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Soleado

Promising Practices from the Field

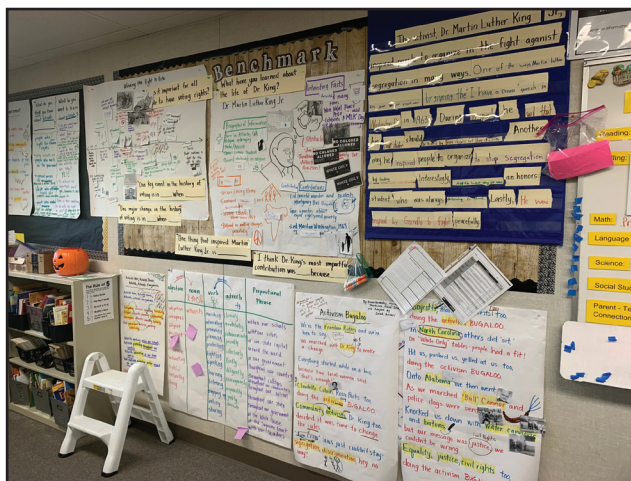
Leveraging Challenges to Increase Access and Engagement of Benchmark Advance with Project GLAD®

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Dismissively waving her hand at rows of shrink-wrapped curriculum, Mrs. A. declared, “Benchmark is just way above their heads. I hate it!” It was a few months after our school district adopted the new English Language Arts curriculum, Benchmark Advance, or BA. The dislike for BA had clearly transferred to her students. Every time she asked them to take out their BA readers, she was greeted with a collective groan of displeasure. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case.

learners in different classes extremely challenging, as they were all learning different ELA content at different times.

In our roles as ELD Specialists and OCDE Project GLAD® (Guided Language Acquisition Design) Teacher Trainers in Dublin Unified School District in the San Francisco Bay area, we work in different classrooms across various school sites. It didn’t take long for us to notice that the same general sentiment Mrs. A. had shown towards the BA curriculum was in



OCDE Project GLAD® strategies have given teachers and students in Dublin Unified School District greater access to Benchmark Advanced materials.

fact shared across the district. The shift to having a prescribed curriculum did not go over well. But why? “The level is just too high,” and “The texts are so dry” were the two most commonly cited reasons for the frustration with BA. Some teachers dug in and gave BA their all, mustering their most positive outlook. However, they were often dismayed when, despite their best efforts, the majority of students scored in the failing range on assessments. Others refused to try the new curriculum. Most teachers fell somewhere in between, reluctantly trying BA. What was consistent? Students were not receiving

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An Unwelcome Curriculum Adoption

With no formally adopted districtwide ELA curriculum for the past 5 years, teachers had been creating or downloading their own ELA materials and teaching them however they chose. While many teachers appreciated the creativity and autonomy this allowed, it posed significant challenges as well. Consistency and continuity across and between grade levels was scant. This made supporting multilingual

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the quality of education they deserved, and teachers were frustrated.

An Opportunity Presents Itself

As OCDE Project GLAD® Teacher Trainers, we naturally upheld our own Three Personal Standards, one of which is “Solve a Problem.” We recognized that the problem was in fact two puzzle pieces that easily fit together. First, teachers were looking for ways to make this new ELA curriculum more comprehensible and accessible to students, while increasing student engagement and enjoyment as they learn. Second, we now had content that was consistent across grade levels throughout the district and carefully designed to spiral and build upon previous learning through the grade levels. The solution was clear ... GLAD® strategies! Thus began our journey of supporting teachers in integrating the use of GLAD® strategies with BA.

OCDE Project GLAD® is a professional learning model that transforms the teaching and learning process with “evidence-based practices that help design classrooms and lessons where language comes alive through content” (<https://ocde.us/NTCProjectGLAD/Pages/default.aspx>). Lessons using GLAD® strategies aim to:

Increase student engagement through the use of academic discourse, collaborative conversations, active participation, metacognition, and reflection;

Increase access to content and language so students have comprehensible input through research-based strategies that differentiate and scaffold, leading to the development of language proficiency and content mastery;

Develop the 21st century skills of collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking; and

Foster a positive and safe classroom culture by having an asset-based mindset with high expectations, respect, and positive interdependence.

In our roles, we continually seek opportunities to support teachers in building their expertise in ELD instruction, largely through the use of Project GLAD® strategies. Our struggles often lie in inspiring teacher interest in changing or building

upon their practice, and in working with teams of teachers in which individual teachers use different content materials. BA gave us the opportunity to leverage both of these challenges. We began testing the delivery of BA lessons using GLAD® strategies every chance we got. Certain GLAD® strategies naturally lend themselves to specific BA lessons: Fictional texts are easily made into Narrative Input Charts; timelines in non-fiction texts became Graphic Organizers. Students began enjoying BA, and comprehension of the challenging texts increased. The reception and change in attitude were astounding! Rather than moans and groans about taking out their BA materials, the disappointment came when it was time to end the lessons. “That was fun!” students would exclaim. Teachers also began to feel more confident in their ability to teach BA through the use of GLAD® strategies, and were less resistant when they were able to choose how they delivered the content. The newfound opportunity to plan and collaborate with teachers across the district also became a huge draw. Most importantly, we saw teachers readily supporting English language development using cooperative learning strategies and creating the conditions for positive interdependence amongst their students.

Gaining Traction

Using GLAD® strategies to teach BA quickly gained traction, not only with GLAD®-trained teachers, but also with teachers who had never been trained. As we modeled lessons, we became increasingly familiar with BA content and structure, discovering patterns across units and grade levels. For example, in every unit on days 3 and 5 in lower grades, and day 14 in the upper grades, the lesson asks students to compare two texts—a perfect opportunity to use a Comparative Input Chart. Through this work, we gained a much more in-depth understanding of the linguistic supports multilingual students need to be successful with the curriculum.

We began offering professional development sessions at staff-wide PD days and after-school workshops, which were very well attended. But still, there was something missing. We began to see that teaching BA lessons using GLAD® strategies was only a beginning. Without GLAD® unit planning, isolated GLAD® strategies were not being utilized to their full effect and the cohesiveness was not sustained through the entire BA unit. The strategies

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did not build upon each other, as GLAD® strategies are designed to do.

Taking it to the Next Level

That’s when we knew we had to go one step further. For one 4-day GLAD® Foundations demo, we created our own BA/GLAD® unit, pairing an existing, similarly themed GLAD® unit with the content from a BA unit. We wanted our unit to have the flow of a typical GLAD® unit but have the content and literacy skills that BA asked teachers to teach. The invaluable experience was a deep dive into the nuances of both BA and GLAD® and yielded a strengthened understanding of the planning and teaching processes. It was many hours of hard work but what incredible joy the process brought us!

We test-drove this newly created unit and it was a success! We attained our goal of increasing access to the curriculum and student engagement, as witnessed by the connections our students made between their experiences and the content and with each other. We knew we were really onto something when a newly GLAD®-certified teacher went on to teach the entire unit we created in her own class. She later shared with us:

GLAD has transformed the way I teach and makes me excited to come to work everyday! I am finishing up Benchmark Unit 1 for 3rd grade, which you modeled in the demo. The unit has moved both me and my students. We have cried together over the issues addressed in my unit. Thank you for the good work that you are doing. I will continue to “GLADify” my Benchmark units this year. There is no turning back for me!

Looking Ahead

Our work with BA and GLAD® continues to gain momentum, and the journey is incredibly rewarding. We are inspired by the way a challenging situation became an opportunity

to work more closely with teachers in shifting their practices to better support all students, but especially multilingual learners. As we continue to support teachers in planning units and using a flow of strategies, rather than stand-alone strategies here and there, there is much refining yet to be done. Our next steps include building more complete GLAD®-BA units and examining how BA’s designated ELD materials can be enhanced when paired with GLAD®. We must further identify how content learning,

English language development, and successful unit test results can be balanced.

Ways to Integrate OCDE Project GLAD® & Benchmark Advance		
Pathway A: Build in OCDE Project GLAD® strategies that align well with BA lessons	Pathway B: Use an existing OCDE Project GLAD® unit with a similar theme as your BA unit, and revamp with BA content	Pathway C: Use the BA content, texts and images to create your own OCDE Project GLAD® unit!
Observation Charts, Inquiry Charts, Big Book, Graphic Organizer, Narrative Input Chart, Pictorial Input Chart, Comparative Input Chart, Chants, SPC, Home School Connection, Listen Sketch, Expert Groups, Cooperative Strip Paragraph, Graffiti Wall (and more!) all pair well with BA.	For example, we used: <u>American Heroes</u> by Diana Hernández and San Bernardino educators with BA Grade 3 Unit 1 texts and images to create: <u>Government for the People</u> by Lilia Tsui and Sarah Ansari	The BA Unit theme, texts, and images can all be used to create your own OCDE Project GLAD® unit!
Considerations for Pathway B: Revamp an existing OCDE Project GLAD® unit with BA content		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does a GLAD® unit with a similar theme already exist? • How much time do you have to devote to this unit? • What are the unit themes in the existing GLAD® unit and the unit objectives/essential questions from BA unit? • What are the standards and essential skills on which students will be assessed at the end of the unit? • What are some key vocabulary words that need to be included in the unit? • Which texts in the BA unit lend themselves to the different GLAD® strategies? 		

Conclusion

Whether it be new curriculum adoption (such as sparked our journey), new accountability measures, or a deep look at data that illuminates ways in which practices are not meeting the needs of all student groups, we encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity the context provides. How can we, as educators, and those in roles that support educators, use this moment to reflect on past practices and try new ways of teaching? How can we leverage the disequilibrium to focus our efforts on the needs of our multilingual learners? We wish you the same excitement and joy along your journey to make curriculum meaningful for your students. Most importantly, we hope that this glimpse into our experience may be a catalyst for you to reframe difficult situations into opportunities for growth, creating powerful learning that impacts both teachers and students.

