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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development and implementation of an after school program designed to introduce the Spanish language to children between the ages of 5 and 9. The program consists of 8 to 10 weekly units, each lasting 50 minutes, that provide students with basic vocabulary and grammar in an interesting and motivating format. Each unit consists of a list of vocabulary and grammatical structures, an introductory activity for the unit, procedures for teaching the vocabulary and structures, and procedures for motivating and integrating the vocabulary and structures into the children's experience. Unit vocabulary themes include the names of toys, animals, and colors. Suggestions for games, songs, and other activities that teachers can use to engage children in the vocabulary are provided. An appendix contains the first two units of the program. Contains seven references. (MDM)

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A new pedagogical approach for teaching Spanish

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1990 I was asked by More than Music, Inc., a Los Angeles-based company which runs afterschool programs in the Los Angeles area, to write and teach a Spanish language program for two age groups: (i) for (pre-literate) children aged 5 to 6, and (ii) for children (with a basic knowledge of reading and spelling) aged 7 to 9. This language program had to be created from scratch, since, to the best of my knowledge, there is no course of study designed to teach a foreign language in an afterschool program. Afterschool programs run from 3 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. and are devised for taking care of young primary school children while providing an educational experience (for grades 1 to 4). Children attending these programs participate in classes on usually non-academic subjects such as those mentioned below. Since my seven year-old son attends one of these programs, it was clear to me from the beginning that this would not be an easy task. Many children prefer playing ball and other unstructured games in the courtyard rather than attending afterschool classes on even 'fun' subjects such as cooking, art, computers, hands on science, karate, etc. These programs run after 3 p.m, when children's attention and patience for the study of academic subjects is very low. Since my son always complained that many supposedly fun subjects such as those mentioned above are in many instances boring or, in his own words, 'the same as regular school', I realized that the key for teaching an academic subject such as Spanish in an afterschool program was building a program based on creating a lively and positive class experience. The Spanish language program was very successful; this is attested by the positive feedback received by this writer (also the teacher of the course) from children and parents alike, as well as by one surprising fact which attests to the popularity of the course: Seven children joined the program during the 3rd and 4th weeks (See Program Evaluation Check List below).

This article presents a consistent method, as well as a course of study, to help teachers of Spanish to teach as much spoken Spanish as English speaking children aged 5 to 9 can learn in two months time in an afterschool program. The program presented below can be thus adapted and applied to two age groups: (i) pre-literate 5 to 6 years old and (ii) 7 to 9 years old with a basic

knowledge of reading and spelling. This program has two major goals: One major objective of such a course of study is to introduce some basic Spanish vocabulary and structures efficiently and with fun. Another major goal is to teach the child a positive attitude toward the Spanish language in order to motivate him or her to learn the language in school and in high-school. This method aims also to decrease as much as possible the unicultural orientation affecting monolingual children by a lively participation in a different culture.

This method can be used also to teach and to motivate the acquisition of other foreign languages taught in American schools such as French and Japanese. The teacher of French or Japanese in an afterschool program needs only to select French or Japanese vocabulary and structures - to change the core of each lesson, while the introduction, procedures for teaching vocabulary and structure, and procedures for motivating and integrating the vocabulary and structures into the child's experience remain largely unchanged (See Appendix). Needless to say, the French or Japanese teacher must select or create appropriate teaching materials and props (songs, dolls, pictures, etc.).

The course of study consists of 8 - 10 units. Each unit is planned for one weekly session, though the rate of learning the material should in practice determine the pace of the class. Some classes will spend a weekly session to complete one unit, some will spend more. Each session lasts fifty minutes. The purpose of the course is to make the student familiar with some basic Spanish vocabulary (e.g. naming animals, colors, numbers) and structures (e.g. "my name is...", "This animal is..."). For reasons of space, this article presents only two units in detail. The teacher or instructor in an afterschool program can construct further units using the method delineated in the following sections (See, further, Chastain's (1976) comprehensive work on foreign language teaching methodology).

THE UNITS

Each unit consists of a list of the vocabulary and structures, as well as of three methodological sections sections:

1. Basic vocabulary and structures
2. Introduction
3. Procedures for teaching vocabulary and structures
4. Procedures for motivating and integrating the vocabulary and structures into the child's experience

The core of each lesson is section 1, the basic vocabulary and structures. Sections 2, 3, and 4 are designed 2 to prepare (5 min.), 3 to teach (20 min.), and 4 to motivate the child to learn Spanish in school and highschool and to integrate (25 min.) the basic vocabulary into the child's experience.

1. Basic vocabulary and structures

The focus is on words and other structures such as greetings, numbers, days of the week, types of food, animals, toys, etc. that the child can understand, identify, and enjoy. The words and structures taught in class are the basic framework of the language presented to the child.

2. Introduction

The lesson may start (a) with a short statement in English to make the child familiar with the activity, or (b) with an exercise in Spanish with a sentence such as "Esto es un/una..." (This is a...) is used while pointing toward an object in the classroom. Both methods are useful; (a) to save time, (b) to conduct the class without help from the native language of the pupil. The introduction should not last more than five minutes (For an enrichment program using toys to develop foreign language skills see Stout & Langdon 1964).

3. Procedures for teaching vocabulary and structures

Suggested procedures: games. The suggested procedures and games employed in the course are given as an outline to studying the basic vocabulary and structures. Specific suggestions for teaching vocabulary and structures are offered.

4. Procedures for motivating and integrating the vocabulary and structures into the child's experience

Suggested procedures: songs, art, film. These procedures are given in order to motivate the child to learn Spanish in school and high-school and to integrate the basic vocabulary and structures into the child's experience. Any other methods which accomplish this purpose are also desirable.

THE TEACHER

To achieve the goals of this program, the teacher of Spanish in an afterschool program is expected to:

- (1) Have personal qualities contributing to his or her success in the classroom: he or she must insure understanding for young children and their cultural milieu.
- (2) Show proficiency in spoken and written Spanish. Whether the teacher is a native or second-language speaker, his or her command of the language should be accurate and fluent.
- (3) Understand the nature of language: (i) social, regional, and functional variation; (ii) the structure and development of Spanish and the culture of Spanish-speaking people.
- (4) Have a knowledge of pedagogical principles and teaching ability, resulting from actual classroom experience, to apply these principles to various classroom situations and instructional materials.

A FINAL SUGGESTION FOR THE TEACHER

Vary class activities whenever interest in the class begins to fall. There are many different games, songs, rhymes, that can be used in class (see, for example, Lee 1979, Mulac & Holmes 1950, Walsh 1987).

SOME SUBJECTS THAT CHILDREN ENJOY

In the appendix below I present a detailed lesson plan for two units, each containing one subject children enjoy to talk about or to work with: (i) toys and (ii) animals and colors. There are, however, many more subjects children enjoy to talk about and work with, e.g. holidays and presents (ideal for the Halloween, Christmas, and Hanukkah season), food (Latin American, Spanish, or international), sports, TV programs, their families (for most children), etc. The teacher in the afterschool program can build his own lesson plan based on those presented in the appendix (Units 1 and 2) to teach subjects such as those listed above.

EVALUATION

As noted in the introduction, this program for teaching Spanish in an afterschool program was very successful; this is attested by the positive feedback received from children and parents. This experience was evaluated in an objective fashion, using the evaluation method delineated by Provenzano (1985). Items (1) - (12) in Table 1 below are evaluated with a binary system as appropriate or in need of improvement.

insert Table 1

APPENDIX

Unit 1

Children's toys

1. Basic vocabulary and structures

(a) Vocabulary

Toys (different dolls, vehicles, plastic or stuffed animals)

pelota

tortuga

soldado

coche

aeroplano

barco

omnibus

bolita

globo

libro

(b) Structures

Numbers: uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez, once, doce

2. Introduction

Pupils are given instructions for saying their names. Everyone (including the teacher) writes his/her name in a card.

Exercise

Buenas tardes, mi nombre es...

'Good afternoon my name is...'

3. Procedures for teaching a basic vocabulary and structures

Games

(1) Magic bag

The teacher fills a bag with toys such as those named in section 1 above. The children take turns to pick up toys from the bag. The teacher names the objects, the children repeat the words. The teacher counts the objects, the children repeat the numbers. The teacher points to groups of two, three, four, etc., toys and asks Cuántos juguetes hay ?/ How many toys are there ? (Spanish and

English).

(2) Memory game

The teacher asks each child to pick up, name, and count two, three, four, or five of their favourite toys (according to the child's memory capacity).

4. Procedures for integrating the vocabulary and structures into the child's experience: Art and music

Songs

Children listen to three songs for children from M. E. Walsh (1987): (i) "Manuelita la tortuga", (ii) "Cancion del ultimo tranvia", and (ii) "cancion de titeres". The teacher explains the content of the songs in English introducing some of the Spanish words from section 1.

Drawing

Children select two or three of their favourite words (from the Spanish vocabulary in section 1) and make a drawing of the selected objects. The teacher points to the child's drawing and asks each child Esto es un/una... This is a... in Spanish and English. The teacher spells (or writes, if the child cannot spell yet) the words under each child's drawing.

Unit 2
Animals and Colors

1. Basic vocabulary and structures

Animales

elefante

mono

tortuga

cisne

perro

conejo

pato

oso

tigre

cocodrilo

gato

vaca

Colores

negro

blanco

verde

rojo

azul

gris

naranja

amarillo

violeta

celeste

2. Introduction

Children are given instructions for saying their names using the structure: Mi nombre es...
'My name is...'

The teacher says: Hoy hablamos de animales. Today we talk about animals (in Spanish and English). Este animal es un/una... 'This animal is a/an...', El animal es... (color) 'The animal is... (color)'.

3. Procedures for teaching a basic vocabulary and structures

Games

(1) Point and tell

(i) Teacher shows pictures of animals and their specific colors and says the words in Spanish. The children repeat the words.

(ii) Each child picks up two, three, four, or five pictures and says the name of the animal and/or the specific color (according to the child's memory capacity).

(2) Operator

A child or the teacher whispers the name of an animal or a color to the person sitting on his right or left and this person whispers the word to the one sitting next to him/her until the word reaches the last person. The last person to get the word says what he/she heard and then the one sitting next to the last one and so on in order to see whether the word was passed in the form uttered by the first person.

4. Procedures for integrating the vocabulary and structures into the child's experience: Art and music

(1) Songs

Children listen to three songs for children by M.E. Walsh (1987): (i) "Twist del mono liso", (ii) "El show del perro bachicha", (iii) "La vaca estudiosa". The teacher explains the songs in English and introduces some of the Spanish words from section 1.

(2) Work with clay

The children make two or three animals with clay. The teacher asks each student Que es esto ? What is this ? in English and Spanish. The child says the name of the animal; the teacher spells the name of the animal and the child writes it on the base of the figure.

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Table 1 Program Evaluation Checklist

Planning

- (1) Incorporated necessary advance preparation. APPROPRIATE
- (2) Planned to make the instructional content culturally relevant. APPROPRIATE
- (3) Planned for parental involvement. NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Teaching Procedures

- (4) Provided language input through a variety of modes (visual, tactile, auditory). APPROPRIATE
- (5) Communicated the objective of the lesson in the native language. NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
- (6) Provided a motivator at the beginning of the lesson. APPROPRIATE
- (7) Provided a closing for the lesson in which concepts taught are clarified. APPROPRIATE
- (8) Showed empathy and understanding toward the students. APPROPRIATE

Evaluation

- (9) Linked students' past achievement to the present tasks. APPROPRIATE
- (10) Provided positive reinforcement. APPROPRIATE
- (11) Provided immediate feedback. NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
- (12) Varied assessment procedures. (classwork, oral work, self-evaluation). APPROPRIATE