

Focus: Student Engagement

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Supporting the Dream of Going to College Through Powerful Student Engagement

by Héctor Bojorquez

IDRA has been working with youth in San Antonio’s Edgewood neighborhood through TECNO 2.0, a project funded by the TG Public Benefit Program and JP Morgan Chase. Our sole purpose was to increase access to college information through mentoring sessions at IDRA’s community technology centers in the west side of San Antonio.

During the year-long initiative, IDRA had the opportunity to reassert one of our main tenets: All students are valuable, none is expendable. While few would argue against this point for elementary school children, many balk at the notion that all high school youth should be considered “college material.” Whether it is out of intentional disregard for the hopes and dreams of students or out of simply following the path of least resistance by focusing on perceived academic elites, the outcome is the same; we send few minority and poor students to college.

The TECNO Tekies

In the fall of 2004, IDRA opened five technology centers on the West side of San Antonio to increase Internet access in the area. Since then, IDRA has leveraged these centers to build capacity among parents, provide professional development for community-based organizations and educators, and increase awareness of education issues through use of IDRA’s School Holding Power Portal (www.idra.org/portal).

Much good has come out of the centers. Hundreds of students have had access to computers for educational use, adults have started businesses and found jobs, and hundreds of hours of professional development have occurred. Yet, one of the most valuable outcomes of the TECNO centers has been the formation of the Youth Tekies group at the Edgewood Family Network community center.

In the fall of 2006, the Edgewood Family Network – a Westside community-based organization that is host to one of IDRA’s TECNO centers – began an intergenerational tutoring service where their home-grown youth leadership group taught basic computer literacy skills to adults in the area. This group of freshmen from two high schools tutored dozens of adults during a two-month period and eventually became known as the EFN Tekies. These teenagers stayed with EFN and have performed hundreds of hours of community service in the form of tutoring adults, leading health information sessions, providing technology assistance, and even organizing summer camps for local elementary students.

It was this group of teenagers that IDRA approached to assist in recruiting students to come to the TECNO centers for college information in 2009. The premise was simple enough: bank on students to bring other students to IDRA sessions. But as we began to prepare the Tekies
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“Student engagement is integral – not a sideline – to learning.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO



Some of the high school students who make up San Antonio’s Youth Tekies: Joseph Cuéllar (left) and Ray Romero (right).



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for this endeavor, something became abundantly clear. The Tekies themselves were highly adept at disseminating information. Since it is IDRA's understanding that every student brings gifts and talents and that those strengths, those assets, should be the building blocks for every student's success, this ability became the foundation of the work of our TECNO 2.0 initiative. Students themselves are skilled at relating to other students.

With the help of IDRA staff, Tekie students became fountains of information about looking for colleges, distinguishing between college options (two-year to four-year college routes), applying to college through applytexas.org, and navigating the financial aid process. The Tekies created fliers, managed their after-school schedules, and organized peer-mentoring sessions while spreading the word about the center at school.

Key Learnings

IDRA's relationship with the Tekie group resulted in information dissemination about the center and increased awareness about college information at the local high schools. During a three-month period, the Tekies served more than 140 students, far surpassing the initiative's expectations for a single center. Furthermore, their networking efforts paid off as IDRA staff connected directly with 450 other youth at the high schools. Almost every student had already heard from them about IDRA's efforts to spread information about college when we later went into classrooms to give direct counseling about going to college.

Furthermore, as we informally surveyed students, something else became clear. An overwhelming majority of high school students already want to go to college and only need some clarity as to what the process is like. Of 600 seniors we surveyed,

close to 95 percent said they want to go to college. When asked what they see as an obstacle, the two most frequent answers were: lack of funding and low grades.

During sessions with the students, all views were valued, all careers choices were taken seriously, and no voice was discouraged. It was this combination of IDRA's approach in valuing the gifts and voices that youth bring to the table and the groundwork laid by the Tekies that set a tone of openness and trust. Students who considered themselves "slackers" or "below average students" would ask us how it was possible for them to go to college, in spite of their past performance in school. We would help them plan a community college route to four-year institutions. Not once was a student told, "Maybe you should consider a trade school." Students who feared they could not afford college received information on how to apply for aid. The results in our evaluations of school and center sessions were that 98 percent of the students felt more likely to continue with their plans of going to college.

What does this tell us about creating college-going cultures in high minority, economically distressed school districts?

- **The desire to go to college is there.** It is the job of schools and communities to find ways to direct and counsel students early on.
- **All students must be valued.** Top 10 Percent students should not be the only students to receive information and counseling about college.
- **Every child should feel that college is a viable option and receive the emotional and academic support to make it a reality.**

Those are the challenges that schools face, creating a college-going culture that is all inclusive regardless of perceptions about what "college bound" kids look like. As one of the Tekies put it: "All students deserve the chance to go to college. Not just the top 10 percent."

Héctor Bojorquez is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

IDRA Texas PIRC

For more information about the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or contact@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at www.idra.org/Texas_IDRA_PIRC.htm

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Achieving a World-Class Education Requires Commitment to Protecting Education as a Civil Right

by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D.

In a recent speech, President Barak Obama reminded us that “in the 21st Century, the best anti-poverty program around is a world-class education” (2010). Achieving the goal of a world-class education requires commitment to protecting the civil rights of every child to access of a quality education through an equitable educational program.

What are the present challenges that keep us from reaching that goal? Our schools lose more than one in three of our young minds (approximately half of Latinos, African Americans and Native Americans) before they can obtain a high school diploma. And we rank 10th in the world among nations that graduate 25- to 34-year-olds from college (Melendez, 2010). This is of utmost concern for all of us who love this country and are seeking ways to eliminate the global achievement gap and regain our leadership status in education that rightfully belongs to the longest living democracy in the world.

Civil rights are defined as “the rights of individuals to receive equal treatment (and to be free from unfair treatment or discrimination) in a number of settings – including education, employment, housing, and more – based on certain legally-protected characteristics” (Thomson Reuters, nd).

That every child has the civil right to a quality education has its roots in statements made by the shapers of this country who had the vision of education as the link to human progress and international leadership. Thomas Jefferson once noted, “If the condition of man is to be progressively ameliorated, as we fondly hope and believe, education is to be the chief instrument in effecting it” (1818).

This article attempts to share some thoughts on how we as a nation need to step back and reflect on ways to ensure that every child has a *quality* education and how we can again become the

model for a world-class education.

First, our national conscience must reflect a genuine desire for inclusivity, unity and a *purposeful* mentality and desire to create a nation where “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (U.S. Congress, 1776).

The creation of alternatives to public schooling to address academic failures as well as integration, the rise of segregation, and the conscious inequity in staffing where only a select few of our schools have the best prepared teachers and administrators, are disconcerting and clear indications that we are not there yet.

The path to achieving this national conscience is a major task that requires intentionality, commitment and immediate action. Policymakers, university faculty, community members, and school administrators and teachers must collaborate to constitute the legions who will carry the banner for equity and create the momentum needed for change.

As noted by then presidential candidate Obama, “It’s time to turn the page on education – to move past the slow decay of indifference that says some schools can’t be fixed, that some kids just can’t learn” (2007). This renaissance will undoubtedly filter across all sectors to citizens in this country.

Second, we will accomplish the goal when we value and attend to the potential of each young mind that steps into our schools, regardless of color, religion, ethnicity, disability or gender. The literature show that reaching the goal of overall improved academic achievement that will propel this country to become second to none in educational achievement the goal requires: (1) a

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The concern for greater accessibility of quality education for all is a national imperative and must be addressed immediately.

IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity

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conscientious effort to improve the quality and rigor of the overall curriculum, and (2) creation of opportunities for a fast-growing minority student population to excel and close the achievement gap that currently exists.

We have the resources to improve the quality and rigor of the overall curriculum, therefore this is a matter of the will to do so. Current unsuccessful efforts to address the second requirement lack the heart and the passion to ensure that our traditionally neglected students excel. Neglect of this second requirement will block our country from reaching and modeling educational excellence for the world.

School districts must focus on the quality of education their students are getting, rather than focusing on finding ways of making their campuses rate high on state assessments. There is only one way of making any campus truly exemplary, and that is to provide each student in the campus with a quality education.

Tragically, some principals blame students or try to find ways to ensure that certain students are not placed at their campuses because of a fear that including these students will lead to a low campus rating. When this happens, we have lost focus of our role as described in a state's code of ethics and teacher performance standards that govern state licensing requirements.

Perhaps, the day has arrived when we, educators should sign an oath, similar to a physicians' Hippocratic Oath, to do no harm to children but rather to protect and promote quality education.

Third, commit – as a national imperative rather than a political necessity – to provide each young mind an equitable and world-class education. Today's efforts to improve education for all young people continue to be governed by the political reality of the day and to be jeopardized by partisan politics. When this happens, our leadership in education internally and externally is compromised, and it manifests negatively in the quality of education that we provide in our schools.

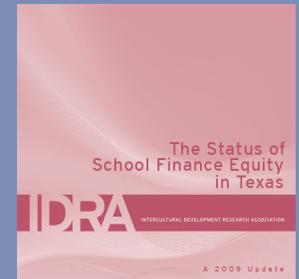
Maintaining knowledge superiority must be a national imperative, just like military superiority is vital to maintaining and ensuring the security of our democratic ideals. Superiority in educational

The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas – A 2009 Update

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

Disparities in per student funding have doubled in Texas, leaving millions of children in schools with severely limited resources for qualified teachers, up-to-date curriculum and basic supplies. This policy update on the status of education funding equity shows that Texas was headed in the right direction until the last two legislative sessions when revisions made to the school funding plan eroded equity among Texas schools. *The Status of School Finance Equity in Texas – A 2009 Update* summarizes where things are and identifies changes that are needed.

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outcomes cannot be achieved when education is in a constant state of flux and large segments of our population do not have access to a quality educational program.

Fourth, review and eliminate all education-related policies that create environments of inequality, inequity and achievement gaps. Today is a defining moment in education; it is time to review all policies that have a negative impact in making quality education more accessible to *all* students in this country. The key policy areas that need to be reviewed include: student assessment, curriculum offerings and accessibility to *all* students, educator preparation programs, quality instruction, access to higher education, graduation programs and accountability programs.

The concern for greater accessibility of quality education for *all* is a national imperative and must be addressed immediately. These thoughts on how to address this national imperative are barely scratching the surface, but they represent four major initiatives that can get us on the right path to achieving and maintaining a second to none role in the world.

Resources

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Mining Multiple Intelligences as a Way to Validate Student Strengths and Assets

By Juanita C. García, Ph.D..

Ask a class of fifth grade students if they think they are smart, and they will most likely tell you that they are. A basic premise of successful teaching is the belief that all students are smart. Being smart is manifested in multiple ways. When we operate from a stance that validates students' cognitive and affective strengths, we create more opportunities for students to feel successful in the classroom. This article provides educators with ideas on how to build learning using a multiple intelligences approach that capitalizes on the varied learning styles represented in a classroom.

The Theory

The theory of multiple intelligences, developed by Howard Gardner in the late 1980s, challenged existing ideas of intelligence. Gardner proposed that everyone has innate talents in several distinct areas. He suggested that these must be cultivated in order to bring about positive changes in ourselves, in education and in the world. He proposed seven intelligences that consist of the following strands: *linguistic*, the intelligence of words; *logical-mathematical*, the intelligence of numbers and reasoning; *spatial*, the intelligence of pictures and images; *musical*, the intelligence of tone and rhythm; *body-kinesthetic*, the intelligence of the whole body and hands; *interpersonal*, the intelligence of social interactions; and *intrapersonal*, the intelligence of self-knowledge. Gardner believed that everyone is capable of seven forms of processing information. Every individual differs in the specific intelligence displayed. (Gardner, 1989)

As teachers, we know students who are artistically creative but are poor in math; we know students who are brilliant in math but are poor in English; we know students who score low on tests but who demonstrate their knowledge in other ways. These experiences demonstrate the fundamental propositions that undergird Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

The first is that intelligence is not a single unit.

Second, intelligence is not fixed. And third, intelligence is not completely measured by IQ tests (Kagan & Kagan, 1998; 2009). Furthermore, in the late 1970s, researchers failed to find any external validity of IQ scores as measures of anything other than rank order of school performance, which is what IQ tests are based on in the first place (Lawler, 1979).

Additionally, brain research has helped to clarify the theory of multiple intelligences. Researchers have found that a person's varied experiences sculpt the brain in ways that are unique to each one of us, thus demonstrating our individuality and uniqueness in learning. The brain is the only organ in the body that shapes itself with learning experiences. Studies have shown actual structural changes in various parts of the brain depending on the way in which these structures were used (Wolffe, 2006).

We know that learning is a matter of making connections between previous experiences and new, concrete and abstract knowledge. For example, we know that we learn from reading and listening, but still the strongest connections are from concrete experiences. So then, which do you think would make the most lasting changes in the brain: reading about an experiment someone conducted or performing the experiment yourself? (Wolffe, 2006).

The Shift

With this theory, Howard Gardner activated a shift in the way we conceptualize intelligence and the manner in which schools, particularly teachers, valued the assets and strengths that students brought. This in turn is transforming curriculum, instructional methods and attitudes toward strengths that are not necessarily academic (Kagan & Kagan, 1998; 2009). Multiple intelligences theory is facilitating ways in which we value students by ensuring that curriculum and instruction validate the strengths and build on the assets that students

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The goal of increasing student success in all areas of the curriculum is reached not only by aligning the curriculum, but also by changing instructional methods that address students' multiple intelligences.

(Mining Multiple Intelligences as a Way to Validate Student Strengths and Assets, continued from Page 5)

bring.

Gardner not only provided education with his multiple intelligences theory but also nurtured new visions for educating our students. This shift is manifested in vision statements that guide actions in successful schools.

Vision drives our actions. The following is an example of a new vision statement for an elementary school that nourishes intelligences in students: "Increase the school's effectiveness in preparing students for middle school and overall student achievement by strengthening a well aligned curriculum, creating opportunities for interactive instruction, developing students' self concept and providing a dynamic extracurricular program for students to develop areas of interest around the seven intelligences. This will be accomplished through the involvement and collaboration of students, teachers, counselors, principal, parents and community."

In this vision statement, the goal of increasing student success in all areas of the curriculum is reached not only by aligning the curriculum, but also by changing instructional methods that address students' multiple intelligences. We believe that the curriculum can become more accessible through instructional strategies that match the intellectual strengths of each student. The goal is to develop multiple intelligences to their fullest potential – to make each student smarter in different ways. The vision also calls for a shift in attitudes of teachers and staff, of parents and the community toward students and for students toward each other and themselves.

Getting Started in the Classroom

Is it possible to organize instruction to address multiple intelligences in a system that has yet to value wholeheartedly the possibilities of a multiple intelligences approach? Does this approach provide a more interactive and engaging classroom?

There is an easy way to begin! Just look at what teachers do already that reflects the multiple intelligences. For example, the linguistic intelligence in language arts is part of a school's everyday curriculum. When teachers have students use a Venn diagram to compare literature stories, they are asking students to use mathematical logic by looking at the intersec-

tions that form a new set in which only those common elements appear. When students write in their journals and reflect on what they have learned, the intrapersonal intelligence is addressed. Applying cooperative learning structures to maximize social interactions creates opportunities for students to produce academic language and their interpersonal intelligence. Using creative drama to interpret stories incorporates musical and body-kinesesthetic intelligences and drawing sceneries for plays addresses the spatial intelligence.

Teachers can examine their instructional methods and how they complement students' multiple intelligences.

Celebrate Success!

School success is accomplished when students know and accept their own uniqueness, and those are celebrated by the school. When teachers encourage their students to be independent thinkers and learners, when they provide different types of learning experiences so that students discover meaning in content, when parents, school and the community work together to develop students' potential, we will then no longer have to ask students if they are smart but how smart they are.

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Six Students Win Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program National Essay Contest

“Thanks to those young children, I am a much better person than ever. It makes me feel as though anything is possible.”

– Kayla Rugg

Six students received prizes in a national competition among participants in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of the Intercultural Development Research Association. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program had helped them do better in school and how they had helped their tutees to do better.

- **First Place High School Winner** – Kwame’ Weatherall, Lee High School, Houston ISD, Texas
- **Second Place High School Winner** – Andre Merritt, Fuller Performance Learning Center, Cumberland County Schools
- **Third Place High School Winner** – Kayla Rugg, Fuller Performance Learning Center, Cumberland County Schools, North Carolina
- **First Place Middle School Winner** – Wendy Ramirez, Dr. Javier Sáenz Middle School, La Joya ISD, Texas
- **Second Place Middle School Winner** – Phylcia Molette, Kennedy Middle School, Atlanta Public Schools, Georgia
- **Third Place Middle School Winner** – Valeria Acevedo, Ann Richards Middle School, La Joya ISD, Texas

There were competitions at both the middle school and high school levels in the United States. Winners from each competition are being awarded \$200 for first place, \$150 for second place and \$100 for third place.

In his essay, **Kwame’ Weatherall** wrote: “Ever since I joined this program, my attitude has changed toward helping people who are in need or struggling... When I see a smile from my tutees, it gives me the sign that I am a great person as a role model and as a growing man.”

“I never met anyone younger than me that I

could honestly say, ‘He acts just like me,’” **Andre Merritt** wrote in his essay. “So every day I saw Lloyd, and I treated him the way I wanted to be treated when I was his age. He saw himself as a nobody, a failure, even a mistake. I made sure that by 9:10 a.m. he felt like a somebody, a winner and a blessing.”

“I have discovered that when my tutees see that I am doing well in school, they also strive to do well,” wrote **Kayla Rugg**. “This has been an extremely good motivator for me. I never dreamed that I could possibly make a 3.8 grade point average. Thanks to those young children, I am a much better person than ever. It makes me feel as though anything is possible.”

In her essay, **Wendy Ramirez** wrote, “Before, I thought that staying in school was a waste of time... But all those thoughts changed since I entered this program. Now, I realize that staying in school is good for my future and for those who surround me... I believe that no one of these changes would have happened without the help that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has given me.”

“When I look into the big, bold, bright and beautiful eyes of my tutee, I think of all the opportunities I gained from being a tutor,” **Phylcia Molette** wrote in her essay. “I no longer only

look at the world from my perspective but also strive to look at it from everyone’s perspective. Since I became a tutor, I understand younger children better, appreciate teachers more, and have become a wiser, mature, confident student and role model.”

Valeria Acevedo wrote: “I have answered back to my teacher, and my tutee has responded back to me. When they answer back to me it breaks my heart, so I’ve learned not to answer back to teachers. When I was in fifth grade, my life was worthless. Now I feel that I am worthy. I have gotten good grades.”

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by IDRA, is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, the program has kept more than 30,600 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth creed, all students are valuable none is expendable. The lives of more than 690,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program.

We are looking for former Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors!

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been in existence for 26 years, and we have created a free web site for former tutors to network with each other and to support each other in areas such as getting to college and employment. If you know former tutors, have them contact us at 210-444-1710 or Coca-ColaVYP@idra.org





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Focus: Student Engagement

Research provides student engagement indicators in four areas: students as part of a community; students' use of academic language, students' concentration and focus; students' confidence in performance; and students as active and participatory.

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