with everyday.

"I get picked on by my brother – who is two – all the time! Okay? That's bad, ain't it!" responded one girl to the question, "Have you ever been picked on by bullies?" Each one of those fifth grade students listened intently to the story and used their prior knowledge to focus on the theme of the story.

Through Project FLAIR, the task force teachers had the opportunity to observe me motivating their students to read in new and exciting ways. Afterward, we met to reflect and analyze why the lessons were so successful.

During the next school year, more campuses will be using Project FLAIR to improve the literacy and reading skills of their students. For more information on how IDRA's Project FLAIR can help teachers capture the hearts of their students with good books and motivating strategies, contact Dr. Rogelio López at 210/684-8180.

Resources

Green, C. and J. García. "*La Gran Caja de Cuentos*: Accelerate Biliteracy Through Literature and the Arts." NABE Proposal (Washington, D.C., 1997).

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