



bridges to learning

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In moments of crisis, our communities sustain us. For 25 years, the Institute for Learning's commitment to fostering equitable high-quality education and strong learning communities has guided our work. Embedded in our approach are ways that we build and maintain the connections that are at the heart of our work and our impact. The new challenges we all face make our work together more critical than ever.

We are very fond of the work we do together and especially proud of how you have been supporting your students and families in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We are collaborating with our community to bring you digital resources that support students, teachers, and leadership until we can work together again on the ground. The IFL is now fully engaged in adapting to our new reality. We, too, are working remotely until further notice and are building ideas and content to share through digital platforms.

We are continuing the work that is core to our mission by designing an online forum in lieu of our annual gathering in Pittsburgh. Sessions will focus on equity, improvement science, and online work.

Getting Better at Getting Better will occur online June 2–5. Dr. David Kirkland, NYU; Dr. Ramón Antonio Martínez, Stanford University; Dr. Tony Petrosky, University of Pittsburgh; and Dr. Amanda Godley, University of Pittsburgh will be joined by the fellows with many new sessions. We will send an email with registration details very soon, and you can always find us at ifl.pitt.edu.

Thank you for your belief in the mission and work of the IFL. You are the focus of our attention. Please reach out to us for your online needs as we work together to carry out our common mission. We get better at getting better together.

Our best wishes to you and yours,

Rosita Apodaca

Executive Director, Institute for Learning

Every Student Needs High-Cognitive-Demand Instruction

"In fact, standards document and reform initiatives... that implicitly perpetuate a universal view of teaching and learning miss the point that many of the structures that exist in ... education are the very things that have created the inequities for historically marginalized students in the first place. ... education cannot truly improve until it adequately addresses the very students who the system has most failed."

– Rochelle Gutiérrez, 2018

Rosita Apodaca

IFL executive director

Peter Compitello

IFL research project manager

Disrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, creating inclusive and sustainable school environments for students, and finding and cultivating the assets and interest that every student brings to school are part of what is needed for all students to develop to their full potential in and out of school. Lauren Resnick, cognitive psychologist and founder of the Institute for Learning (IFL), believes we can teach all students to reach or exceed world-class standards.

Resnick knows that, in practice, it is proving hard to meet the twin goals of equity and higher achievement. This is because schools are trapped in a set of beliefs about the nature of ability and aptitude that makes it difficult to evoke rigorous academic effort from students and educators.

Students who have not been taught a demanding, challenging, thinking curriculum do poorly on tests of reasoning or problem solving, confirming many people's original suspicions that they lack the talent for high-level thinking.

Students cannot learn what they are not taught, and depriving them of high-cognitive-demand

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In celebration of our 25th anniversary, the Institute for Learning is dedicating three issues of *Bridges* to the Principles of Learning. The winter, spring, and summer issues of *Bridges* will focus on sharing stories and insights about moving the Principles of Learning from theory to practice.

Winter 2020

Clear Expectations

Self-Management of Learning

Recognition of Accomplishment

Spring 2020

Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum

Learning as Apprenticeship

Socializing Intelligence

Summer 2020

Fair and Credible Evaluations

Accountable Talk® Practices

Organizing for Effort

Every Student Needs High-Cognitive-Demand Instruction

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curriculum and instruction is not an equitable education.

For decades, Resnick and others have advocated for thinking and problem solving to be the “new basics” of the 21st century. Still, the common idea that we can teach thinking without a solid foundation of knowledge has to be abandoned, as does the idea that we can teach knowledge without engaging students in thinking. Knowledge and thinking must be intimately joined. This implies a curriculum organized around major concepts in each discipline that students are expected to know deeply. In short, in every subject, at every grade level, the curriculum has to include a commitment to a knowledge core, high-thinking demand, and active use of knowledge.

Despite widespread support for disciplinary literacy, not all students have been given opportunities to achieve this high standard. Ramón Antonio Martínez (2018) believes that building on the assets students bring to school can support them in accessing and participating in a high-cognitive-demand curriculum. Changing how we view learners is also critical to improving the educational experience of students of color and those who are labeled upon their entry in school. When we view students as struggling or “at risk,” we make assumptions that they are students in need of remediation. When we begin to see students’ multilingualism as an asset and their use of multiple languages as tools to help them access high-cognitive-demand work, we can turn the dime on its head and make small modifications in learning plans that will enable emergent multilingual students to access complex text and engage in high-cognitive-demand activities.

Practitioners have made arguments that mediating

instruction does not need to be labor-intensive; it is about making decisions while teaching a well-designed lesson. Teachers focus on the goal of the lesson and find ways for every student to meet that goal. Knowing and building on the students’ assets should serve as a guide to making the small modifications to support students. Simple supports, such as offering a student the text in a language the student understands or allowing a student to write the argument about something familiar, are ways to make modifications that allow for access. We can begin by abandoning deficit thinking and keeping our minds open to see our students’ situations as opportunities to try ways that will support them where they are and enable movement toward the goal.

Martínez (2018) argues that for emergent multilinguals, we may have to “learn to see students anew—to imagine them as competent readers and writers and to treat them accordingly.” The labels students are given in school, more often than not, are not helpful. Martínez thinks that for us to “recognize the richness of bi/multilingual students’ linguistic repertoires requires that we think beyond the convenient labels that serve to mask their brilliance, their competence, and their tremendous potential.” Martínez’s recommendation may serve us well once we decide that high-cognitive-demand work will be made available to every student.

In a similar vein to Gutiérrez and Martínez, Dr. David E. Kirkland reminds us “rigor in education cannot be about broken students but about supporting students who are vulnerable to broken systems.” Before we can address the systems that support inequitable practices, we need to acknowledge systemic root causes: “Rigor often codes a set of hierarchal social and cultural values that reinforces a narrow concept of learning and achievement. Too often,

rigor is about who is recognized and who is not. By flattening rigor in the image of the seen, a narrow version of us gets baked into educational success—a version that is incomplete, favoring an intersection of cis, heteronormative, White, abled, English-speaking, monied, and Judeo-Christian—or, put simply, privileged—identities. I’ve learned the farther away students are from this identity, the less likely they are seen to be ‘rigorous,’ the less likely the classroom works for them.”

While being keenly aware of systemic disparities in equity and rigor, Kirkland aims for a hopeful solution: “. . . teaching and learning must be about preservation—the incredible acts that help people preserve our languages and cultures, to tell history on our terms, to preserve it too, to preserve ourselves by preserving the congregation of ideas that will make the world better, that will free our bodies and heal our souls. Thus, academic rigor comes close to equity when it connects teaching and learning to acts that are meant to sustain us.”

Martínez, R. (2018). Beyond the English learner label: Recognizing the richness of bi/multilingual students’ linguistic repertoires. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 512-521.

Gutiérrez, R. (2018). The need to rehumanize mathematics. In I. Goffney, R. Gutiérrez, & M. Boston (Eds.), *Rehumanizing mathematics for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students* (pp. 1-2). National Council of Teachers of Mathematics ■

Amplifying the Academic Rigor in Math Classrooms: Butler Area School District’s Journey

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different administrators who are supporting this work. Logistics, communication, and coordination are a big challenge. Our strategy for consistency has been to select high-level tasks that are integrated into the curriculum map. Every teacher at the grade level will complete the high-level tasks. Our hope is that this provides accountability for implementation.”

That said, the district is already seeing the impact of their work both in the classroom and on high-stakes assessments. Hopp and Robb stated that the pedagogy studied in the IFL PD sessions “provides a basis for making our classrooms more student-centered. The use of *Accountable Talk* practices has increased the communication between students and enhanced their ability to discuss mathematical concepts.” In addition, they share that there have been increases in assessment scores: “We have seen significant increases in our PVAAS (Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System) growth scores. We have also seen increases in most of our buildings in the number of students scoring advanced on the PSSAs (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment). We feel there is a direct connection between our work with IFL and these increases.” ■

The IFL offers high-quality instructional materials in mathematics and English language arts that can be flexibly integrated into existing curricula. Designed around core concepts in each discipline, our materials apprentice students to read, write, talk, inquire, and reason as mathematicians, readers, and writers.

Visit our [website](#) to learn more!