



Educating Hispanic Students: Effective Instructional Practices

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Effective instructional practices are crucial to addressing the educational crisis facing many Hispanic students in the United States. The number of Hispanic students attending public schools has increased dramatically in recent decades, yet Hispanic students as a group have the lowest levels of education and the highest dropout rate of any student group. Conditions of poverty and health, as well as other social problems have made it difficult for some Hispanics living in the U.S. to improve their educational status. Cultural and historical practices have also placed numbers of Hispanic children at risk for educational failure. Research-based instructional practices are thus vital to improving the academic success of Hispanic students. CREDE researchers have synthesized the research on strategies that have been significant in advancing the achievement of these students. This brief presents these identified teaching practices, which can be applied in any classroom and are beneficial for all students, as well.

Effective Teaching Practices for Hispanic Students

Research shows that education needs to be meaningful and responsive to students' needs, as well as linguistically and culturally appropriate (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). Instruction must specifically address the concerns of Hispanic students who come from different cultures and who are often trying to learn a new language. The home and community environment must be tapped into and connected to students' learning in addition to focusing on knowledge learned in the classroom. CREDE researchers suggest five research-based practices that, while valuable for most English language learners, have been particularly successful for teaching Hispanic students (Waxman, Padrón, & Arnold, 2001). These practices are highlighted below.

Culturally-Responsive Teaching

Culturally-responsive teaching incorporates the everyday concerns of students, such as important family and community issues, into the curriculum. Teachers develop learning activities based on familiar concepts, facilitating literacy and content learning and helping Hispanic students feel more comfortable and confident with their work (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). By working from and validating students' existing knowledge base, this teaching practice improves the acquisition and retention of new knowledge and develops students' self-confidence and self-esteem. For Hispanic students whose experiences and everyday living may not be parallel to those experiences found in the school environment, culturally-responsive teaching makes new subject matter and everyday lessons relevant and significant. It increases the transfer of school-taught knowledge to real-life situations and exposes students to knowledge about other individuals or cultural groups (Rivera & Zehler, 1991). This helps Hispanic students prepare themselves for meaningful social roles in their community and the larger society by emphasizing and connecting both social and academic responsibility.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning uses small groups in which students have specific roles in order to accomplish specific tasks and activities. This enables students to work together to maximize and stimulate their own learning as well as that of others in the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). By having opportunities to discuss and defend their ideas with others, students come to complex understandings. Instead of lecturing and transmitting material, teachers facilitate the learning process by encouraging cooperation among students. This teaching practice is student-centered and creates interdependence among students and the teacher (Rivera & Zehler, 1991). While cooperative learning is appropriate for all students, it is critical for Hispanic students who may face socio-economic disadvantages. Through collaborative practices, they can develop the social skills and inter-group relations essential to academic success. Cooperative learning activities influence Hispanic students by

- ♦ providing opportunities for students to communicate with each other;
- ♦ developing social, academic, and communication skills;
- ♦ decreasing anxiety and boosting self-confidence and self-esteem through individual contributions and achievement of group goals;
- ♦ improving individual and group relations by learning to clarify, assist, and challenge others' ideas;
- ♦ developing proficiency in English by providing students with rich language experiences that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Christian, 1995; Rivera & Zehler, 1991); and
- ♦ providing skills that are necessary to function in real-life situations, such as the utilization of context for meaning, the seeking of support from others, and the comparing of nonverbal and verbal cues.

Instructional Conversations

The instructional conversation (IC) is an extended discourse between the teacher and students in areas that have educational value as well as relevance for the students. It is initiated by students to develop their language and complex thinking skills, and to guide them in their learning processes (Tharp et al., 2000). Rather than limiting expectations for Hispanic students by avoiding

discussion during instruction, instructional conversations emphasize dialogue with teachers and classmates (Durán, Dugan, & Weffer, 1997). Hispanic students may not have full control of the English language, which may prevent them from participating in classroom discussions. One major benefit of using instructional conversations with Hispanic students who are learning English is that ICs provide students with this opportunity for extended discourse, which is an important principle of second language learning (Christian, 1995).

Cognitively-Guided Instruction

Cognitively-guided instruction emphasizes learning strategies that enhance students' metacognitive development. It focuses on the direct teaching and modeling of cognitive learning strategies and giving students opportunities to practice them. Through explicit instruction, students learn how to monitor their own learning by tapping various strategies to accelerate their acquisition of English or academic content (Waxman, Padrón, & Knight, 1991). This instructional approach is beneficial to Hispanic students who are not doing well in school because the students can remove some of the individual barriers to academic success by learning how to use cognitive strategies effectively.

One example of effective cognitively-guided instruction is reciprocal teaching, a procedure in which students are instructed in four specific reading comprehension-monitoring strategies: (1) summarizing, (2) self-questioning, (3) clarifying, and (4) predicting. These cognitive skills can increase reading achievement and help students master their school-based knowledge.

Technology-Enriched Instruction

Technology-enriched instruction incorporates more active student learning and is more student-centered. Instead of delivering knowledge, teachers are facilitators of learning through the use of multimedia and other technology (Padrón & Waxman, 1999). Technology can be especially helpful for Hispanic students learning English. Web-based picture libraries can promote Hispanic students' comprehension in content-area classrooms (e.g., science and mathematics). Multimedia can facilitate auditory skill development by integrating visual presentations with sound and animation (Bermúdez & Palumbo, 1994). Digitized books are also effective tools that allow Hispanic students to request pronunciations for unknown words, request translations of sections, and ask questions. Technology-enriched instruction also helps students connect learning in the classroom to real-life situations, thereby creating a meaningful context for teaching and learning (Means & Olson, 1994). It allows Hispanic students to connect classroom instruction that may be beyond their everyday experiences to a rich and interactive medium that may be more familiar.

Conclusion

The effective instructional practices described above can significantly improve the academic success of Hispanic students. They respect the students' desire to learn and the collective knowledge students bring to the classroom. Changes in classroom practice, however, need to be accompanied by changes in policy that reflect the diversity in classroom settings. Instructional practices are key components, but not recipes for improving schools. No single approach will be a solution for all of the educational challenges facing Hispanic students. Each school should be considered unique, and educators should choose among research-based practices according to the needs of the Hispanic students they serve. Educators should recognize the importance of family and community influences and other critical out-of-school factors that influence the outcomes of schooling in addition to integrating these practices into the school environment.

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