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BASAL READING INSTRUCTION AND E.S.L. STUDENTS

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The number of English as a Second Language (ESL) students enrolled in schools across North America is increasing (Cummins, 1981). The increase means that more are enrolled in mainstream classrooms where they are taught to read using materials and programs designed for native English speakers. Eighty to ninety percent of the reading instruction in the United States (Aukerman, 1981; Austin & Morrison, 1963; Chall, 1967) and Canada (Pieronek, 1981) involves basal readers. Since L2 learners are being taught to read using basal readers (Gunderson, 1983) this paper presents an integrated Second Language (L2) lesson plan developed with their needs and abilities in mind.

Basal Readers and the D. R.A.

A basal reading series is generally designed within a skills model of reading, typically providing "...for developmental sequences of phonics skills, word recognition skills, comprehension skills, and so on" (Aukerman, 1981, p. 11). Basal vocabulary is controlled so that only words occurring at a high frequency in the general lexicon are used, only a few words are introduced at a time, words are repeated often to ensure they are learned, and words are not encountered in text until they have been introduced. The initial texts designed for L2 students contain vocabulary that differs from L1 basals. In L2 texts the highest frequency words are inflected "ing" forms of verbs (Rebane, 1983). Since they are the first grammatical morphemes learned in both L1 (Brown, 1973) and L2 (Dulay & Burt, 1974) it is appropriate to include them in initial L2 texts because they are a prominent feature of the language of beginning L2 learners. The vocabulary in initial L1 reading texts is inappropriate, however. Teachers should place beginners in texts designed for L2 students or use some other instructional approach such as Language Experience.

Basal reading series usually prescribe the Directed Reading Approach (D.R.A.) to teach individual lessons which involves; 1) a discussion of story background, 2) the introduction of new vocabulary, 3) guided reading, 4) story follow-up activities, and 5) related skills development activities. Pieronek (1979) developed the "ideal integrated reading lesson plan," a refinement of D.R.A., as a guide for classroom teachers. The L2 plan presented in this paper is a refinement of D.R.A. to be used with L2 students.

The D.R.A. and L2 Students

Text comprehension depends, in part, on one's background knowledge and experience (Bransford and Johnson, 1978; Thorndyke,

1977; Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz, 1977; Mandler and Johnson, 1977). Betts (1946) notes that "...the pupils should be prepared for the reading of a given selection" (p.430). D.R.A. provides for background knowledge by introducing historical features and concepts. Background knowledge is essential for L2 students (Johnson, 1981 & '82; Carrell, 1981; Hudson, 1982). However, they face the additional burden of not knowing a great number of the items of vocabulary associated with the background of a particular story. They lack a knowledge of mainstream customs, idiomatic terms, or genre-specific vocabulary. The standard procedure for basal vocabulary introduction is in isolation. Aukerman (1981) describes this as the "whole-word" method or "...providing pupils with the new words in each lesson in chalkboard work just prior to reading in their pupil books" (p. 11).

Step one

The first instructional step is the integration of vocabulary and background, a task best accomplished by assuring that 4 areas of vocabulary are covered: 1) new vocabulary, 2) context-dependent vocabulary (e.g., "pilot" in a story about ships means something different from "pilot" in a story about airplanes), 3) genre specific vocabulary, and 4) idiomatic vocabulary – within the structure of the story. It is important at this point to introduce words at a sight level as an aid for learning meaning. Stage one can be best understood with an example from a third grade classroom in which three students were being introduced to a basal story about a "fair". (Ruddell, Adams, & Taylor, Surprises and Prizes, 1978)

Before the lesson the story was mapped and an outline containing main narrative elements in chronological order was produced. The resulting structural units resemble typical story grammar elements (cf. Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975; Stein and Glenn, 1979; Thorndyke, 1977). Vocabulary was ordered according to occurrence in the story providing a set of expectations to guide passage comprehension. Illustrations were collected for use as cues to the learning of meaning. Analysis resulted in the following outline:

1. Introduction – Family on its way to a fair.

2. Family arrives at fair, introduction of fair features.

3. Family buys tickets to the fair – buying features.

4. Family sees a high wire show – high wire features.

5. High wire incident – incident features.

6. Conclusion – Family gets to jump on net.

Thirty-four words to be introduced were identified: no, this, want, dad, Dave, miss, mom, fair, hurry, library, people, books, but, here, need, now, dime, win, Bell, Day, prize, ticket, jump, jumped, looked, Mrs., show, so, that, bike, fell, Ling, net, Rose. The order of introduction was determined by story structure. So, for instance, fair, no, Dave, miss, mom, dad, this, hurry, and want were associated with the introduction and were taught first.

The lesson was begun in a typical manner: "today we are going to read a story about a fair. (Holds up the word "fair" printed on an oak-tag strip and repeats it once, places it into a pocket chart.) "Do you know what a fair is?" (Reveals several illustrations of a fair.) During this portion attention is focussed on word meaning, however, each reference to a word is cue for the teacher to point to the related flashcard and say "yes, a fair is a place with rides, prizes, tents, and shows."

The first phase of stage one focusses on word meanings integrated into a story or passage structure. The "fair" introduction, for instance, began with a discussion of the word fair and continued with the development of the first story element, a family hurrying to a fair. "The story today is about a fair. Dave, (Shows flashcard) his dad, (shows flashcard) and his mom (shows flashcard) are going to a fair (points to the word fair). Can someone tell me what mom means? After meaning is learned the next word is introduced. "Dave, his mom, and his dad (points to each word) are going to the fair (points to fair) and Dave is in a hurry (holds up the word hurry). The student is made aware of the words as visual units. The subtle introduction of words as visual units often helps students remember word meanings. That is, the printed form helps them remember what the words are so they can concentrate on what they mean. Since teachers know their students' abilities they can judge how much of a story to teach at one time. The most meaningful units to teach are story elements.

The second phase of step one represents a shift in emphasis from the teaching of word meanings to the teaching of word recognition. Again, the procedure involves retention of the structure of the story, beginning with the first words to be encountered and progressing sequentially through story elements.

"Can anyone remember this word?"(shows fair) "Yes, this is fair." (Moves fingers from left to right under the word.) "We know this word means a place with rides, shows, tents, and prizes." "What is this word?" (Students repeat the word fair individually and in unison.) While the emphasis is now on learning to recognize the words by sight the teacher subtly refers to the meanings either by repeating them aloud or by saying, "Yes, you're right, that is fair, what does it mean?" When students have difficulty recognizing words, their meanings can be used as added cues, i.e., "This means a place with rides, tents, prizes and shows."

The teacher's task in step one is threefold: 1) to help students acquire word meanings, to help them place the words into their speaking vocabulary while subtly associating them with the printed forms, 2) to help students learn to recognize words by sight while subtly reinforcing their meaning, and 3) to provide the background or concepts to be developed through the repeated sequential introduction of vocabulary and story structure. In each case, the activity uses information from other sources to help students learn a particular skill. So, for instance, story background and concepts are retained by the order in which word meanings are introduced, learning word meaning is assisted by the presence of the printed forms of words, and so on.

Step Two

Guided reading is an important factor in comprehension since it provides goals for reading. Reading can be guided globally or in increments. It has been my experience that guiding reading in a global fashion is more appropriate for L1 readers than for L2 readers. When step one has been successful and the students have acquired essential vocabulary at a lexical as well as a sight level and have been introduced to the essential structure and concepts of the passage, they are generally aware of global issues. Guided reading should emphasize significant structural elements. The first element in the fair story describes a family hurrying to a fair. The teacher began the guided reading with the statement, "Read the first two pages to find out why Dave was in a hurry to get to the fair." The question does not represent any really new activity. During the introduction of background and vocabulary, and the sight–word practice, the students focussed on the story element and the background of the element, the meaning of the vocabulary of the element, and the recognition of the printed forms of the vocabulary related to this element. The guided reading allows them to integrate all these sources of information in a meaningful way. As students become more proficient they can read increasingly greater portions of a story.

Step Three

Oral reading often occurs after guided reading. It is essential that oral reading be meaningful. If they are involved in oral reading it is essential that it involves the best in pronunciation, intonation, stress, and phrasing. In this respect L2 students are inappropriaately placed in the lowest reading group where they repeatedly hear the worst oral models. When L2 studens constitute a reading group, they should not listen to their own unrehearsed oral reading. It is essential that L2 students be placed in the 'best' reading group, where oral reading is excellent or in activities that present the best oral models, e.g., following along as the teacher reads, following along in a textbook while listening to a tape, choral reading with good readers, etc.

Steps Four and Five

Steps four and five involve related skills and enrichment activities. Follow–up exercises should redirect L2 students to the vocabulary and content of the material they have read. All too often, it seems, follow–up activities are not significantly related to the ongoing reading activities. Follow–up exercises should involve vocabulary practice, comprehension exercises related to the particular story, etc. Enrichment material should be at students' independent reading level and should be similar to the instructional material being read. Indeed, enrichment material should be directly related to the primary story being read in order to reinforce skills and to promote better comprehension. They will, after all, be familiar with the structure and vocabulary of theme–related stories.

Measuring L2 Reading Ability

In order to place students in appropriate reading groups

and materials, it is necessary to assess their reading abilities.
Two evaluation procedures have been found to be effective with
L2 students, the cloze procedure (Oller & Conrad, 1971; Bowen, 1969;
Darnell, 1968) and miscue analysis (Devine, 1981; Rigg, 1977;
Clarke, 1981). Mainstream teachers, however, generally rely upon
standardized test results to make reading placements (Barr, 1975;
Shavelson and Borko, 1979; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Johnston & All-
ington, 1983). Such a reliance is problematic with L2 students.
Gunderson (1984) analyzed L1 and L2 reading scores obtained from
individually- and group-administered standardized tests. Individu-
ally-administered L1 scores did not differ from group-administered
L1 scores, while the L2 difference was statistically significant.
L1 individual scores were predictive of group scores while L2
scores were not. Indeed, correlations between L2 individual and
group scores were zero. The estimations of two reading specialists
were compared with the individual and group assessment scores
revealing that L1 scores were valid while L2 scores were not.
L2 reading placement should be based on cloze scores or miscue
analysis rather than standardized test results.

Conclusion

The integrated L2 reading lesson plan is repetitive, purpose-
fully so. It is designed to provide L2 students with consistent
and redundant feedback in order to assist their learning of word
meanings, recognition of words, and comprehension. A preliminary
study has shown that the L2 D.R.A. results in significant gains
in comprehension. The use of basal readers and D.R.A. is not
necessarily recommended for ESL students. However, since it is
widely used across the United States and Canada, with both L1
and L2 students, the attempt has been made to make it as effective
as possible for L2 students. We anxiously await research that
will give us empirical evidence concerning the best methods for
teaching L2 students how to read in mainstream classrooms. Until
then we can use the L2 D.R.A.

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