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Educating ESL Students for Citizenship in a Democratic Society. ERIC Digest.

The 1990 Census reported that nearly 6.3 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are English-as-second language (ESL) students; that is, they speak a language other than English at home. Although school enrollment dropped by 4 percent between 1980 and 1990, ESL students increased by 41.2 percent. According to the National Association for Bilingual Education, between 2.3 and 3.5 million students are limited in their English proficiency. The Immigration Act of 1990 was designed to further diversify our population. The median age of these immigrants is generally younger than that of native-born residents. The fact that these immigrants are of child-bearing age, and generally have families larger than the United States' average, may further increase the number of non-English speaking students served by the nation's education system.

A basic need of this growing population of ESL students is learning how to cope with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the United States. So civic education should pervade the curriculum for ESL students. This ERIC Digest treats five facets of civic education for ESL students: (1) needs and goals, (2) content and curriculum materials, (3) use of cooperative learning, (4) use of outside resource persons, and (5) national organizations that provide resources for teachers.

NEEDS AND GOALS

What happens when these ESL students enter United States schools? What are their civic education needs? Joan M. First writes (1988, 205), "Young immigrants enter the United States classrooms with cultural scripts modeled on the material and social environments of their homelands. Their behavior norms stem from lives they are no longer living but cannot forget. To survive, they must integrate old scripts with their new environment."

Nowhere is this acculturation process more essential than in the area of United States civic culture--government, laws, criminal and civil rights, and civic values. In their home countries, however, ESL students and their parents may have experienced political systems very different from our own. Some have come from tiny villages where the official law or justice system rarely intrudes. Others arrive from nations where government is repressive and omnipresent. Thus, the need for good civic education is urgent for those new to this culture. To live in any kind of harmony with United States institutions and to make a productive contribution to national democratic life, students from other cultures need both information about and experiences in the political system of the United States.

A key to personal fulfillment and social responsibility in the United States is acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed for effective democratic citizenship. The principles, practices, and values of U.S. constitutional democracy comprise the cultural core of our pluralistic society. This is the social cement that provides unity for a diverse

population with ancestral connections to most cultures throughout our contemporary world. This is also a means to personal empowerment and achievement of individual interests. Citizens in possession of this democratic civic culture are able to protect their private rights, pursue personal interests, and contribute to the public good. So, a primary goal of education in schools for ESL students is civic education for life in a democratic society.

Learning English is an essential part of this civic education process. Language is both the vehicle and the most profound expression of culture. In the past, language instruction has often been provided apart from content-area study. However, ESL students can achieve higher levels of language development while learning subject matter. This provides educators with the opportunity to develop and implement curricula to help students understand political principles and practices in the United States, and learn values and skills necessary for effective civic participation.

The increasing number of limited English proficient students and their special civic education needs place greater demand on teachers to upgrade their own knowledge and skills. ESL teachers need education in the content areas of civics and political science. Social studies teachers need training in incorporating language teaching strategies and presenting civic concepts to students from foreign cultures. Both groups may benefit from increased knowledge of civic education and its relationships to multicultural education.

CONTENT AND MATERIALS OF INSTRUCTION

ESL teachers will usually have weaker backgrounds than social studies teachers in U.S. history and government. An ESL teacher might need professional development workshops on the U.S. Constitution and the development of constitutional law through Supreme Court decisions. Many ESL teachers, for example, might need to learn about the most significant landmark decisions of the Supreme Court and how those decisions have expanded the constitutional rights of individuals in the United States.
Social studies teachers are usually not as skilled in teaching language or perceiving themselves as language teachers. They can profit from professional development programs on teaching English to ESL students. They need to learn how to select and use reading materials that are related to the lives and language capacities of their ESL students. Good citizenship, however, is far more complex than the simple pictures and sentences sometimes used with ESL students. The dilemma, therefore, is identifying materials which are both accessible to the students and can give them a more realistic and dynamic understanding of citizenship. Techniques for developing language skills include teaching new vocabulary directly or helping students use context clues. Word study can be encouraged by approaches such as "finder's fees"--students receive points for submitting proof of having read, heard, or used words that have been introduced. Obviously, a variety of stimuli such as demonstrations, visual aids, or role-plays help make language more comprehensible to students.

Both ESL teachers and social studies teachers can profit from professional development experiences in multicultural education. Through these experiences, teachers can learn to deal more sensitively and effectively with cultural diversity in the classroom. Further, they will increase their capacities to compensate for inadequate social studies textbooks by selection or personal development of supplementary instructional materials pertaining to ethnic and racial diversity in the United States.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

An effective teaching strategy for the civic education of ESL students involves cooperative learning; that is, students working together as a group to perform a task, which can only be done if all participate. Breaking individual isolation, learning to work with other students, and creating a group product are important experiences for immigrant students. Often, immigrant students' home cultures favor a cooperative approach. They may learn more easily and comfortably when this model is used in conjunction with the individualistic competitive approaches that are often the primary structure of learning in the United States. Working in pairs and small groups provides the opportunity for more extensive language practice. Language experiences can be enhanced while learning material of high interest and relevance. The methodology can also be a powerful tool in helping them develop the skills and attitudes necessary for living in a democratic, pluralistic society. Cooperative learning includes the following characteristics.

* Positive Interdependence. Everyone must realize that it is essential to work together to accomplish the task. Naturally everyone must understand the task and have the skills within the group to complete the task. For example, the group is not done until everyone in the group has learned the material.

* Interaction within the Group. Both the task and the physical arrangements increase the interaction. Higher level thinking produces better interaction so that the task assigned should go beyond mere recall leading to students forming opinions based on fact and logic. Students may not have had this kind of experience in the schools they attended in their native lands. Interaction can also be enhanced by assigning roles. Physical arrangements need to keep the group facing each other and far apart enough from other groups to keep from distracting each other. Group formation, although always difficult, can be particularly challenging when confronted with a variety of languages and cultures that have historical and political disagreements.

* Accountability of Individual Students. Writing assignments, short speeches, short essay tests--as well as holding all of the individuals accountable for reporting on the progress of the group--help the students understand that they must individually learn the material and provide support for more competitive work.

* Explicit Teaching of Small Group Skills. These skills include such things as active listening, questioning, clarifying, elaborating, challenging, summarizing, and

encouraging others to participate--all important skills in the larger democratic society. To begin, students with limited English proficiency might work in pairs developing a joint summary of the facts of a case; one student summarizes and the other asks questions to ensure the summary is complete and accurate. The larger the group; the more difficult the task may become. If the class includes both ESL students and other students, they might be paired so that an ESL student works with a non-ESL student. Thus, the ESL student's language development would be promoted. Students also should be part of the evaluation process to improve the workings of the small groups.

USING OUTSIDE RESOURCE PERSONS

Outside resource people can be both helpful in providing current information and creating another contact in their new country. If recruited from ethnic and racial groups represented in the class, they may also help overcome the language barrier. Classroom lessons need to be structured to take advantage of the person's experience and expertise and foster interaction between the students and adult. Specific questions generated by the students and sent to the resource person in advance are a simple way to start. They also can react to positions taken by students, help prepare students for role-plays, assist groups in discussions or development of arguments, or moderate a class discussion.

Law enforcement agencies, constituent service offices for elected officials, bar associations, courts, and community groups are good places to start. This may be the first time that immigrant students have had positive interaction with government officials.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WITH RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

The following list includes organizations that provide free or inexpensive resources and services for teachers of ESL students.

* California Tomorrow

Fort Mason

Building B

San Francisco, CA 94123

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* Center for Applied Linguistics

1118 22nd Street, NW

Washington, DC 20036

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* Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago

407 South Dearborn

Suite 1700

Chicago, IL 60605

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* NALEO

3409 Garnet

Los Angeles, CA 90023

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* National Association of Bilingual Education

1220 L. Street, NW

Suite 605

Washington, DC 20005-4018

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* National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and

Second Language Learning

339 Kerr Hall

University of California

Santa Cruz, CA 95064

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* National Coalition of Advocates for Students

100 Boyleston Street, #737

Boston, MA 02116

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* National Council of Christians and Jews

360 North Michigan Avenue

Suite 1008

Chicago, IL 60601-3803

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* National Council of La Raza

900 Wilshire Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90017

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* Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

1600 Cameron Street

Suite 300

Alexandria, VA 22314

REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest and related documents. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield,

Virginia 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1440 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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