

ENGLISH FOR LEP CHILDREN: AN INSTRUCTIONAL AID

David W. Gurney, Ph. D.
University of Central Florida
ABSTRACT

A great number of LEP children may pass rapidly beyond critical stages of cognitive development before reaching even an acceptable level of English for basic communication, certainly not sufficient for essential learning tasks. Underlying the Lau v Nichols decision is the realization that increased amounts of English instruction and materials for children who knew little English was, essentially, ineffective. These conditions create a need for special training in techniques that do not depend solely on the use of English for instruction so that teachers can create effective learning conditions under which LEP children can use their own native competencies for processing information and gaining skills. Such training relies, predominantly, on a **reduced language instructional mode** in which English is, essentially, a verbal extension of the teachers' total communication strategy. Techniques of ESOL, applied cross-cultural understanding, and new developments of curriculum and materials are the chief aspects of this training. Testing and evaluation needs to be developed contingent upon the kinds of learning situations that are created under this new conceptual approach to the learning tasks of LEP children. Applied linguistics can facilitate specific English language developments as they arise from the learning situation and for purely ESOL instruction.

Classroom teachers are faced with an increasing population of children with limited English proficiency. These teachers can adapt existing strategies and materials to offset the primary dependency on the use of English for instructional presentations and evaluation. Such training can help teachers develop expanded competencies in conceptualizing the learning task, perceiving learner potentialities based on individual, cultural and linguistic factors. Enhanced, meaningful, contexts for learning are expected benefits.

A pertinent cultural orientation suggested by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education with regard to the implications for teacher training in an increasingly multilingual multicultural society underlies the conceptualization for the training described above: whatever the level of instruction/learning, students' learning reflects, in large measure, what they bring into class with them from unique perspectives formed within a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Education, then, has the potential for viewing, accepting and valuing LEP children's unique perspectives to their own education. A rationale for teacher attitudes and training follows: schools and educators should allow for maximum interaction between educational goals, content, techniques, materials, and personalities, and the cultural milieu which these children represent. In essence, education must build on what the learner brings into the classroom in order to create optimum learning conditions for successful achievement. Teacher education must avoid taking the form of specific training on "accepted" sets of cultural variables, in order to open future teachers' minds to the vast richness of cultural heritage represented by the LEP children they will have to teach.

The recommended approach, then, concentrates on teachers developing competencies in learning about the LEP child's cultural experiences and their linguistic development in order to help create meaningful associations between these experiences and the new experiences in which they are immersed. To facilitate such associations, teachers must develop broader conceptualizations about the content and skills which shape these associations from the point of view of the human competence inherent in them.

Prepared for Sunshine State TESOL conference, May 2000.

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