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ABSTRACT

Controversy exists as to the specific approach to use in teaching language arts skills to culturally and linguistically different children who speak non-standard English. Three primary approaches involve eradicating, maintaining, or expanding the home language systems of such children. In the expansion approach, children are taught to use standard English in appropriate context while respecting and maintaining their home language or dialect. The role of the teacher is important in helping these children learn to interpret written and oral forms of standard English. The teacher should make an assessment of the cultural and linguistic diversity within their classrooms and should be speech models for children. Specific strategies can be implemented to assist children in building language facility. These include: (1) using the language experience approach; (2) using pictures to build a visual-auditory association; (3) reading stories to students; (4) using techniques such as expansions, sentence building, sentence combining, and transformation to manipulate oral sentences; and (5) integrating language instruction within other academic areas. (JDD)

TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS TO CULTURALLY DIFFERENT HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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Most languages comprise a number of variant forms of dialects that differ in vocabulary, syntactic structure and/or pronunciation. Not any dialect of a language is inherently superior or inferior; not any dialect is deficient. These variant forms of language, commonly referred to as non-standard English, differ significantly from the form used by the majority of speakers. Non-standard English may result from regional dialects in which there is a difference in pronunciation and meaning. As an example, tonic, soda, drink, pop are words used in different geographic areas to refer to carbonated beverages. Non-standard English may also be the result of social groups (i.e., Black, cajun, Appalachian, etc.). In this instance, dialects are well ordered, highly structured, highly developed language systems with extensive vocabulary and consistent rules for sentence building. As an example, Table 1 illustrates the general phonological and syntactic characteristics of speakers of Black English. In order to encourage children's continued growth in English, it is important for the teacher to learn the languages being spoken in the classroom.

Table 1
Black English

Variations in Sound or Phonology	Examples
1. final r may be weak or lost	"poor" pronounced "poe"
2. final l may be weak or lost	"foll" pronounced "foe"
3. final t may be weak or lost	"last" pronounced "lass"
4. final d may be weak or lost	"mend pronounced "men"
5. vowel contrasts may be lost	"pin" pronounced "pen"
6. final th may sound like f or v	"with" pronounced "wiv"

Variations in Syntax	Examples
1. loss of third person singular suffix	He go everyday.
2. loss of possessive suffix	That man hat is on the table.
3. alteration of possessive pronouns	You can get you book there.
4. loss of plural form with numbers	five cent
5. substitution of it's for there's	It's a school on the hill.
6. use of double subject	John, he live in New York.
7. double negative	He ain't got no house.

Hennings, D. Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts. 3rd Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.

Controversy exists as to the specific approach to use in teaching language arts skills to culturally and linguistically different children. Currently, those approaches involve teachers in eradicating, maintaining or expanding the home language systems of such children. Advocates of the eradicate approach would have instructional personnel to eliminate children's non-standard dialect completely and replace that language system with standard English (Hennings, 1986). In such an approach, children would be continually corrected and admonished whenever aspects of their dialect appeared within their conversation. A significant disadvantage of this approach is the negative feelings conveyed to children regarding their speech.

Maintenance, the second approach, encourages teachers to permit children to use only their primary language within the classroom. This approach recognizes the cultural and communicative importance of children's home language. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to accept children's home language as a structurally consistent means of communicating (Hennings, 1986) and to use children's language as a medium of instructions. Opponents of the maintenance approach point out that children taught in such a manner are able to communicate with only a limited segment of the population (Polloway and Smith, 1982). Further, opponents argue that maintenance oriented

classrooms would require teachers who are either bilingual or familiar with the particular dialect used within the community. In addition, the scarcity of books and other materials written in non-standard syntax and vocabulary would impose an additional limitation to the use of this approach.

The expansion approach encourages teachers to fully accept the language diversity which children present within the classroom. In my opinion, this appears to be the most humanistic approach to teaching language skills to culturally different children. In this approach, the home language system is not viewed as a deficit but as a different language system. Children would be encouraged to communicate in their dialect, share ideas, enjoy verbal interaction, and gain skill in oral communication. However, teachers would also provide opportunities for children to participate in learning standard English. Proponents of this view recognize the positive feedback in the form of economic and other advancements available to speakers of standard English. In general, children are taught to use standard English in appropriate context while respecting and maintaining their home language or dialect (Adler, 1979).

The testimony of experts in the Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School, etc. vs. Ann Arbor School District court case (473 Federal Supplement, 1979) provides an indication of several other alternative approaches to teaching culturally and linguistically different children. Their suggestions included the following:

1. provide instructions to children through trained linguist
2. avoid correcting children's speech initially until it appears that corrections would not be detrimental to their emotional state
3. start instructions in children's home language and then bridge in to standard English
4. utilize instructional materials written in nonstandard English
5. model appropriate standard English oral language behavior

Again, the basis of many of these suggestions involves increasing children's skills in using standard English while respecting their home language.

It is clear that the teaching of standard English to non-standard English speakers does not require eradicating children's home language system. However, development of proficiency in standard English may not proceed without difficulty for children from linguistically different backgrounds. Simultaneously while maintaining their home language, children are learning to interpret written and oral forms of standard English. This skill is not required of children who are reared in homes in which standard English is the primary language (Hennings, 1986). Despite the additional language factor, most children from linguistically different families do acquire speaking, reading and writing skills. The role of the teacher is important in facilitating this process.

Teachers must make an assessment of the cultural and linguistic diversity within their classrooms. This process involves determining the primary language of children and how that language is used. Teachers must become aware of how the languages or dialects used by children differ from standard English. One means of achieving this objective is to engage children in dialogue during situations that maintain children's interest and attention. Further, teachers can listen to children during informal conversations with their peers; hear what they say; and try to grasp the meaning of specific concepts. Through the process of becoming familiar with features of children's dialect teachers are better able to understand children and to accurately determine language difficulties from language differences. The instructional environment should communicate a sincere appreciation for the culture of linguistically different children. Importantly, the ability of teachers to recognize and appreciate the value of each language cultural group will determine the greatness and humaneness of our educational system (Gollnick and Chinn, 1986).

Teachers should be speech models for children. Recognizing children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds, teachers can model alternative forms of "correctness" in verbal communicative behavior (Seymour, 1986). Words can be used in standard English form and in various contexts. Teachers should maintain consistency in giving and clarifying directions; while avoiding slang and confusing language forms. Consistency should also

be evident in the language used by the teacher with the children. In learning standard English, children not only have to determine what the individual words mean, but also how to combine those words to make meaningful verbal statements which observe grammatical rules, and are appropriate to the context in which they are used. Therefore, when children are exposed to a mixture of standard and non-standard English in the same context, it becomes difficult for children to work out the grammatical rules of each language (Cummins, 1981). Rather, each language should be associated with a specific context and consistently used in that manner.

Children acquire language proficiency through their interactions within their home and community environments (Hardwick and Travis, 1985). As children meet and use language in a variety of social and cultural situations, they assimilate new data into their conceptual and schematic frameworks and improve their ability to handle the ideas for which words are symbols. Effective oral communication necessitates certain skills. These skills include the ability to convey meaning as well as to demonstrate communicative competence.

Effective oral communication requires children to take into account the meanings or intentions of their messages. In other words, children must be able to determine the type of communicative behavior appropriate for a given situation. In order to communicate appropriately, children must also develop communicative competence. The dimensions of communicative competence include linguistic knowledge of the rules for communication; knowledge of the shared rules for interaction within a communicative setting; and knowledge of the rules involved in communicating within the context of the culture. Because language is primarily an oral system devised as a vehicle for communication, oral interaction must occupy a considerable portion of instructional time.

Children learn to speak by speaking. Yet, there are specific strategies that can be implemented within the classroom to assist children in building language facility. One method is described as the "language experience approach." Accordingly, the teacher structures situations in which children produce language naturally. Field trips, class

activities and special events are used as a basis for generating language ideas from children. The teacher writes down the words, sentences, and stories of the children. Together they read back the written words with children taking turns reading. The conventions of standard English print, a sight vocabulary, and the rudiments of phonics can be taught through the language experience approach (Hall, 1981). Through this method, the reading vocabulary can be directly linked with concepts and oral language.

Pictures can also be used to build a visual-auditory association. Sentences can be generated about pictures in the format of the language experience approach, and used in written form to caption the pictures. According to Feeley (1983), labels for pictures should be developed in categories if children are to retain the concepts in their long term memory. For examples, pictures of mother, father, sister, brother, baby can be discussed together under the cluster title "family". Again, simple stories can be written around these themes. Children can also generate patterned sentences in an aural-oral setting. The teacher can present sentences related to specific topics. Children can orally generate sentences modeled after sentences presented by the teacher. Pictures and samples of objects can be used to clarify meaning.

Children can learn much about the rhythms and sounds of standard English by listening to stories. Picture books can be read to children directly by the teacher. Stories can also be recorded on tape to accompany picture books. These visual-auditory associative procedures can assist children in learning about the graphic counterparts of specific sounds, as well as in developing an understanding of the meaning of specific words.

Strategies to assist children in learning to manipulate oral sentences include expansions, sentence building, sentence combining, and transformation. Expansion activities involve children in expanding sentences by adding adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and other forms of words to basic subjects and predicates. A fun way of achieving this purpose is to establish a sentence clothesline within the classroom. Words in the shape of "clothes"

can be placed on the line to form simple sentences. Children can add other "clothes" to establish more descriptive sentences. Children can orally repeat the words on the clothes they are hanging. The "Oral Expansion Game" (Hennings, 1986) can also be used. Using a basic sentence, children can, in this game, orally add a word or phrase increasing the length of the sentence with each respeaking. These oral activities help children hear subject nouns and verbs that agree in number.

In sentence building, children manipulate sentence parts by experimenting with different subjects and predicates. Cards containing word phrases can be distributed to children. Children can build sentences from the parts, reading them orally to hear the sound each sentence makes. Combininb two basic sentences into one sentence provides additional practice in language building for children. This activity can be structured so that children are required to produce a particular pattern, such as a combined subject or predicate.

Transforming sentences involves changing basic sentences into questions, exclamations, negative sentences, etc. (Henning, 1986). Children are provided with phrases to combine into complete sentences. By substituting different phrases for subject and/or predicates, children can build sentences of various types. In this manner, children can manipulate words and sentence parts to form questions, exclamations, etc. Activities such as these help children orally play with and hear standard patterns until children become more familiar with these forms. Auditorily differntiating these patterns is important for children who are culturally and linguistically different.

TABLE 2

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING LANGUAGE FACILITY

1. Expanding Sentences

Dogs run.
Red dogs run.
Red dogs also run.

2. Sentence Building

Sentence	→	Subject	+	Predicate
		A girl in my class		won the contest.
		Sam		made a homerun.
		John's dog		barked at the moon.
		The fireworks		lit up the sky.

3. Sentence Combining

He gave me a _____, a _____, a _____...,
(Children add a series of object words.)

As I went walking, I spied _____, _____, _____, ...,
(Children add a series of fantastic things.)

4. Sentence Transformations

Provide phrases such as: John, has come, Susan and my mother, have gone shopping, my best friend, is the winner, the two cows, are in the barn, the radio, is too loud, the girls, are going to Florida for the winter.

Children build sentences from the parts. Once basic sentences are formed, children can transform the sentences into questions, exclamations, etc.

Adapted from: Hennings, D. Communication in Action: Teaching the Language Arts. 3rd Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986.

It is appropriate to assume that all varieties of English are linguistically valid, have merit, and are reflective of the cultural, cognitive, and social orientation of their speakers (Taylor, 1986). Culturally and linguistically different children must be assisted in effectively using the linguistic system of both their home culture and the larger society. Schultz (1986), provides a summary of current professional thought with regard to developing proficiency in standard English for non-standard English speakers.

1. Vocabulary input, in meaningful contexts, is more important than analysis of grammar. Words and phrases should be connected to actions rather than linguistic exercises.
2. Meaning of vocabulary takes precedence over form or accuracy.
3. Language should be practiced in social, interactive contexts to fulfill communicative purposes.
4. Language instruction should be cyclical in nature. Focus of instructions should be on continuous reviewing, reentering, and enlarging structures previously presented.
5. Language input should consist of authentic language. Grammatical sequencing and grading is not essential for effective acquisition of standard English. Instead, teachers should attempt to develop language through classroom activities and naturalistic settings where language occurs.

Building language facility should not be isolated to only the language period. Every effort should be made to integrate language instruction within other academic areas. Development of language facility should occur throughout the day in the varied informal learning situations that occur. In this manner, children can see how skill in standard English relates to other areas, and how these skills might increase success in other areas.

Effective language instruction conveys respect and appreciation for the culture of culturally and linguistically different children as teachers incorporate cultural elements into the total instructional program. Activities can be devised to assist all children

becoming aware of the similiarities and differences among cultures. Holidays and special events, particular to a culture, provide occasions for emphasis within the classroom. Persons from children's language community can also be involved in the classroom as speakers and resource persons.

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