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Director's Corner

Rising from Risk

In this issue of *Talking Leaves* I address CREDE's fourth standard for effective teaching, Teaching Complex Thinking. Teaching critical thinking and problem solving strategies in all content areas should be one goal of academic instruction, but overemphasis on basic skills and procedures can draw attention away from the level of ideas. Details and basics are learned best in the context of genuine problems.

Complex thinking can be taught to all students, and it is imperative that it be taught to diverse students who are at risk of academic failure. Only 10 years ago one of our most respected research handbooks prescribed repetitive, basic-skill teaching tasks for low-performing at-risk students. Perhaps even more destructive has been the practice of forgiving any academic challenges to at-risk students, particularly those of limited English proficiency, on the assumption that they are of limited ability. This practice denies many

see **Meaning**, *page 2*

In This Issue

Program Showcase: Integrated Reform and System Studies

Sam Stringfield, Johns Hopkins University and **Yolanda Padrón**, University of Houston

This issue of *Talking Leaves* focuses on six of the eight projects that make up CREDE's Integrated Reform and System Studies Program. Here we will introduce you to the program as a whole, by discussing the projects' shared content themes and methodological perspectives.

The research projects in this program share three unifying content themes. The first theme is that understanding the challenges at-risk students face is necessary for successful implementation of reforms. Grissmer and his colleagues at RAND are exploring these challenges in their efforts to improve estimates of the numbers of different types of children at risk of educational failure (see *Talking Leaves*, vol. 1 no. 2). The other studies are more specific, qualitative investigations of challenges that confront at-risk students, their parents, teachers, and schools. In two studies of efforts to "scale up" various reform designs in diverse contexts, researchers are first carefully examining the specific local contexts of each implementation site (Datnow, Stringfield, & Ross, below). In their project "Untracking: Evaluating the Effective-

see **Findings**, *page 2*

Scaling up School Restructuring in Multicultural, Multilingual Contexts

Amanda Datnow and **Sam Stringfield**, Johns Hopkins University
Steven M. Ross, University of Memphis

Recent research suggests that implementing externally developed school reform models like Modern Red Schoolhouse or the Core Knowledge Sequence may be the best way for schools to raise students' academic achievement systematically. These findings and the need to improve schools have caused districts, states, and the federal government to embrace external reform models with an increased fervor. The passage of the Obey-Porter bill, a bipartisan initiative beginning this fall that allocates $150 million federal dollars to states for schools willing to adopt research-based reform programs, is evidence of growing enthusiasm for external models.

In their quest for proven practices, however, educators and policymakers should question whether or not these school reform models will work in districts serving linguistically and culturally diverse students. In the first study of its kind, CREDE researchers are

see **Scaling Up**, *page 6*

ness of an Educational Innovation," Hugh Mehan and Lea Hubbard are evaluating the effectiveness of an upscaled educational innovation which "untracks" low achieving ethnic and language minority students.

Contextualization in classrooms and reform in diverse communities is the second unifying theme. Context is critical to understanding research data and reform. All six projects profiled in this newsletter look at educational improvement issues within specific cultural settings. Some gather longitudinal data in predominantly Hispanic communities (Padrón & Waxman, see p. 3; Estrada, see p. 7). Two sample exclusively from Native American communities (Demmert, see p. 5; Tharp & Hillberg, see p. 5). Another focuses on problems faced by formerly rural, Appalachian students whose families have migrated to an industrialized urban area (Kyle & McIntyre, see p. 5). Three also include substantial African-American or Afro-Caribbean populations.

The third unifying theme is the co-constructed nature of school reform, such as Estrada's examination of the role of classroom social organization in shaping diverse relationships. Whether gathering data in the non-graded elementary classrooms of formerly Appalachian students, or studying and aiding reform on a southwestern Pueblo, CREDE researchers consciously investigate the ways that intended reforms interact with the interests of students, parents, community leaders, teachers, and school administrators.

In addition to these themes, the research projects share two methodological orientations: they last for several years and they employ multiple research methods. To gain full understanding of a school reform, program researchers believe the data collection must be longitudinal. The methodological pluralism is also deliberate. While one study is exclusively quantitative, the other seven include qualitative methods. Several gain strength by building mixed methodologies into their longitudinal designs.

For more information on this CREDE research program, contact Sam Stringfield (sstringf@csos.jhu.edu or 410-516-8834). 🍁

Note: Research articles about several of the studies discussed in this issue of *Talking Leaves* can be found in the January 1999 issue of the *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR, vol. 4 no. 1)*.

Read past issues of Talking Leaves online: http://www.cal.org/crede/

diverse students the basic requirements of progress: high academic standards, teacher assistance, meaningful assessment, and tailored instruction.

We know today that drill-and-kill, basic skill are not the prime prescription. At-risk students, like all others, learn most effectively when offered the challenge and assistance to think in complex ways. Connecting new material to overarching schemata, pressing consistently for higher zones of cognitive development, and providing clear standards and performance feedback are strategies that provide an environment of cognitive challenge and foster academic achievement and joy in learning.

Of course, working with a cognitively challenging curriculum requires careful leveling of tasks. Teachers should begin with tasks students can accomplish, moving up levels of difficulty over time, so that students are stretched to grow within their zones of proximal development. Challenging students toward cognitive growth requires that teachers think, assist, and assess right along with the learners, and that takes some time, effort, and trial and error to learn.

Educators who teach complex thinking ignore neither phonics rules nor the memorization of multiplication tables, but they do go beyond that level of skill development into the curriculum's deepest possible reaches of interesting and meaningful materials. Encouraging students to review and question their own and others' beliefs and rationales is one way to challenge and stimulate cognitive growth. Activities for solving problems through dialogue provide an organizing structure for students to construct new understandings. Dramatic problems with real-life meaning can help students at any level evaluate, revise, and reorganize their concepts. The object of complex thinking is not only to conclude with a correct answer, but also to expand discussion and promote alternative perspectives or alternate solutions for the topic. A bilingual curriculum, for example, provides cognitive challenges when students have to negotiate meaning across two language systems.

Regular readers of this column know how often my mind turns to the remarkable achievement of the Cherokee people, who achieved near-universal literacy in one decade. We have noted before how this process was facilitated by whole families learning to read together, at the fireside and the roadside. We should note that Sequoia invented an extremely complicated orthography for these people who had no previous literacy experience. Now that is teaching complex thinking! Sequoia did not underestimate his "low-literacy, at-risk" people. We should not underestimate ours. 🍁

Improving Classroom Instruction and Student Learning for Resilient and Non-Resilient English Language Learners

Yolanda Padrón and **Hersholt C. Waxman**, University of Houston

Why are some Latino English language learners (ELLs) successful in school, despite coming from backgrounds and settings similar to those of their less successful classmates? In this 5-year CREDE project we are trying to answer that question by identifying factors that distinguish *resilient* students, who perform well in school and have begun to use English effectively, from *non-resilient* students, who have difficulty in school. Drawing upon those findings, we will develop an instructional intervention for non-resilient students.

In the first 2 years of this study, we observed fourth and fifth grade classrooms in three elementary schools that serve predominantly Latino populations. We examined four groups of variables: individual attributes of learners, school and classroom factors, family factors, and out-of-school factors. To gather data, we interviewed students, teachers, and parents; examined student achievement data; conducted systematic classroom observations; and used student self-report instruments.

Our initial findings indicate that resilient elementary school students perceived a more positive instructional learning environment and are more satisfied with their reading and language arts instruction than non-resilient students. Non-resilient students indicated that they have more difficulty in their classwork than both average students and resilient students. Resilient students spent significantly more time interacting with teachers for instructional purposes, whereas non-resilient students spent more time interacting with other students for social or personal reasons. The percentage of time that resilient students were on task in class was much higher than that of non-resilient students.

Over the next 3 years, we will develop an instructional intervention program for improving the resiliency of Latino ELLs that includes the following activities: a) enhancing teachers' knowledge base in literacy; b) training teachers to use cognitive reading strategies; c) developing teachers' ability to evaluate and diagnose ELLs' learning strategies related to literacy; d) providing teachers with effective strategies for working with parents; and e) providing teachers with skills to develop appropriate instructional materials.

This project is identifying factors that contribute to ELLs' academic success and help us develop instructional practices that will best meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

For more information, contact Yolanda Padrón at ypadron@uh.edu or 713-283-3580.

Reform for Kentucky's Primary Grade Children

Diane W. Kyle and **Ellen McIntyre**, University of Louisville

How do young children at risk for school failure develop academically in nongraded primary classrooms? How is this development enhanced when instruction incorporates research-based best practices? And how does a deep understanding of and familiarity with children's families and home cultures help teachers further support children's academic progress?

In this 4-year CREDE project we are seeking a better understanding of instructional practices for children at risk for school failure. Since passage of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act, which mandated nongraded K-3 classrooms statewide, we have been studying how teachers have developed and implemented primary programs and the apparent results for children. Nongraded classrooms include students of different ages and grade levels. Our longitudinal study combines detailed documentation of instruction, systematic assessments of students' literacy and mathematics learning, analysis of student work, reflections of teachers, and knowledge from and about children's families.

We are working with five teachers of nongraded primary classrooms in four sites reflecting urban, rural, and small town populations, and 36 children and their families. Most of the children are considered poor or working class, and most are of Appalachian descent or in their own words, "small town," "country," or "hillbilly." Teachers and university researchers make frequent visits to family homes where parents are the experts who share their knowledge about their children and about family life. Teachers use these "funds of knowledge" in classroom instruction by finding informal ways to connect with students and by building more explicit curricula that values what children know.

Every week researchers observe instruction and document how learning takes place. The teachers reflect on

When a Model is not Enough for Comprehensive School Reform

Gil Garcia, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement

The National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement recently published *Tools For Schools* (1998), a compendium of research-based school reform models to assist schools with large numbers of students at risk of educational failure, including language minority and/or limited English proficient students. *Tools for Schools* contains 26 reform models across three categories: comprehensive school reform, classroom and curriculum redesign, and professional development. Approximately 11 models claim to address cultural diversity issues and nine, second language learning and/or bilingual education.
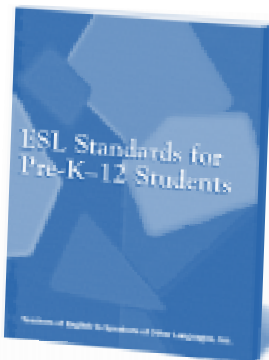
While *Tools for Schools* and other efforts at the federal level constitute a starting point, adopting one of these 26 school reform models to help improve student achievement does not guarantee comprehensive school reform. In order to see real and systemic change, school officials need to adopt a school improvement plan that goes beyond the promises of the typical model. This plan may include strategies for evaluating efforts to change the school's teaching and learning climate, to integrate subject matter across grades not addressed by the model, and to ease the transitions students make from grade to grade. The plan may also measure changes in teacher attitudes toward students who do and do not participate in the model.

School officials need to think about what it means to introduce a model into their school environment, and pay special attention to the fiscal resources and the workforce skills that the typical model requires. Even the best models alone are not enough to improve an entire school. The cutting-edge research that CREDE and others are conducting in schools serving large numbers of students at risk of failure is already providing important insights into the dynamics of educational reform. However, the impact of these research efforts on school change must also be considered.

Gilbert Garcia is a Research Analyst in the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students, OERI/USED. He is the Team Leader for CREDE, Manager of the Language Minority Studies Program for CRESPAR, and Contracting Officer's Technical Representative for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. He can be reached at Gil_Garcia@ed.gov.

School/Community Co-Constructed School Reform in a Native American Community

Roland Tharp and **Ruth Hilberg**, University of California, Santa Cruz

Twenty years ago parents and educators in Zuni, NM created the Zuni Public School District in an effort to improve the education of Zuni children. Since then the district has been working to reform school governance, curriculum, and pedagogy to meet the needs of Zuni children. In this CREDE project, we are working with the Zuni Public School District in three capacities: a) to provide technical assistance, b) to document reform efforts, and c) to develop a model of dynamic processes of addressing resistance to school reform.

In the first part of this project, we are providing regular consultation and training to Zuni Middle School teachers in the uses of CREDE's standards for effective teaching and learning. During the 1997-98 school year, we found that math students taught with CREDE's standards learned, retained, and enjoyed mathematics more than students receiving traditional instruction. Our work in Zuni has also uncovered two additional standards that are consensual within the Native American research and development literature: *include modeling and demonstra-*

tion by teacher and students, and *provide opportunity for student choice and initiative.*

We have also worked with the middle school principal to refine her professional development portfolios and evaluation system. The portfolios, along with classroom observations by the principal, serve as the basis for teacher evaluation, personnel actions, and planning for future professional development. As a result of that work, the Zuni School Board has mandated that such a system be created and implemented throughout the Zuni Public School District. This system is now available to other schools through our web site (http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/HomePage/Standards/Assessments/portfolio.html).

To increase family and community involvement, we conducted parent-teacher focus groups to discuss teaching and learning processes, as well as a 3-day summer institute for teachers and parents to work together on developing instructional units that incorporate Zuni experiences and concerns. We conducted a survey of the

Schools Serving Native America: A Series of Case Studies

William Demmert, Western Washington University

Most public schools serving Native Americans (American Indians, Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiians) have not been very successful in meeting these students' educational needs. Academic performance levels are below national averages and the dropout rate is very high. The cultural climate of the school seldom supports the language and cultural base of the Native community served. Yet some schools have been successful–the students are doing well academically and the school is supported by its community.

In this CREDE project, we are conducting a series of case studies on effective schools and programs serving Native communities and incorporating a Native language and cultural curriculum. We have selected them with the assistance of a group of educators who are nationally or regionally known to local Native American communities. We hope to identify a set of characteristics that is consistent across the set of case studies.

To date, six sites with effective schools–in Alaska, South Dakota, Hawaii, Oregon, and Minnesota–have participated in the case study process. Locally based field investigators have collected data for the studies. In addition, the investigators and other select Indian educators serve as a national board, monitoring the case studies and

ensuring that the needs of the Native communities are not compromised. This group has met twice to discuss each case study site, impressions of what field investigators found, and common characteristics across each of the sites.

Our findings indicate that each site has a local educational leader who initiated the school or program and worked to build a partnership with the school's community. The faculty, students, and members of the community support promoting the language and culture of the community in the classroom and feel that traditional knowledge and educational systems may still have a role in the educational process. Language and culture support self and group identity as Indian, Native Alaskan, or Native Hawaiian. These preliminary findings will be tested as the completed case studies are analyzed.

In a similar manner, several Circumpolar Nations that are part of a consortium of Ministers of Education and educators working around the North Pole are conducting case studies or research projects to complement studies of Native schools in the U.S. This group shares its cross-national perspectives and understandings with the participants in the first set of case studies. Because many

Zuni community to gather information about their educational values, beliefs, and practices, and about their educational aspirations for their children. We plan to offer technical assistance to Zuni schools in organizing school-community interactions and discussions about the results of the survey.

We have also documented reform efforts and have identified seven major obstacles to reform in Zuni and other reservation-based Native American communities and schools. Three of these are teacher imperviousness to external influence, disrespect of Native Americans by the schools, and vision conflicts between Native communities and the schools. We have explained how the obstacles have affected our work, the steps we have taken to overcome them, and the consequences of our actions. We have also developed a guide to successful school reform. During the next 3 years of our project we will elaborate on these findings, and present more effective methods by which resistance to school reform can be overcome.

Using our findings, we are developing a dynamic process model to address resistance to school reform. This model considers issues of incentives, policies, and assistance; appropriate timing of initiatives; and processes of communication and decision-making.

The primary objective of these reform efforts is to improve student learning. Evaluation of reforms will rely on student assessment data. Through our project we hope to support Zuni schools so all students can demonstrate progress in academic achievement as required by the state of New Mexico.

For more information on this project, contact Roland Tharp at tharp@cats.ucsc.edu or 831-459-3500.

Case Study, *from page 5*

school and program characteristics cut across countries and projects or schools, each site will benefit from the exchange of information and the discussions that take place. Researchers at each site have made the issues of indigenous languages and cultures a top concern and priority.

For more information on this project, contact William Demmert at demmertw@cc.wwu.edu or 360-650-3032.

addressing several important questions: Can the current generation of externally developed restructuring models work in multilingual, multicultural contexts? When, where, and why do the reforms work? How must the reform models be modified, and how must schools adapt to the designs?

We are conducting much of this study in 13 elementary schools in the Sunland County Public Schools (SCPS) District (a pseudonym), which serves students from a diverse set of cultures. It also serves one of the largest second language populations of any district in the U.S. where Spanish and Haitian Creole are the most common of over 100 languages and dialects.

Several popular school restructuring models are represented in Sunland County. The district has received special support from the New American Schools (NAS) Corporation to implement several of its reform designs in multiple schools. The NAS designs we are studying include Roots and Wings, Modern Red Schoolhouse, and the Audrey Cohen College System of Education. We are also studying three independently developed designs: the Core Knowledge Sequence, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the Comer School Development Program.

We are using both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study. The quantitative component examines the relationships among implementation level of the restructuring design, student academic gains, and experimental-control differences in achievement gains over 3 years. The qualitative component involves 4-year case studies of the 13 restructuring elementary schools and site visits to 30 replication sites around the U.S.

Preliminary qualitative findings suggest that all of the 13 schools in Sunland County sustained some level of implementation of an externally developed reform model for at least 3 years. This suggests that indeed there are some models or components of models that are applicable in multicultural, multilingual contexts. However, after 3 years, five of the schools abandoned their reforms. While school and reform design teams certainly influence how the reform models are received within the schools, state and district forces are also critical in determining the overall success or failure of the models. Our study documents these dynamic forces.

CREDE has published preliminary findings of this study in Research Report No. 2, *Scaling Up School Restructuring in Multicultural, Multilingual Contexts: Early Observations From Sunland County* (Stringfield, Datnow, & Ross, 1998). For more information on this project, contact Amanda Datnow (adatnow@jhu.edu or 510-526-7417) or Sam Stringfield (sstringf@csos.jhu.edu or 410-516-8834).

Patterns of Instructional Activity in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: Excellence, Inclusivity, Fairness, and Harmony

Peggy Estrada, University of California, Santa Cruz

In many American classrooms, the story is familiar. Students from poor, minority, non-English speaking backgrounds perform academically, on average, below their peers. Socially, these students tend to have lower status, and friendship groupings are often segregated. By high school, it is not uncommon for such students to be enrolled in completely different courses and to occupy different physical spaces on campus. However, many practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and community members realize that we can no longer maintain the status quo. As we move toward an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse society, we need to make school success within the reach of all students.

How can teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse children create academic and social inclusivity? How can they ensure that all students are valued and socially accepted? How can teachers ensure that these students succeed? How can teachers foster a common classroom culture of acceptance, excellence, fairness, and harmony?

The work of CREDE researchers and others suggests that excellence can be accomplished by instituting a set of pedagogical principles on which there is an emerging consensus (see *Talking Leaves*, vol. 2 no. 2). Our own work indicates that in order to institute these principles and to accomplish the goals of inclusivity, fairness, and harmony, classrooms must be organized into simultaneous and varied activities and that students must be given some opportunities to work together in heterogeneous groupings along important dimensions such as language, ethnicity, performance, and gender.

In this study, we have focused on 27 first and fourth grade classrooms from eight culturally and linguistically diverse schools to learn how different patterns of language arts instructional activity are related to student performance. In each classroom we observed language arts instruction for 2 full days. We focused on pedagogy, that is, how the teachers were teaching, the extent to which they used simultaneous and varied activities, and the extent to which they had students work in heterogeneous groups for some portion of the time.

We found that first and fourth grade teachers created different patterns of language arts activities. First grade teachers tended to spend more time on language arts, provide a greater number and variety of activities, mix up student groups more often, and use effective pedagogy. However, rarely did first and fourth grade teachers, when examined together, provide students with choice in selection of activities, engage students in joint production with peers, or contextualize instruction in students' community experiences or values. Additionally, in both first and fourth grades, students very rarely assisted each other with their work. With respect to overall student performance and language arts performance across both grades, teachers who created patterns of language arts activity involving more effective pedagogical features and those who created patterns involving simultaneous, varied activities rated their students' performance higher.

In the next 2 years of the study, we will examine these patterns of instructional activity more closely in six case study classrooms to understand the relationship between patterns of activity and student performance. We will investigate whether different patterns result in more social inclusivity and harmony among peers and whether they result in more harmonious teacher-student relationships.

For more information on this project, contact Peggy Estrada at peggye@cats.ucsc.edu or 831-459-3649. 🍁

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their instructional decisions weekly. CREDE's five principles of effective instruction and the Critical Attributes of Kentucky's Primary Program provide useful frames for examining patterns of instruction. Formal and informal assessments of children's development in reading, writing, and mathematics occur each year.

Preliminary results indicate that in nongraded primary classrooms that reflect the five principles of effective instruction, children can excel in literacy and mathematics. However, the teachers exhibit variation in their instructional practice as the students do in their achievement.

Over the course of this study, we will identify the areas of instruction that are and are not emphasized and implications for student achievement. We will also investigate whether process-oriented classrooms help children learn the necessary content as measured by our tasks and tests. Finally, we will be able to speculate on how home factors affect achievement in ways not shown in previous studies.

For more information about this project, contact Ellen McIntyre (e0mcin01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu or 502-852-0576) or Diane Kyle (dwkyle01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu or 502-852-0572). 🍁

🔥 Hot Off the Press 🔥

Pedagogy Matters: Standards for Effective Teaching Practice, by S. Dalton, presents CREDE's five standards for effective pedagogy: joint productive activity, language and literacy development, meaning making, complex thinking, and instructional conversation. The standards emerge from principles of practice that have proven successful with majority and minority at-risk students in a variety of teaching and learning settings over several decades. Each standard is accompanied by a set of indicators and illustrated with examples from classrooms. (RR4, $4)

Educational Reform Implementation: A Co-Constructed Process, by A. Datnow, L. Hubbard & H. Mehan, presents initial findings from a study of two CREDE projects: one on the implementation of the school reform efforts in "Sunland County" schools, and the other on the implementation of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) untracking program in Kentucky schools. The researchers examine how reform efforts succeed, and discuss the consequences of different perspectives involved in the implementation process, the influence of the schools' cultures, and how school-site educators may facilitate or hinder the process of reform. (RR5, $4)

Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Programs in the United States, 1997-1998 Supplement, by C. McCargo & D. Christian, adds 21 profiles to the growing database of two-way programs. ($8)

Secondary Newcomer Programs in the United States: 1997-1998 Supplement, by D. Short & B. Boyson, contains 26 additional programs and adds four new states to the directory. ($10)

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