Chapter 13

Developmentally and Culturally Effective Instructional Strategies for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Young Children

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ABSTRACT

The rising numbers of English Learners (ELs) in our schools requires educators to have a specialized knowledge base for understanding their linguistic needs, especially when planning for instruction; teachers also need to use language acquisition principles for working with ELs and integrate effective instructional strategies in their teaching. Studies have found factors affecting student success in public schools: 1) inadequate preparation of teachers, 2) ineffective teaching practices, and 3) at-risk school environments. These complex factors impact the instruction and ultimate success of student learning which is extremely detrimental to ELs. Therefore, the focus of the chapter addresses: the changing demographics, historical reasons for low achievement of ELs, and how educators can use their understanding of best practices to motivate ELs and increase their academic achievement. This chapter provides effective teaching practices for ELs and instructional activities that teachers can implement to help young ELs succeed academically.

INTRODUCTION

The number of students who speak a language other than English in classrooms has increased 95 percent in the past decade, and the number is expected to continue. Approximately, 4.7 million designated English language learners attend public schools (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2002). The number of English as Second Language (ESL) students in U.S. public schools has almost tripled over the past decade (Goldenberg, 2006).

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The states with the highest numbers of limited English proficient students in 2010 were California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. These six states accounted for 67% of the limited English population in the United States. By 2030s, it is predicted that English learners (ELs) will account for about 40 percent of the school-age population. Yet very few teachers are training to address their educational needs (Rojas, 2007). Teachers need training on best practices for effectively instructing students, so they can be academically successful.

With the continual growth of diverse students in our schools, the need for having competent educators with specialized skills for working with diverse students with varying proficiencies of English becomes crucial for equipping their schools with the effective practices that have been proven to work (Menken & Holmes, 2000). Not only are educators needing to address linguistic issues, they must address required grade-level content standards. However, to teach subject-area content, literacy skills for teaching reading and writing efficiently and effectively rise to the top as a priority for ensuring that students have the necessary skills to learn English and content knowledge with success. Another barrier for English Learners is learning to read fluently and with comprehension, especially since reading has been linked to academic success. Therefore, today’s schools are in great need of having teachers provide effective developmentally appropriate instruction required for the diversity of student learners in classrooms. Having a positive disposition and attitude toward cultural diversity are critical components needed by teachers to implement effective instructional practices to meet the needs of English Learners and to advocate for their continued cultural and linguistic development.

**Background**

The census bureau has predicted that by the year 2100, the minority will become the majority, with non-Hispanic Whites comprising only 40 percent of the US population (Noor, 2012). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that Black and Hispanic youth are more likely than Whites or Asians to drop out of high school (NCES, 2011). Statistically, dropout rates particularly correlate with high poverty rates, poor school attendance, grade retention, and disengagement from school (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). With an estimate of more than 50 million Hispanics in the United States, they are the fastest growing group, but they have performed with some of the lowest educational success.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Culture is a broad and comprehensive concept involving behaviors, attitudes, values, and norms shared by a group of people, including how people think and behave. With the diversity of our schools today, it becomes increasingly apparent that the traditional teaching practices are not adequate when working with English Learners. Specialized teaching skills and the acknowledgment of the cultural richness students bring with them as learners has to be taken into consideration when teachers plan their lessons (Flores, Sheets, & Clark, 2011). Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. The background experiences and skills that English Learners bring to school are rich resources of prior knowledge that can be used to make connections with new learned concepts. This ability to use the background experiences of students depends on teacher skills to recognize the resourceful capacity that students bring to schools, and to relate them to new concepts. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992) called this phenomenon, *Funds of Knowledge*. Socioconstructivists believe