ED286705 1986-03-00 Reading Skills Development of Hispanic Students in American Public Schools: Some Specific Strategies. ERIC Digest.

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Author: Zarate, Narcisa
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TEXT: Mexican American students' grade-level reading and overall academic achievement, as measured by standardized tests, decline as they progress through the educational system. By grade seven, 65% of Mexican American students fall one or more grade levels below expected achievement. As a result, Mexican American attrition

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in junior and senior high schools is the highest among all racial and ethnic groups. To address this problem, teachers, students, and parents need strategies for developing and applying reading skills in all subjects.

THE CURRENT STATE OF HISPANIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

In order to function in American society, non-English speaking students must learn the language. Their learning, however, can be encouraged and enhanced by a positive pedagogical approach in the classroom. One very telling and immediate suggestion is for teachers to recognize and incorporate into the classroom the valuable twin resources of Hispanics: their language and culture.

Since language mastery precedes reading instruction, intensive language instruction must be a part of the curriculum. Developing and shaping basic reading skills (along with other cognitive processes) improves both reading and academic proficiency. Chicano students can and do achieve, given access, educational support, and encouragement (Anrig, 1984). They generally meet teachers' expectations; to expect less from Hispanic students is to underestimate their capacity for learning and to diminish the significance of education (Boyer, 1983). Elementary school Hispanic students who have received intensive reading, writing, and language instruction can be adequately prepared for secondary schooling if several tactical assumptions are implemented.

ESSENTIAL TACTICS OF HISPANIC EDUCATION

Four assumptions underlie the application of educational strategies: namely, that the teacher possess a knowledge of language and reading skills applicable to the subject taught; that the teacher be able to recognize and diagnose reading skill problems; that the teacher is cognizant of and sensitive to Hispanic culture--its beliefs, values and behavioral codes; and that the teacher is flexible and creative in the classroom.

The premise that reading requires "mastery" of language is part of the rationale for concentrating on the following strategies. Knowledge of a language involves both its literal and nonliteral forms, and hence idiomatic expressions and figures of speech which enable students to infer, associate, and recognize implications. Since vocabulary acquisition is a linchpin of literacy and since reading comprehension and vocabulary are intimately related, any student who falls below the 50th percentile on a standardized pre-test in reading/vocabulary should be targeted for rich instruction. According to the findings of the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics, Hispanic students need more personal attention and daily contact, including more instructional materials, if they are to improve their reading comprehension.

SOME SPECIFIC AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

Among the strategies found effective with Hispanic students are:

--Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1980) A strategy demanding student participation in the learning process via action between teacher and student and interaction among students. Cognitive and affective transaction is the key to this strategy, appropriate for preschool through adult education. Preschool children learn language and then learn to read. Here, respect is shown not only for the experiences and language students bring with them to school, but also for their heritage and natural curiosity.

--Directed Reading/Thinking Activities, DRTA (Stauffer, 1969) A sequential strategy designed to help student and teacher establish purposes for reading, identifying concepts and applying reading skills. Adaptable for all levels and subjects, it is particularly appropriate when students need individual attention, structure, extended activities or refinement in reading skills. It enables the teacher to identify the specific skill which warrants remediation and to initiate appropriate activities to encourage those skills (i.e., making relationships, forming analogies, classifying, etc.).

--Easy Steps to Reading Improvement, ESTRI (Chaffee, 1975) This structured strategy, focusing on the English sound system and on writing, employs five principles of syllabification of English words. Exceptions are handled through reverse principles. Appropriate for any grade level, ESTRI encourage students with a limited English background, students having problems with the English sound system, and those with spelling difficulties.

--Cloze Procedure (Taylor, 1953) The original "cloze" procedure asks that every fifth word be omitted, but the teacher has the option of omitting the element or skill being focused. Some examples of omissions are language markers, context clues, definitions and examples within the reading material. Cloze works for those who need to learn language structure involving any subject area.

--Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review, SQ3R (Robinson, 1961) SQ3R is a five-step strategy appropriate for all grades and subjects and designed especially to encourage mature students to become independent in reading expository materials. Those who read at grade level can apply its techniques to improve comprehension. SQ3R not only aids students in organizing and outlining, but also assists them in developing a sequential process in reading any assignment. The teacher can thus create extension and refinement activities to develop higher levels of thinking.

--Sequential Steps to Reading Nonliteral Language (Sherer, 1977) Appropriate for all grades and subjects, this strategy proposes a five-step approach to reading nonliteral or figurative language (metaphors, similies, hyperboles, personification, idioms). Its steps include: defining each type of figurative language, providing signal words; helping the student see comparisons; identifying the author's purpose in making the comparisons; and deciding what similarities the author wants readers to see. This strategy helps students understand what they read and clarify concepts, while increasing their

vocabulary, improving their writing, and helping them read literature and history.

--Cognate Recognition In this strategy, teacher and student identify words which are the same in both languages. Using the sound systems of each language, students pronounce words in that particular reading in order to become aware of the differences. Definitions are presented, compared, and discussed. Some examples of cognate words are: doctor, local, and adobe.

--Paragraph Function (Robinson, 1975) This strategy recognizes specific functions of paragraphs which serve as guideposts to meaning: explanatory, definitional, introductory, transitional, narrative, descriptive, summary and conclusion. The paragraph function also establishes writing style and pattern. The essence of paragraphs is that the organized message is equal to the sum of a series of paragraphs. Applicable for any grade level and content area, this strategy strengthens knowledge of structure in reading and writing. Knowing the function of a paragraph increases understanding of content and improves reading and writing.

--Critical Analysis (Chaffee, 1985) This strategy permits student-teacher interaction and involves extensive use of English. Students dissect statements, paragraphs, or essays and then reconstruct them. Students become aware of multiple denotations, connotations, euphemisms, etc., while teachers identify vague and precise language, techniques of persuasion, and differentiate among facts, opinions and propaganda. Ample opportunities occur for discussion of reasoning fallacies.

A CODA TO CURRENT HISPANIC EDUCATION

The strategies suggested are adaptable to the needs of Mexican American students. Although they apply to most educational levels, several specific recommendations for junior high school teachers include: (1) providing clear and concise sequential steps in assignments; (2) devising a variety of activities using English language and reading skills; (3) striving for effective English instruction and, whenever possible, incorporating intensive instruction for all students who fall below grade level; (4) alerting students to reading skills they possess and prompting them to use those skills in every reading activity; (5) recognizing students' varying language and reading skill levels and constructing lesson plans accordingly; and (6) providing, as needed, individual instruction, rich vocabulary instruction, extensive reading, and opportunities to experiment with English.

Similarly, high school teachers should become more proficient in teaching reading skills, provide students with appropriate labels for reading skills, and encourage students to apply collateral cognitive processes to all reading assignments. High school teachers should be cognizant of the principles of learning: overlearning, ordering, sizing, or programming new material, rewarding desired responses, and frequent reviews.

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