

FORUM

Effective Instructional Practices Enhance Student Achievement

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Effective instruction for language minority students shares major characteristics with effective instruction for native English-speakers. However, additional instructional features need to be implemented for language minority students. This article describes five teaching practices that can lead to higher levels of achievement for language minority students: use of students' prior knowledge, teacher modeling, scaffolded instruction, interactive teaching, and the teaching of metacognition and thinking. Each of these can be attributed to a cognitive model of learning in which learners are perceived as active partners in the construction of knowledge.

Research on building instruction on students' prior knowledge has identified a dramatic impact on the learning of new information and skills (Leinhardt, 1992). In reading, for example, a student's prior knowledge schemata interact with the text, allowing the student to construct new knowledge (Wilson & Anderson, 1986).

When a student does not have access to a relevant schema, comprehension is impeded. Nowhere is this more relevant than in the context of second language learning: students who can access prior knowledge through the familiar language and culture have a rich array of schemata for comprehension; in contrast, students who rely on knowledge learned explicitly in the second language do not.

Effective bilingual and ESL teachers utilize instructional practices that value and draw from students' native language(s) and culture(s). They also provide support ranging from content courses in the native language to bilingual tutors and native language student-student interactions (Lucas et al., 1990; Tikunoff et al., 1985, 1991).

Bilingual and ESL teachers are important models for their students-language models, intellectual models, role models, and models of thoughtfulness and reflection. This latter form of teacher modeling is particularly useful for students as they learn to "think aloud" to express thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and learning strategies (Idol, Jones, & Mayer, 1991; Jones, Palincsar, Ogle, & Carr, 1987). Modeling problem solving processes in conjunction with modeling expert performance demonstrates to students the false starts and intuitions that underlie and lead to expert performance (Collins, 1991). Modeling processes such as reading comprehension and writing is especially helpful for students learning English for academic subjects because it clarifies their thinking processes as well as the interaction between reader, writer, and text (Chamot & O'Malley, 1993).

Teachers can also utilize peer modeling and modeling for younger or less proficient students-these can provide incentives for the students doing the modeling and demonstrate a realistic goal for other students (Harris & Graham, 1992).

A third effective teaching practice is scaffolded instruction, whereby teachers plan instruction so that students can experience successful learning from the beginning and develop as independent learners. Initially, the teacher provides sufficient support for students to practice integratively, rather than practicing only discrete component skills. Gradually, the teacher removes the supports so that students can practice independently (Idol, Jones, & Mayer, 1991; Jones et al., 1987).

Interactive teaching is a natural outgrowth of these three practices-using students' prior knowledge, modeling, and scaffolding. Each of these instructional techniques calls for dialogue between teachers and students. Dialogic teaching, which dates back at least as far as Socrates, uses open-ended questions to make students think beyond "right" answers. Teachers listen and respond to answers in a non-judgmental, truth-seeking fashion. Students use academic language and content knowledge to participate in ongoing intellectual investigation. In Sizer's (1992) high school model, teachers and students learn together by talking about ideas and reasoning. Interactive or dialogic teaching was found to be an important component of exemplary ESL (SAIP) programs and was facilitated by cooperative learning activities in which students had to talk in order to complete assigned tasks, and teachers focused on concepts expressed by students rather than on the language form of their utterances (Tikunoff et al., 1991). Lucas and her colleagues (1990) also found that in effective high schools for language minority Spanish-speaking students, teachers:

...challenged students with difficult questions and problems... Teachers did not talk down to limited-English-proficient students in 'foreigner talk', but spoke clearly, with normal intonation, explaining difficult words and concepts as needed (p. 328).

A fifth instructional practice that promotes academic achievement is the development of metacognition and higher order thinking skills. Unfortunately, a pervasive attitude among researchers and educators in compensatory programs for at-risk students, including language minorities, is that higher order thinking must be delayed until basic skills are developed (Anderson & Pellicer, 1990; Pogrow, 1990; Secada, 1991; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). In some approaches to second language instruction, for example, teachers are advised to ask only lower-level questions (i.e., *yes-no*, *either-or*, and *what, when, where, and who* questions) at the initial stages of language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). This view is challenged by current curriculum reform in the content subjects as well as individual researchers who point out that, for language minority students, the target is constantly moving ahead so that while they may be mired in repetitive low-level activities such as mathematical computation, their majority peers are engaged in high-level instruction and problem solving (Secada, 1991; Thomas, 1992).

Diaz, Moll, and Mehan (1986) noted striking differences in students' level of thinking based on instructional context. They found that bilingual students successfully engaged in higher level comprehension activities in Spanish reading, but were relegated to lower level phonics instruction in English reading classes. By making English reading instruction more congruent with Spanish reading instruction (i.e., focusing on higher-level reading comprehension), the same students were able to perform at significantly higher reading levels in English.

This is only one example of the powerful effects of asking students to think and talk about their own thinking. The development of metacognitive knowledge-or the understanding of one's own learning and thinking processes-is an important educational objective for all students. Teachers can encourage students to describe the conditions in which they feel they can learn most effectively and share their own approaches to solving learning problems. Teachers should convey to students the importance of:

1. thinking about and identifying the problem/task to be solved;

2. remembering strategies or techniques used in the past to solve similar problems;
3. selecting strategies that seem most useful for the problem or task;
4. using the strategies;
5. evaluating the strategies according to their usefulness in solving the problem; and
6. applying the strategies (modified as necessary) to related tasks. When students develop metacognitive knowledge about learning processes, they are able to regulate their own learning. Developing and nurturing this metacognitive knowledge about their own learning is an important characteristic of effective instruction for all students and, more importantly, for language minority students.

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