

SIX EASY AND BENEFICIAL STRATEGIES FOR AN INTERCULTURALLY RESPONSIVE (IR) CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This scenario is a reflection of many classrooms throughout the United States. This heterogeneous population of students is Linguistically, Culturally, and Educationally Diverse. Some are Native Born, and others have immigrated for various reasons. These reasons include new Employment Opportunities, a United States Education, Political Refuge, and Family Relocation to name a few. Our schools must learn to respond to this diversity by providing an Interculturally Responsive (IR) Classroom (Jones, 2013) and Linguistically appropriate methods for Language Learners. The following strategies will assist in creating an Inter culturally Responsive Classroom and they are (a) provide side-by-side dual language opportunities, (b) assist with language transfer, (c) loosen up dialogues, (d) make language learning interesting, (e) Utilize Graphic Organizers, and (f) Doodle. The aforementioned six strategies are easy and beneficial for any teacher to utilize and these strategies will assist the language learning situations in the classroom.

Keywords: Inter-cultural Responsiveness (IR), Awareness, Sensitivity, Responsiveness, Reflection, Language Learners

INTRODUCTION

Being an effective Inter-culturally Responsive (IR) teacher is an arduous task that requires perseverance and drive. It is one that requires teachers to be aware of cultural differences, sensitive to cultural needs, and the willingness to respond to the varied cultures. Teachers are expected to teach the student who enters the school one day as a limited English speaker and the immediate need to start preparing for the state assessment the next day, the student who understands English words but not comprehending what's taught, and/or the student whose language is constructed by his culture and as result is not American discourse.

This aforementioned scenario is a reflection of many English as a Second Language (ESL) programs throughout the United States. The following student scenarios provide real world examples of the challenges that teachers face and the examples consist of students from Mexico, Pakistan, and Syria. The student struggles consist of English language proficiency, Reading and Comprehension skill deficiencies, and English writing skills. The following best practices and scenarios were crafted after an exhaustive

review of the literature on language learners. An annotated bibliography was aligned with the experiential practices of the authors to form a Research and Scenario based template to incorporate Inter cultural Responsiveness (IR) into the classroom. This heterogeneous population of students is Linguistically, Culturally, and Educationally diverse (Grantmakers for Education, 2013; Roy-Campbell, 2013). Some are native born, and others have immigrated to the United States for various reasons. Grantmakers for Education (2013) reported these reasons include new employment opportunities, a United States education, political refuge, and family relocation to name a few. Our schools must learn to respond to this diversity by providing an Interculturally Responsive (IR) Classroom (Jones, 2013) and linguistically appropriate methods for Language Learners.

1. Literature Review

Duncan and Gil (2014) reported that United States schools hosts an estimated 4.6 Million English language learners. These students come with diverse backgrounds and diverse language heritages. Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Hmong are reported as the most

Common Languages of these Students. In 2010, Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals accounted for 25.2 Million, or 9% of the United States population over age five (Pandya, Batalova, & McHugh, 2011). California, Texas, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey were the states that had the highest concentration of LEP individuals (Pandya et al., 2011). Because of our country's increase in language Learners and Students of diverse backgrounds, providing the best program Models and Educational Opportunity is top priority (Honigsfeld, 2009). As educators, we must realize that one size doesn't fit all in today's Educational Society.

Teachers are expected to educate Students from all backgrounds, from all Languages, and specific content areas (Roy-Campbell, 2013). If given the appropriate tools and strategies, teachers can become aware, sensitive and then responsive (Jones, 2013) of student's academic and linguistic needs (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Cultural awareness in the classroom will equip teachers to teach their content to all students including English Language Learners (ELL). Lucas et al. (2008) suggested that although teachers whose primary responsibility is to teach students subject matter cannot be expected to become experts on language, they can learn to identify and articulate the special characteristics of the language of their disciplines and make them explicit for their ELLs. The following strategies will assist in creating an Interculturally Responsive (IR) classroom and they are (a) Provide side-by-side Dual Language Opportunities, (b) Assist with Language Transfer, (c) Loosen up Dialogues, (d) Make Language Learning Interesting, (e) Utilize Graphic Organizers, and (f) Doodle. The aforementioned six strategies are easy and beneficial for any teacher to utilize and these strategies will assist the language learning situations in the classroom.

Academic Knowledge and Conceptual Knowledge learned in a Student's Native Language are able to transfer to a Student's Target Language while providing as a rich resource for Language Acquisition (Cardenas-Hagan & Pollard-Durdola, 2007; Cummins, 2000; Olsen, 2006). According to Lucas et al. (2008).

Students who are academically strong in their first

language already have a broad range of subject matter knowledge and skills to draw on while learning a second language, thereby easing the burden of having to learn subject matter and a new language simultaneously. (p. 5).

Research has indicated that reading skills and knowledge can transfer across languages (Goldenburg, 2008; Olsen, 2006). Goldenberg (2008) reported, "National Literacy Panel and four other meta-analysis reached the same conclusion that learning to read in the Home Language promoted reading achievement in the Second Language" (p. 15). The research studies agreed that if a student has a strong foundation in reading the Home Language then reading comprehension of the Target Language will simply transfer (Goldenberg, 2008). Educators need to understand that Language Learners should be able to comprehend the concept in their Target Language (Goldenburg, 2008) then the concept can transfer with ease and congruency (Washburn, 2008). This transfer of the Home Language to the Target Language should be the goal of teacher because it will allow more time and focus to be invested in learning academic content. Miguel's example below exemplifies a couple of ways to assist teachers with Language Transfer.

1. If he knows it in his Native Language, should he know it in English?

Miguel came to the United States at the beginning of his Tenth Grade Year. His parents decided that living with his Aunt and Uncle in the States would provide him more opportunities and a better chance of success. His posture and raised chin portrayed a sense of determination and resiliency. He had a positive future ahead of him but a present lack of English skills accompanied him. Miguel was considered to be a non-English speaker as he entered his new high school. His ESL teacher had high hopes for him, but was concerned of his English language proficiency. With a strong foundation of his Native Language, Miguel started down the road of success quickly. His Language Acquisition Skills transferred to his Target Language of English. As Miguel learned new concepts in English, he depended on his strong foundation of his Native Language.

1.1 Provide side-by-side Dual Language Opportunities

Supplemental Dual Language Material is extremely beneficial for Language Learners (Dewe, 2011). It gives the opportunity for students to recognize the concept in their Native Language and then it can be transferred to their Target Language. Also, promoting literacy by creating dual media books (Cummins, 2005) is a way for students to visualize the parallel between Languages.

1.2 Assist with Language Transfer

Teachers should assist in the transferring from the Native Language to the Target Language by recognizing that transfer is not automatic (Goldenburg, 2008; Olsen, 2006). Many times allowing students to recognize cognates or by providing visuals to confirm the learned concept will assure the Language Learner.

Assisting students in transferring languages from the Home Language to the Target Language requires teachers to be aware of the linguistic background of the student and sensitive to the linguistic needs. Awareness of the student's Home Language proficiency as well as the Communication and Academic Skills of the Target Language should be known by the teacher (Goldenburg, 2008). It shows the Language Learner that transferring languages is possible in order to understand the "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1981) of the teacher.

In his seminal work, Krashen (1981) supported that language isn't simply learned, it must be comprehended by the Language Learner. The message must be comprehended by the Language Learner (Krashen, 1981, Olsen, 2006). Krashen (1981) suggested that Language Learners acquire their Target Language by hearing and understanding messages that are slightly above their language proficiency. He called it "comprehensible input + 1" (Krashen, 1981). In his continued research, Krashen (1985) claimed by obtaining comprehensible input a Language Learner can understand the meaning of the message and focus on semantics at a later point in the process. Dewe (2011) and Grantmakers for Education (2013) stressed the importance of creating content objectives that were Clear, Obtainable, and comprehensible. Shamsha's example below exemplifies a couple of activities to invite comprehensible input into the

classroom.

2. I taught the Lesson, isn't that enough?

Shamsha, a 5th grader, from Pakistan began school in the United States when she was in 2nd grade. When the ESL Teacher met her, Shamsha's Speaking and Writing skills were proficient in English. However, her Reading skills were lacking. She could pronounce all the English words that she was Reading, however she couldn't comprehend their meaning. Shamsha expressed that she could understand the words spoken by the teacher but didn't understand the lesson being taught. Her ESL teacher talked to her content teacher who replied, "I taught her the lesson, isn't that enough?" Afterwards, the ESL Teacher worked towards making the content understandable for Shamsha. The information that Shamsha was learning had to be comprehended for it to be beneficial.

2.1 Loosen Up Dialogues

Dialogues don't have to be only academic; encourage social dialogues as well. Students can be creative in their words and responses within the dialogue. It's important to adapt the message to the Language Learner's needs (Haynes, 2005). Dialogues should include high frequency words and words that students comprehend the meaning. Even if the dialogue isn't advanced, it's okay.

2.2 Make Language Learning Interesting

Learning a language can be considered boring if the teacher isn't innovative and creative. The focus should be on comprehensible (Grantmakers for Education, 2013) input that is interesting. It's easy to get real world input that is interesting but not comprehensible (Krashen, 2013). Teachers should find out about the likes and dislikes of their Language Learners and embed them into the instruction.

Sensitivity stems from being aware of a Language Learner's needs (Sato, 2014) and then being willing to mold instruction around those needs (Jones, 2013). Learning about the interests of the students is a way to be sensitive while being responsive (Community HealthCorps, 2008). It's a skill set that allows you to learn about others and how to better them in our communities (Community HealthCorps, 2008, Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011). Respond by understanding that culturally diverse

students can think, speak, and write in different arrangements than the socially dominate culture. Their organization of thoughts could be different than those in mainstream American schools.

Language Learners write expository text using their structure of their native language and cultural background (Kaplan, 1972). According to Kaplan (1972), the discourse pattern of a language learner is the logical arrangement of ideas. Montano-Harmon (2001) presented that a student's literacy skills are connected to the student's discourse pattern. He argued that if students don't know the expectations of the standard American English discourse then educators can't expect them to produce them in expository texts. It is vital to a language learner's education for the teacher to acknowledge the student's home and academic discourse because discourse that is spoken at home varies from the dominant assessment driven curriculum (Mays, 2008). Aziz's example below exemplifies a couple of ways to assist teachers with discourse patterns of Language Learners.

3. He lives in America, shouldn't he write like one?

Aziz came to the United States at the beginning of his 7th grade year. His family moved from Syria because their home country was in Turmoil and Safety was a critical issue. His extended family and their occupations were in danger. His English skills were adequate for his new U.S. school, however his English writing skills needed improvement according to American language proficiency guidelines. When his writing skills were assessed, he scored as a Limited English Writer. This result wasn't because of the lack of English vocabulary but because of the structure of his Written English Language Discourse. As Aziz created his Written Language in his new Target Language, his English Writing Skills became more proficient and while reflecting more of an American Writer.

3.1 Utilize Graphic Organizers

Teachers can supply graphic organizers for writing assignments in all content areas (Lucido, Leo, & Boatright, 2012). "Venn diagrams, graphs, and timelines help students clarify concepts and understand causal relationships and trace the sequence of events by asking them to organize ideas visually" (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 10).

3.2 Doodle

Allow students to draw little pictures of their Learning Objectives (Montano-Harmon, 2001). Students can make foldables that include words, definitions, pictures and how to use the word in a sentence. Doodles give words meaning (Ensminger, 2010) with the help of pictures.

Conclusion

Communicating via Text or Spoken Language can be difficult for Language Learners. The complexity of culture as related to Intercultural Communication can be difficult because Language Discourse reflects culture and culture is Unique (Wang & Lui, 2007). Teachers who are aware of Diverse Discourse Patterns and are interculturally sensitive to Language Learners act beyond cultural circumstances (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). They are becoming Interculturally Responsive (IR).

These easy and beneficial strategies for an Interculturally Responsive (IR) Classroom will help any teacher assist with Language Learning Situations. Teachers need to focus on how to adapt materials, implement culturally responsive lesson plans, and promote learning (Newman et al., 2010). Grant and Gillette (2006), Gur (2010) and Ward and Ward (2003) agreed that being a culturally competent teacher suggests being responsive to students from all cultures, ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds while valuing their Cultural heritage. Teachers of Culturally Responsive Classrooms want to educate all students despite different cultural backgrounds (Montgomery, 2001) while Interculturally Responsive (IR) Classrooms educate all students while being culturally aware, sensitive and most importantly responsive (Jones, 2013) through reflection. Aponte-Soto et al. (2014) claimed that being culturally Responsive is an implementation process that is a reflective practice to understanding one's own culture while relating to another culture. Teachers need to make reflections of their own cultures while respecting other perspectives a priority (Han & Thomas, 2010).

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