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# English Literacy for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in the Mainstream Classroom in the U.S.A.

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## Introduction

Today, there are many arguments concerning Japanese education. Many teachers in Japan began to recognize the importance of understanding the truth that each child is a unique student who has different character, different talent and different preference. Teachers began to feel the necessity of changing the old system: “teacher orientated teaching” which is based on the idea that all the students can learn by one method. Each student is a different learner. The people in America seem to have noticed this much before than Japanese did. It is mainly because that America consists of much more diverse people. There has always been minority students whose English proficiency is limited.

The objective of this essay is to introduce basic definitions of “Language Minority Students” and LEP (Limited English Proficient ) Students in the U.S A., to describe some instructional strategies, and their signifi-

cance in developing the students' academic language skills. Finally, as a conclusion, the real role of mainstream teachers will be discussed. There must be some hints for Japanese mainstream teachers who are trying to make an active and cooperative class where every one of child with different abilities can learn a lot.

## **Treatment**

### **I. Basic Definitions**

#### **1 Language Minority Students**

Language minority students have a language other than English in their home background. They may share a household with, for example, a parent or grandparent who speaks a language other than English. On the other hand, a language-minority student may come from a home where English is rarely or never spoken. A language-minority child may be bilingual or LEP.

#### **2 LEP students**

LEP students are those who, by some measure, have insufficient English proficiency to succeed in English-only classrooms. Emphasis must be placed on the phrase "by some measure". Definitions of the term "limited English proficient" and the measures used to assess proficiency vary widely from district to district, and lack of uniformity in assessment is a significant problem both in identifying the needs of LEP students and in meeting those needs.

### **II. The present situation of LEP students**

No one knows exactly how many LEP students there are in the

United States. Between 1978 and 1982, the number of LEP students increased by 20 percent—from 2 to 2.4 million. Recent estimates range from 3.5 million to 5.3 million in kindergarten through 6th grade. (Hurley, p. 14) According to Dr. Carrasquillo, students need more than social-language skills to be successful in school: they need academic language, which involves using both receptive and productive language, thinking and reasoning skills in all content areas. However, too many LEP students in the United States are not taking sufficient Bilingual Education, Partly because it costs a lot. Also, the languages LEP students speak are so diverse and students differ in their educational background in this country.

### **III. Recommended strategies for Integrating oral and written language**

How the ability to communicate effectively in one language is achieved through diverse students? The answer involves two parts: (1) what is there—the environment—for the child to use, and (2) the ways that the children use it. No one is more concerned than the classroom teacher with the “what is there” in the child’s learning environment and with supporting the use the child makes of it. That’s simply the business of being a teacher. It’s comforting to know that children are good language learners. Children develop language best by observing and engaging in authentic communication—language used in situations that are meaningful and purposeful to participants. And so it is of crucial importance to recognize what is, and is not, authentic communication. Language is for telling people things they want to know or things you want them to know. Language isn’t for performing your ability to list attributes of salt

shakers. Children develop language by doing language, not by doing something else.

The good news is that classrooms can be—and many are—authentic language environments for children to creatively construct their first and second languages. Here, I would like to introduce three examples many teachers in America use to their children.

(1) **Show and Tell**

“Show and Tell Time” was one of children’s favorite time. In “Show and Tell Time”, a student tell the other students and the homeroom teacher about an incident or an experience which is important to him or her showing an object related to the speech. After that they have question period. For example, when a girl is asked to look after her friend’s dog, she took a picture of the dog saying, “Wow !! I will bring this photo to my school for Show and Tell Time”. She wants to tell her friends about the events and objects she lugged in ; she wants her friends to be her audience. There were matters of social status and acceptance and such which were crucial here.

“Show and Tell” is always authentic for children. Also, it is the perfect opportunity for them to control, to shape, to design, to creatively construct both what to tell and how. Their response to classmates’ telling were of their own constructing, too. There is the special value that this experience would hold for the ESL child. It would provide the perfect situation for the child to participate socially, the first concern of the second-language learner. It will provide contextual support that can help the child to convey his or her meanings and to grasp those expressed by others. Above all, it would provide a real reason for the child to interact with classmates and to shape his or her own message in his or her own

way in the new language.

### **(2) Story Time**

Another of children's favorite activities is "Story Time". Now this one is as old as human kind. Homeroom teacher constantly reads the children's favorite book every day. In applying story time, teacher must not forget the most basic concept of all: the child sitting down with a book and as much time as he wants to read it. All these would provide ways for the children to creatively construct meaning and expression in and through stories, the most timelessly and universally authentic event of all. Story time was a pleasurable break in the school day: a nice way to rest after recess, a way to fill in time before the bell rings. Research shows that reading aloud to children has a significant effect not only on literacy acquisition, but also on language development. For the child who is acquiring English as a second language, this literacy input is vital. A "Story Telling Program" should be developed that includes all children but should be designed in ways to provide special support to the second-language learner. Teachers whose classrooms include second-language learners should select with care the books they are sharing with the whole class, choosing ones that will help the child who is less proficient in English tap into the meaning.

### **(3) Journal**

The teacher also needs to employ motivational techniques. In a short essay, sometimes composed in a school diary, the child is encouraged to bring together what is learned in school with what is experienced in life. The teacher often sets an example by relating a personal experience, and then gets the children to talk about it "What would you have done if you had been me?" Besides this school diary, some teachers let the children

take turns bringing home and bringing back a notebook and a stuffed animal. Children love to write about their own experience of spending some time with the beloved stuffed animal. They bring it anywhere : the skating rink, the soccer field, their friend's house.....etc. They speak for it, they speak for themselves. The students express a wide range of communication themes in their writing.

Through the experiences of "Show and Tell", "Story Time" and "Journal", one can find the clear message : children's development of language is fostered in classroom communication situations that are purposeful to them. If one choose to take it seriously, "Show and Tell", "Story Time" and "Journals" are good places to begin.

#### **(4) Language Experience Approach (LEA)**

The "Language Experience Approach" has been proposed as an initial reading program for English-speaking children in which students produce reading materials based on their own interests and language background. Learners recount stories and the teacher writes their stories. The learner-produced stories are used as reading material and language development activities. The LEA approach capitalizes on shared experiences as a pathway to developing English reading skills. Learners are introduced to the written form of language which they control orally. Motivation is high as students are more apt to recognize their own words in print. In ESL classrooms the learners' experiences and ideas are used as a means of developing communication skills in all four skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The LEA approach integrates all four language skills in a holistic manner. It has many advantages for LEP students : they see their own words transformed into writing and used as a basis for a lesson, and it strengthens their self-esteem and promotes a

close working relationship between the teacher and the learners. It can be used both as a vehicle for individual instruction or group work. A strong relationship emerges when working with groups because they feel that they have made a worth contribution to the group and their words and experiences are important since they can say and read it again and again.

**(5) Story Mapping**

This activity is useful for both adolescents and adult ESL learners. It supposes that reading stories, especially short stories, dramas, and novels have structural elements that appear in many stories at all levels. (setting, plot, initial event, climax). Using a “Story Map” assumes that the instructional model puts learners through steps of the reading process in activities that replicate in one way or another the actual mental processes learners go through in reading a text. Here is an example of the many variations of this model.

- …Setting
- …First Event
- …Main characters
- …Problem/Plot
- …Turning Point
- …Ending

Story mapping has several functions in the ESL classroom. It can be used a : (a) a framework for designing questions to be used in teaching a story, (b) a study guide for developing routines for learners’ own creative stories, (c) a summary activity, and (d) providing the framework for sutdents’ stories of their own stories.

#### IV. "Teaching" English through content-area activities

Like Japanese students, many American students learn through using textbooks. Students are asked to open their books, to read out loud or silently, to answer oral or written questions and later, to be tested on the content. However, it seems that this way of approaching content and texts is particularly inappropriate for students whose native language is not English and who have parents who do not have time to help with their homework enough.

ESL students are in the classrooms, and the expectation is that they should receive the school's curricula in the content areas. So what are teachers to do? One way of addressing this problem is to use content-area material as a vehicle for language development. What is necessary is the combining of content-area goals with some specific principles of learning in general, and language learning in particular, in order to move from the objectives to sets of activities that will provide meaningful learning experiences for students still developing as English users. The following principles may be used as a starting point for developing learning activities from content area objectives :

##### **Principles**

1. Students learn both content and language by being active. Language develops through use.
2. All of the language processes are interrelated, and students in classroom activities.
3. Students learn to read by interacting with whole, authentic texts by reading, and they learn to write by creating whole, authentic texts by writing.
4. Reading comprehension is facilitated by having prior knowledge of



the topic of the text.

Background knowledge may be activated through classroom activities.

**Applications : Making the text readable**

Content objectives may be achieved by using a variety of materials and activities. But if teachers choose to use the textbook, a variety of activities could be undertaken to provide the children with necessary background experiences and language that should make their reading of the text successful. It is critical to begin their reading with a prereading activity that asks students to list what they already know about the topic. An alternative would be to construct a semantic map or web of what the children already know about the content. After what they already know has been listed, children would read the selection and then compare what they listed to what was actually in the selection. After reading, it is logical to ask, "What else did you learn from what you just read?" It is important for the students to spend time working together with a content focus, including reading and writing for various purposes.

**Applications : Mathematics Example**

According to Dr. Carrasquillo, mathematics provides the process to improve the ability to think, reason, and solve problems. And mathematical language is hard for all students, especially LEP students. There is another objective from mathematics. For many learners, the concept of probability might be most understandable if it were considered initially in a nonmathematical way by dealing with the idea of chance in people's daily lives. Chance refers to the idea that something might or might not occur: It could happen, but maybe it won't. "Who will win the city championship in football this year? Will all the members of our class be

in school tomorrow? How many members of our class will have perfect math papers this week?" After students have reported what their groups decided, the teacher could conclude that all of these were chance events, giving students the specific vocabulary for the concept that they have been investigating.

Following these nonmathematical activities, the mathematical side of probability should be developed. In grows once more, students would solve a variety of probability problems by carrying out sets of written directions that would ask them to do such thing as: Toss a coin into the air a certain number of times and record whether it lands heads or tails. As the learners solve these kinds of problems and struggle with answers to some of the questions, the learning logs would be a logical vehicle to use for enabling learners to consider what they were learning about probability.

#### **Applications : Science/Health Example**

Another way to approach the task of combining language and content is to group together a set of related objectives, such as the following set of intermediate science/health objectives: children will define the basic food groups, will recognize and understand culture differences in foods eaten, will define what is needed to stay healthy, will evaluate specific foods and diets in terms of how healthy they are.

As an initial activity, children could be asked to keep a record or log of all the food that they eat over a certain period of time. These logs would be kept individually and then brought to school. In school students in groups would share their logs with the goal of determining which foods they all have eaten and which foods they have eaten and unique to them or to their ethnic or cultural group. After small groups have listed the

foods eaten, a class list would be developed. Then small groups would work again to put the foods eaten into categories. How would the students categorize the foods they eat? Which foods would they put together, and why? After the groups have reached consensus about food groups, they might consult their textbooks or other written sources. Another way to examine foods would be a study of the nutritional elements in certain kinds of packaged foods, such as breakfast cereals. Students have used talking, reading, and writing for a variety of purposes. From the point of view of writing, children could create their own recipe books or bring in favorite recipes from home. All of these are examples of the kinds of integrative language activities advocated as crucial to the language and cognitive growth of ESL students.

## Conclusion

Through the research, one can find some good strategies to provide students with the opportunity to use English in both oral and written forms, for varied purposes. There is a truth: Teachers have to be willing to set aside for a time. They have to have the patience to allow their development to proceed as slowly as necessary, and the courage and imagination to work out new routes, new curricula, through which we can draw them into the world of learning and inquiry, holding them firmly without stifling their capacities, and offering them the means to learn actively, to explore problems and questions, and—most important—to discover in these enterprises their own competence as observers, thinkers, critics and creators.

Also, close collaboration between classroom and language specialists

(ESL and bilingual) teachers is essential in meeting the educational needs of these students. Language development does not stop when students are not in ESL classes. All teachers need to work together to ensure that language skills are developed throughout the school day. Minority-language students may need more time than is usually provided for them to develop academic language skills in English in bilingual and ESL programs. In many cases, ESL students may also need help in how to learn academic content. Because of the attention devoted to language at the beginning level of ESL instruction, students may have had limited opportunities to develop effective learning strategies and study skills. Also, unless students have been in a content-based ESL class or maintained their subject matter development through instruction in their own languages, they can be expected to have significant gaps in content-area knowledge and skills. For these reasons, classroom teachers with students who are either in an ESL or bilingual program for part of the day or have recently exited from such a program need to continue to develop language skills and learning strategies in all areas of the curriculum.

Also in Japan, although our country is not so diverse compared with the United States, each child must have different language proficiency, different strengths and weaknesses. The educators have to remember that each child is a different learner. The educators find out and try out as many methodology as they can so that the children can learn effectively. Also, so-called “team teaching” for Japanese classes is recommendable to make a cooperative and effective learning environment.

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