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The passage of Public Law 94-142 mandated that students with a primary language other than English must be placed in regular classrooms with English-speaking children and teachers. Many teachers whose only language is English, however, feel unqualified to teach non-English speakers. This Digest will present practical strategies for teachers

to use when working with language-diverse students and discuss some of the most recent research on the topic.

A CHANGE IN THINKING

Not too many years ago one could find articles in education journals which proposed that children with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds were inherently deficient and inferior, and that their chances for success in school were very slight. Today, however, the outlook for non-English speakers in our schools is much improved. Recent research has shown that giving these students a chance to use English in natural and meaningful situations in the classroom enhances their second language acquisition. Students who speak English as a second language may be referred to as bilingual. Those who speak only their native language are monolingual. Lacking English as a primary language, many students who are very capable of learning are unable to do so because of the language barrier. In 1970 Justin indicated that almost one million Spanish-speaking students in the Southwest were unable to go beyond the eighth grade because of the language factor.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

According to Bond et al. (1989), perhaps the ideal situation is to have bilingual teachers to help meet the needs of these children. However, this is usually impossible, particularly in schools where there are many different languages spoken by the students. Yet teachers who speak only English can still provide a warm and supportive atmosphere in which their limited-English-speaking students can learn to communicate by speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Hayes and Bahruth (1985) describe such an atmosphere in a class in Pearsall, Texas. The class consisted of 22 migrant children, ages 10 to 16. The age range shows that some of the children had failed a year or more of school already. The children all spoke Spanish and most knew little English. Besides school, their exposure to English came from television and the radio. Most were reading three or more years below grade level; some were nonreaders. Obviously, the prediction that the majority of these children would become illiterate dropouts with only a life of migrant labor to look forward to was quite likely to come true. From the first day of school, Hayes and Bahruth worked on improving their students' self-concepts. They undertook activities that emphasized working together. The students drew pictures, talked about their favorite things, traced each other's silhouettes, and developed a sense of unity as a class. The teachers read many of their favorite books aloud to the students each day. When the book was read, they printed the name on the bulletin board. After 6 weeks students were asked to pick one of the books, illustrate a scene from it, and using the illustration as a prop, tell the story to their classmates. In this way they "planted and nurtured the seed of reading," a seed which began to germinate early. The children began to ask to take home books which they had read, as well as other books in the class library.

Another strategy Hayes and Bahruth employed early on was the use of dialogue journals. As Hudelson (1988) points out, if there is no fear of being marked "wrong," writing is a powerful tool for students with limited English skills. The students wrote on any topic they chose. Teachers read the journal entries and responded. The teachers neither criticized the content nor edited in any way. With time, the students improved, often dramatically, in their use of the English language.

When tested during the latter part of the school year, one child had improved one grade level, seven children had improved two+ grade levels, and another child had improved four+ grade levels. While most of the children were still below their age grade level, it must be remembered that they were tested on a test normed with a native speaker population. Their tremendous achievement is certainly apparent. But perhaps even more important, these children learned that they could learn, and they were very proud of what they accomplished.

In a report on other ways that classroom activities can be modified to provide the special support that LEP children need, Allen (1986) also stresses making the reading/writing connection. Like Hayes and Bahruth, the teacher read high-interest stories to the children. She also found many strategies to extend the stories in interesting and motivating ways. The classroom was not one of the "no talking" stereotypes that so often appear in research literature--this classroom thrived on communication. Dingboom (1994) also stressed a risk-free environment for children to explore literature and added parental involvement with home-based reading.

Ching (1993) succeeded in integrating a recently arrived Vietnamese first grader into a summer course that focused on language arts by letting him use cut-out art as his sign system for expressing his frustration at sometimes not being able to communicate with his classmates. The many language arts activities, such as silent reading, read alouds, story writing, cooking, and singing, provided him with the resources to acquire language. His reading and writing improved slowly in a print-rich environment, but his artistic creative strength gave him the means to communicate more fully with his classmates.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

In a small and highly informative book Cambourne and Turbill (1987) describe the theory and practice of this kind of learning experience for kindergartners in Australia. Each of the classrooms they observed had a mix of English and non-English speaking children. The two point out that all children use coping strategies to learn to read and write, but that the speed with which English speakers and non-English speakers solve the "written language puzzle" differs. The initial coping strategies, according to Cambourne and Turbill, are: (1) use of related activities, particularly art; (2) use of environmental print--that is, the print the children see around them every day; (3) use of repetition; (4) assistance from and interaction with other children; (5) assistance from

and interaction with the teacher; (6) use of "temporary" spelling.

One fear that many researchers have as they look at children of other cultures being mainstreamed into regular classrooms is that their cultural identity will be lost. For this reason, teachers should strive to use reading materials that focus on the cultural heritage of the students, if such materials are available. Alternatively, teachers should emphasize the positive aspects of the various cultures in the United States, and reading materials that stress cultural diversity should be used.

Another reason for using these kinds of reading materials is that some research (Horowitz, 1984) shows that bicultural readers comprehend and remember materials that deal with their own culture better than those of another culture. There is evidence that cultural relevance of stories may be more pronounced in higher grades than in lower grades. It may be that this factor accounts for reports from some teachers that bicultural students are not interested in school. However, this could also be related to the importance (or lack of importance) given to schooling in the student's home culture. Teachers need to use materials and techniques that utilize content which is meaningful to the communities that they will serve. This means that if your class has Spanish speakers, use of Mexican or Puerto Rican or Cuban folklore (depending on the ethnic group), cultural activities, oral histories, or family stories as a part of the reading program will help stimulate interest in new text content.

Some suggestions that the teacher of the multicultural student should remember are:

*Instruction in the language arts should always be adapted to individual needs

*The student should be taught some "survival" words in English, e.g., home address, rest room, etc.

*The nonnative speaker should be teamed with another student who acts as a "big brother" or "big sister" in helping the foreign student become acquainted with the school

*Resources from within the community can be used to help the foreign student--adults or other students who speak the language, for example

*Students should be placed in mixed groups for reading and language arts so they can gain more experience with English

*Time is necessary for the foreign student to use English in real communication--talking, listening, reading, and writing.

Baca et al. (1994) remind us that "language minority and culturally different students are the fastest growing group of students in the public schools today--as a group they are already the majority in more than 20 of our largest cities in the nation." Of course, not every teacher teaches in an urban environment where she or he will encounter a diverse student population, but the basic strategies presented in this Digest can help

those who do.

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