

**DETERMINING A TEACHING METHOD OR APPROACH FOR INCREASING
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR ESL STUDENTS IN GRADES 1, 2, AND 3**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine what method and/or approach was perceived by practicing ESL teachers to best increase second language acquisition in ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3. The need for this study is significant because of the rapid growth of students who do not speak English natively.

Variables surrounding a student's learning success were reviewed and several methods and approaches were examined in depth in order to determine how to optimize second language learning for ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

Thirty ESL instructors were asked to rank seven different methods/approaches as to their effectiveness in teaching a second language. The results of the survey showed that CALLA was perceived as having the highest degree of effectiveness in optimizing learning for the ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

There are several different teaching methods that are used to address the challenges and needs of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. ESL students are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) in Arizona.

There are over 5.3 million school-aged children in the United States who enter school speaking a language other than English (Lyons, 1991). The rapid growth in the number of students who do not speak English natively has necessitated the development and implementation of various educational programs to serve these students. Research indicates that it takes two to three years for a student to become orally fluent in a second language; however, it takes five to seven years to become fluent in the academic and abstract language necessary for understanding content without help (Collier, 1995).

In assessing the needs of LEP students, research leans heavily towards using different methods and approaches in order to optimize the learning environment for these students (Krashen, 1981). This study surveyed practicing ESL teachers to determine which method was considered most beneficial for students.

Development of the Problem

Prior to 1995, the assumption was made by ESL educators that language learning could be isolated from other issues which lead to the belief that minority students must first learn English (Collier, 1995). This belief has resulted in some ESL students being taught English in pull-out programs that caused them to miss out on instruction in their regular content-based classrooms. Vocabulary and English grammar were taught in an isolated environment (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).

In some cases, the ESL students who were mainstreamed into regular classrooms appeared fluent in oral language skills. They often receive no additional support after this transition. As a result, they begin to fail immediately and/or fall far behind English as a First Language (EFL) students. Because ESL students have often experienced limited success in regular classroom situations, many educators believed that this was the direct result of the conditions inherent in the transmission pedagogical model of teaching found in most traditional classrooms (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).

The transmission model, which has been used in schools for generations, envisions the teacher as the reservoir of all knowledge and the students as passive recipients of that knowledge. ESL students frequently do not succeed in transmission classrooms because the classrooms are simply not effective in promoting language acquisition. This is because these classrooms drill the

students in sounds and vocabulary using rote memorization (Arizona English Bulletin, 1988).

Additionally, growing numbers of language-minority students in American schools have prompted the Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English to warn against classroom practices that members say frustrate students' desire to learn. This group, a part of the National Council of Teachers of English, has issued a pamphlet entitled Expanding Opportunities: Academic Success for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students; which recommends teaching approaches that have proven to be effective for helping such students gain a command of written and spoken English (Arizona English Bulletin, 1988).

The pamphlet calls for giving speakers of other languages and dialects at all levels of education daily opportunities to practice talking and reading in English about topics related to the student's lives. It calls for reading aloud frequently to give students a feel for the sounds and structures of written English and recommends collaborative writing activities in which peer interaction supports learning and practice of the new language. Implicit in such activities is a gradual developmental process that is built on students' knowledge and skill in their native language (Arizona English Bulletin, 1988).

Need for the Study

In order to provide the most comprehensive methods for teaching ESL students, additional research into effective educational practices for teaching

ESL is important. The lack of beneficial instructional methods, such as the pedagogical classroom model, and wrong assumptions, such as the isolation of language acquisition from content-based classrooms, warrants careful consideration into alternative approaches (Cummins, 1986). There are many learning methods and approaches that will be identified in order to see which method(s) best fulfill(s) the goal of effective learning and application of English by ESL students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what method and/or approach was perceived by practicing ESL teachers to best increase second language acquisition in ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3. The methods explored include: The Language Experience Approach; Whole Language; Process Writing; CALLA; Cooperative Learning; Cognitive Instruction; and Thematic Units.

Research Question

What teaching method and/or approach was perceived to most effectively increase second language acquisition for ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Prior to 1995, the assumption was made by ESL educators that language learning can be isolated from other issues. This assumption led to the belief that minority students must first learn English as a basis for language proficiency (Collier, 1995). This incorrect belief resulted in inadequate second language acquisition for ESL students.

This chapter will explore several variables affecting the ESL learner's success and the seven methods mentioned of second language acquisition: The Language Experience Approach (VanAllen and Allen, 1967); Whole Language (Goodman, 1986); Process Writing (Murray, 1982); CALLA (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989); Cooperative Learning (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, 1984); Cognitive Instruction (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989); and Thematic Units (Fredericks, Meinbach & Rothlein, 1993). These variables and methods will be analyzed in order to find a method that best addresses language acquisition by ESL students.

Variables Affecting ESL Learning

According to Collier (1995), it is important to identify certain variables that can contribute to how effectively ESL students acquire a second language. The variables include empowerment and at-risk factors. Regardless of what method is chosen for teaching ESL, these variables must be considered important and effective solutions be developed and synthesized into the preferred method of instruction.

Empowerment: Empowerment is defined by Britannica World Language Dictionary (Preble, 1958, p. 118) as “authorization or delegation of authority to” someone or something. It results when “one is an integral part of a society and has a positive self-image within that society” (Cummins, 1979, p. 28).

Empowerment affects self-esteem which is, in turn, affected by the ability to communicate, to belong, to share in decision-making and feel valued. Cummins (1986) refers to students from dominated societal groups (i.e., minority students) as being either empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools.

At-risk Learner: There are many categories and components that might account for development of the variables which lead to at-risk students. A student who does not share the culture or linguistic characteristics of the majority population of a community may be said to be potentially at-risk of failure. Other factors responsible for producing at-risk youth are poverty, divorce, abuse,

dropout rate, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, crime and minority status (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 1993).

While family and environmental factors are at the forefront of this at-risk situation, the school and educators within the school environment have control over certain educational practices and behaviors.

Educational practices and philosophies that are able to promote student empowerment will heighten the possibility for success in school, and in so doing, diminish the possibility of failure or in the students becoming at-risk (McWhirter, et al., 1993). The Effective Schools model is a good example by which to reduce at-risk situations.

McWhirter, et al. (1993) point to the findings of research on the effectiveness of schools as being consistent regardless of the underlying theories of methodologies used by the researchers. Leadership behaviors, academic emphasis, teacher and staff factors, student involvement and community support are the variables used to determine effective schools.

Effective schools generally exemplify the following.

1. Schools are effective that likely have autonomous or site-based management and make many decisions about programs and their implementation without school board approval. Strong instructional leadership is also emphasized.
2. A curriculum that stresses academics and recognizes achievement on a school-wide basis with frequent monitoring of student progress is another variable.

3. "Collegial" or professional relationships among the staff that supports collaborative planning, low turnover of faculty members and availability of staff development on a school-wide basis are the teaching/staff factors in the elements of effective schools.
4. Students at schools that have clear goals, a fair, understandable and consistent student discipline program that is not oppressive or punitive tend to create a sense of community and belonging that involves students
5. The community that has high expectations of the schools and their students, and show district and parental support and involvement, will nurture effective schools (McWhirter, et al., 1993, p. 35).

ESL students, and their families, are in a subordinated position with respect to all of the societal and school-related variables because of the language barrier. It becomes necessary, then, to understand how language is learned in order to assess methodologies that will lead to effective language learning for the ESL student, thus optimizing the chances for success in the classroom (McWhirter, et al., 1993).

Language Acquisition Defined

In continuing the research on finding an ideal method for teaching ESL, the question must be asked, how does language acquisition develop? There is much research on contemporary and traditional methods, strategies and techniques that optimize participation and comprehension in a classroom. The aspects of ESL and other grade level learning are diverse and complex. Language development is the foundation of learning for the young student or the ESL student, and is central to several other components that must be present for

maximized participation and comprehension to occur (Ferguson and Slobin, 1973).

Krashen's "Monitor theory" (1981), addresses his hypothesis about subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning.

Acquisition is the natural way in which young children learn or pick up a language with some or no formal teaching. Meaningful, natural interaction is needed for acquisition to occur. The focus is on understanding the message, not the form.

Phonetics in Language Acquisition: In a study of language acquisition by Cantonese learners of English and Cantonese learners of French, basic aspects of language acquisition involved the need to address phonetics. The importance of contrasting voiced and voiceless sounds in general was demonstrated as to the scale of difficulty that depends on the position of the phoneme in the mouth: the farther back in the mouth it is, the higher is the difficulty rating of the phoneme (Kessler, 1992). Phonemes are one of a set of the basic sounds of speech of a language which provide the changes that differentiate between words. Phonetic aspects of language acquisition are basic to the person's second language (L2), as well as the person's first language, (L1), in the ability to apply linguistic principles to higher level transformations. A Markedness Differential Hypothesis was developed which explained many of the patterns of difficulties, although it was limited to consonants. Kessler (1992) suggested that their study be extended to allow for a greater degree of interlanguage facts.

Sociocultural Aspects of Language Acquisition: Researchers studying the

language development of both young (L1) learners and (L2) learners began focusing on the semantic and social/contextual facets (Enright and McCloskey, 1985) with definitive rethinking on the aspects of language acquisition for children and perhaps all language learners.

Language develops by comprehension and linguistic signals, semantic relationships, word-order and morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful unit of a language that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts. Collier's (1995) research has resulted in a conceptual model based on four components that help to explain the interacting factors experienced by the child when acquiring a second language during the school years. This model discusses sociocultural, linguistic, academic and cognitive processes.

The first component comprises all the surrounding social and cultural processes occurring in the child's everyday life, past, present and future. In all contexts, these processes are central to that student's acquisition of language.

The second component of Colliers model addresses:

Subconscious aspects of language development (the innate ability that all humans possess to learn oral language), and metalinguistic, conscious, formal teaching of language in school, and oral acquisition of the written system of language (Collier 1995, p. 3).

The third component is academic development. Academic knowledge and conceptual development through the curricular disciplines expands the

linguistic dimensions of the learner. These expanded areas are vocabulary, socio-linguistics, and discourse to higher cognitive levels in the subjects of: language arts, mathematics, the sciences and social studies (for all grade levels from 3-12 and beyond).

Cognitive development is the fourth factor in Collier's model. Cognitive development is the ability to advance one in mental apprehension or increase the mental knowledge. During the 1970's, there was simplifying, structuring and sequencing of the language curricula. The cognitive aspect had been neglected for the most part. It is now known from the extensive research base that cognitive development in first language is crucial to second language acquisition success. All of these components are necessary for the student's overall growth and success (Collier, 1995).

Language Experience Approach

There is a need to shift attention to the types of language acquisition teaching methods developed by a variety of educators. The first method is the language experience approach which is based on the notion that students' prior experience needs to be used as a bridge to new ideas and concepts. In this approach, students talk about personal experiences, and this recounting is written down by the teacher, an aide, or another student. An important aspect of the language experience approach is that vocabulary and grammatical structures are experienced first within the language knowledge base known by students.

The language experience approach encompasses many of the same principles that underlie CALLA's approach to literacy development and is particularly advantageous with beginning-level ESL students (Chamot and O'Malley, 1993).

An interesting alternative, which considerably changes the dynamics of this approach, is for the whole class or small groups within the class to dictate a group story while the teacher writes it on the board, flip chart, or overhead transparency. What makes this alternative particularly interesting is that the students scaffold upon, or support, each other's utterances and create "Zones of Proximal Development" for each other (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992, p. 20).

The stories, once they are ready, can be placed in story collections and displayed in the classroom for all to read and reread. Students can also provide illustrations to accompany their stories, adding another dimension to the printed page. As the students become more proficient reading their stories, they can be gradually introduced to textbooks and other materials that are easy and are within their reach cognitively (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992).

Applications of the language experience approach can be used in many other kinds of classroom writing activities other than story writing and at many different levels of proficiency. Charts can be created with the information supplied by students, comparisons can be drawn in chart or paragraph form, and idea maps or clustering devices can be generated (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992).

Perhaps the biggest advantage is that the text is appropriate both cognitively and linguistically since it comes from the students themselves (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992). Moreover, it reflects the culture of which the students are a part. The students' own ideas are encouraged and validated, thereby enhancing self-concepts and fostering independence. The unit of study is the created story or products rather than isolated sound and letter correspondences, words, and sentences. Grammar and other discrete point instruction can be individualized and used as needed and small groups can be formed of students needing similar instruction. In the case of a group-created product, students can learn from one another and scaffold upon each other's contributions. The teacher serves as a facilitator in the entire process rather than mainly as an editor of what is produced (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992).

Whole Language

This approach to literacy development is based on the belief that language should not be separated into component skills, but rather experienced as a whole system of communication. To this end, students are given many opportunities to interact with authentic texts, especially literature, and to use language for personal communicative purposes. Activities in a whole language classroom include reading aloud by the teacher, journal writing, story writing, and sustained silent reading. Also included are higher-order thinking skills discussions about what is read, student choice in reading materials, and frequent

conferences with the teacher and other students about what is being read and written (Goodman, 1987).

For those students whose first language is not English, whole language is not only good teaching, it is essential. "Whole language may be the only road to success for bilingual learners. The instruction that many bilingual learners have received in schools has been for the most part fragmented and disempowering" (Crawford, 1991, p. 4). Teachers and administrators want to do what is best for all children, but frequently they are unprepared for students who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and do not speak English. As a result, the dropout or push-out rate among second language students is high. Studies have shown that among Hispanics, for example, nearly 45 percent fail to complete high school (Kollars, 1988).

ESL whole language classrooms use a variety of activities designed to draw out student meanings through various language and literacy activities in social contexts. These classrooms frequently use thematic interdisciplinary units so that meanings can be constructed in large contexts and easily connected by students to their lives. Within these units there is a great deal of literature read to and by students in their primary language and later in second languages (Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991).

The whole language approach is based on the principle that meaning and experience are closely tied to each other and fundamental to the literacy process

(Freeman and Freeman, 1992). In this approach, the interaction of all experiences of ESL learners as members of bilingual communities must be taken into account. These learners can read and write about experiences stemming from their first language and culture or their second language and culture. A second principle underlying the whole language approach is that the components of language are parts of an interrelated system and form a whole (Halliday, 1975; Smith, 1983). Children start with ideas that they express in a single word, and later they learn to use additional words to express that idea. They are able to add more detail with time and move toward the conventional adult way of speaking. In the same way, when children first start to use written language, they often write a single letter to represent a whole word (Freeman and Freeman, 1992).

Process Writing

In process writing approaches students learn that writing involves thinking, reflection, and multiple revisions. Teachers model the writing process by thinking aloud about their own ideas, jotting them down, organizing them, developing a draft, reading it aloud, making revisions, asking students for their comments, and continuing to make more revisions (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989). ESL students can profit from instruction in writing strategies just as instruction in using strategies and in self-regulation has proven beneficial for native English-speaking students. By teaching students effective strategies for

planning, accessing prior knowledge, composing, and revising, and also teaching them how to select and manage writing strategies, teachers can help students develop both confidence and increased skills in their writing.

Revisions are particularly important to the writing process. According to Murray, they provide opportunities for the student to “stand back from the work the way any craftsman does to see what has been done....The most important discoveries are made during the process of revision” (1982, p. 12). Because the effective writer has “to pause, go back, reread, rethink, consult, with other writers, rewrite, and write some more,” he or she must be able to concentrate intensely on the composition without interference from the teacher or others who might want to help (Richard-Amato and Snow, 1992, p.73)

CALLA

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) was developed to teach content to second language learners. It is an “instructional system designed to develop academic language skills in English for students in upper elementary and secondary schools” (Chamot and O’Malley, 1989, p. 111).

The rationale behind the approach is that “learning a language has more in common with learning complex cognitive skills than it does with learning facts, isolated pieces of information, or even meaningful texts” (Chamot and O’Malley, 1989, p. 112). The idea is that ESL students will learn English through an

organized approach to the content area materials they need to study in the regular classroom.

Three components comprise CALLA: grade-appropriate content, academic language development, and instruction in learning strategies. With CALLA, students first study content material in science and mathematics because these subjects are least language dependent. In science, students receive comprehensible input through hands-on activities. Mathematics has an international sign system and somewhat restricted vocabulary. Later, students begin to work in social studies, which involves more language.

It is important that teachers have a number of ways to provide context for the content (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989). As students explore various content areas, they also develop the academic language they need. Since much of the academic language used in the content areas is context-reduced, particularly the language of textbooks and lectures, the input is made comprehensible through the use of maps, models, manipulatives, demonstrations, written responses, and discussions. As students become actively involved in the content, they learn the academic language they need (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

The third component of CALLA, learning strategy instruction, is meant to help students consciously develop techniques for working with content area materials. In CALLA, teachers first find out what learning strategies students already use by interviewing them and having them think aloud as they do a task.

Once strategies are identified, teachers provide students opportunities to practice other strategies. Chamot and O'Malley (1989), have identified three major types of strategies, and they have developed activities for each type. Metacognitive strategies include such activities as advance organization, selective attention, and self-evaluation. These strategies are intended to help students plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Cognitive strategies such as grouping, note taking, imagery, and inferencing encourage students to manipulate content material in different ways. Social-affective strategies like cooperative learning give students a chance to interact in order to ask questions and clarify the content (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

A CALLA lesson is organized into five parts: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. In the preparation phase, the teacher discovers what students already know about the content to ascertain the gaps in students' prior knowledge and to build on what students already know. In the presentation stage the material is presented using different techniques to make it comprehensible. The practice phase allows students to engage in hands-on activities in cooperative groups as they go over the content. The evaluation phase may be individual, cooperative, or teacher directed. However, the emphasis is on helping students to self-evaluate. In the final stage, expansion, students are encouraged to go beyond the materials to explore the content in other ways. For example, students might decide to interview family or

community members about a topic discussed during a social studies lesson (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

In a CALLA lesson, the goal is to provide students with different ways to practice language and learn content at the same time. Through the practice of different strategies, students are shown how to approach content in more than one way. The authors of CALLA have developed textbooks for secondary content area classrooms that follow the model. Many teachers have found both the model and the materials extremely helpful as they work to teach content to ESL students (Chamot, 1995).

From a whole language perspective, CALLA builds on student strengths, involves students actively in learning, includes all four modes, and encourages social interaction. However, students have little choice about what direction the study will take or what strategies they will practice. CALLA is more content centered than student centered. There is a tendency to focus on details of content before students get the big picture, some of the instruction is part to the whole. In whole language classes, teachers provide demonstrations of strategies during content instruction and nudge students toward using them instead of directly teaching the strategies. CALLA lessons show faith that second language students can learn academic content. Teachers are given practical ideas for embedding content in context, and students can develop faith in themselves as learners because they are given useful ideas for approaching academic subjects (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

Cooperative Learning

In cooperative learning, students work in heterogeneous groups on learning tasks that are structured so that all students share in the responsibility for completing the task. While there are a number of models of cooperative learning, all provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in active practice of language and content. In cooperative learning, students of varying degrees of linguistic proficiency and content knowledge work in a group setting that fosters mutual learning rather than competitiveness. For language minority students, the benefits of cooperative learning include additional practice with academic English, the use of the native language to draw on prior knowledge, the incorporation of content into ESL classes, and the opportunity for students to become more independent learners. Teachers who set up cooperative activities in which groups members have differing levels of English proficiency make it possible for students to help each other understand and complete the task (Kagan, 1986).

Cooperative learning is an integral part of CALLA lessons. Cooperative learning activities are featured in the practice phase of the CALLA instructional sequence. They can also be used successfully during the preparation phase when students are identifying their prior knowledge of a topic, and during the evaluation phase in which students make applications of the new information to their own lives. In CALLA, cooperation is identified as a particular learning strategy which is taught overtly so that students understand the value of working

collaboratively on academic tasks (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

In cooperative learning, students work in groups or teams to complete a learning task. Although there are a number of models of cooperative learning, all provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in active practice of language and content (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, 1984). In cooperative learning, students of varying degrees of linguistic proficiency and content knowledge work in a group setting that fosters mutual learning rather than competitiveness (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, 1984; Slavin, 1983).

For language minority students, the benefits of cooperative learning include additional practice with academic English, the use of the native language to draw on prior knowledge, the incorporation of content into ESL classes, and the opportunity for students to become more independent learners (Kagan, 1985). Teachers who set up cooperative activities in which group members have differing levels of English proficiency make it possible for students to help each other understand and complete the task (Kagan, 1985).

The benefits of cooperative learning may be enhanced in classrooms that are organized as learning communities. The teacher who creates a classroom learning community recognizes the social aspects of learning, stimulates discussion about authentic intellectual issues, makes explicit relationships between school learning and real-world activities, and involves all students in active learning and thinking (Slavin, 1983).

Cognitive Instruction

Cognitive instruction is used to describe a number of approaches to teaching thinking and to infuse thinking into all areas of the curriculum. New instructional approaches in science, mathematics, social studies, reading comprehension, and writing all share a common cognitive orientation. Students are seen as active constructors of knowledge (Chamot and Kupper, 1989).

The role of students' prior knowledge is seen as a critical influence on the acquisition of new information. The curriculum calls for fewer skills through challenging questions, modeling the learning process, and engaging in interactive dialogue with students. Another common feature of cognitive instructional approaches is that learning strategies are taught explicitly. Students are told the names of particular strategies, they are given reasons for using the strategy, they observe the teacher modeling the strategy, and they are given opportunities to practice the strategy with ordinary classroom tasks. Later, the teacher leads a debriefing discussion in which students describe how they used the strategy and the degree to which it was effective for completing the learning task. Finally, the teacher suggests ways in which the student can apply the same strategy to different learning situations (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

Thematic Units

Thematic units are an excellent way to keep language whole by providing opportunities for the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

In this natural approach, the focus is geared toward the students' needs and desires (Ovando and Collier, 1985).

Thematic units offer teachers a way to organize objectives around a theme and use various teaching materials to make learning meaningful to the student. Students usually assist in choosing topics to be learned, and the topics are taught across the curriculum. For example: if the topic is the environment, stories about different environments may be read in literature class, science class could look at the scientific aspects of the environment, history could discuss an historical perspective, and culturally, the students could compare perspectives of one culture versus another about environmental issues. Foreign language vocabulary could be introduced and reinforced throughout all the activities of the unit. Thematic units allow a breakdown of the artificial boundaries set by schools for compartmentalized learning, and they can be used to integrate all content areas (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).

A thematic unit is multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional; it knows no boundaries. It is responsive to the interests, abilities, and needs of children and is respectful of their developing aptitudes and attitudes. In essence, a thematic approach to learning offers students a realistic arena in which they can pursue learning using a host of contexts and a panorama of literature (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).

Thematic units are built on the idea that learning can be integrative and multifaceted. Children need to be provided with a host of opportunities to become actively involved in the dynamics of their own learning. This will enable them to draw positive relationships between what happens in the classroom and what occurs outside the classroom. A thematic unit, a concept surrounded by literature, promotes learning as a sustained and relevant venture. Well-developed thematic units establish systematic connections across all subject areas (Fredericks, Meinbach & Rothlein, 1993).

Thematic units provide various occasions for students to engage in decision making and critical thinking. Children are given the chance to make important choices about what to learn as well as how to learn it. Most important, thematic units provide youngsters with hands-on learning opportunities in dealing with real-life concerns and problems. Science and social studies form the foundations for these investigations, but the entire curriculum is integrated (Wong-Fillmore and Valadez, 1986).

Thematic units give students a chance to extend and expand important concepts and issues. For example, if students have a great deal of interest in environmental issues, the development of an appropriate thematic unit will encourage them to explore this topic in greater detail than would be possible if they were to rely solely on a textbook for the necessary information. Thematic units also enable educators to combine the various skills, attitudes, and knowledge levels of their students with the resources and literature available in

and outside the classroom into an extended plan. In short, thematic units integrate many resources, all areas of the elementary curriculum, and the interests of students into a meaningful and balanced approach to learning. Above all, thematic units demonstrate the varied relationship that exists between content and other aspects of the elementary curriculum in a positive, non-threatening format (Wong-Fillmore and Valadez, 1986).

Summary

This chapter introduced several teaching methods and approaches for optimizing the learning of a second language. These methods and approaches include Language Experience Approach, Whole Language, Process Writing, CALLA, Cooperative Learning, Cognitive Instruction, and Thematic Units.

Although each method described has its own unique characteristics and aspects, the researcher wants to find out which method and/or approach will most effectively teach language acquisition to ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3. A determination will be made in Chapter 3 as to the best way of teaching a second language.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine what method and/or approach was perceived by practicing ESL teachers to best increase second language acquisition in ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

Research Design

This paper used a descriptive study.

In descriptive research, the researcher does not manipulate variables or control the environment in which the study takes place. Its purpose is to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon, population, or area of interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, p. 15).

This study involves an attitude and value scale test which attempts to gather opinions from the participants that reflect their attitude or values about a particular topic or scenario. When measuring attitude, the researcher is measuring “a predisposition to think, feel, perceive, and behave toward a referent or cognitive object” (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, p. 15).

The instructional methods to be rated include:

1. Language Experience Approach - In this approach students talk about personal experiences, and this recounting is written down by the teacher, an aide, or another student (VanAllen and Allen, 1967).
2. Whole Language - This approach to literacy development is based on the belief that language should not be separated into component skills, but rather experienced as a whole system of communication (Goodman, 1986).
3. Thematic Units - This model seeks to infuse language teaching and learning into all areas of the curriculum where teachers carry out language development activities associated with their individual content areas (Fredericks, Meinbach & Rothlein, 1993).
4. Process Writing - In process writing approaches students learn that writing involves thinking, reflection, and multiple revisions (Murray, 1982).
5. Cognitive Instruction - This approach is used to describe a number of approaches to teaching thinking and to infuse thinking into all areas of the curriculum (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).
6. Cooperative Learning - In this approach students work in heterogeneous groups on learning tasks that are structured so that all students share in the responsibility for completing the task (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, 1984).
7. CALLA - This approach is based on a cognitive model of learning and combines aspects from the other approaches (Chamot and O'Malley, 1989).

Population and Sample

The research includes a survey of thirty ESL instructors of grades 1, 2, and 3 who teach in urban, inner city, elementary schools. Teachers were selected from four separate districts in Phoenix, Arizona.

Assumptions and Limitations

1. All responses are honest and truthful.
2. All instructors were well versed in the methods assessed.
3. All instructors understood the survey questions and intent.

Procedure

A phone call was made to each of the ESL instructors wherein the process was explained and questions answered before the survey was completed.

The determination was made that the use of a Likert scale would be most appropriate to measure the effectiveness of each method. It was also determined that instructors who teach ESL would rate each method based upon their classroom experiences in how to effectively teach ESL. Therefore, thirty ESL instructors were asked to rank the effectiveness of the seven ESL methods and approaches for teaching a second language.

Instrumentation

A survey which contained a modified Likert scale was used with parameters, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Numbers correspond to the ratings: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. The ESL instructors were asked to rate

each method as to its effectiveness for teaching a second language. The survey was used to make this determination is shown in Appendix A.

Method of Analysis

The instructors were asked to rank seven different learning methods and approaches for their effectiveness in teaching a second language. A modified Likert scale was used to measure differing levels of agreement for how effective each method is. Using the number 5 as equal to strongly agree, the number 4 as equal to agree, the number 3 as equal to undecided, the number 2 as equal to disagree, and the number 1 as equivalent to strongly disagree, each method was ranked by the thirty ESL instructors. The numbers were totaled for each method and that total number was averaged by dividing it by thirty to give an average score.

The results of the survey, as seen in Table 1, showed that CALLA was ranked as having the highest degree of effectiveness with an average score of 4.07, which is equivalent to agree on the Likert scale. Next comes Cooperative Learning with an average score of 3.83, Language Experience Approach with an average score of 3.70, Process Writing with an average score of 3.67, Thematic Units with an average score of 3.37, Whole Language with an average score of 3.13, and Cognitive Instruction with an average score of 3.10.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to determine what method and/or approach was perceived by practicing ESL teachers to best increase second language acquisition in ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

A survey was prepared with the results of the phone calls that used a Likert scale range of 1-5. Table 1 shows ranking by number from 1-5 as perceived by the thirty ESL instructors.

Table 1. Survey Results For Second Language Acquisition Approaches

EFFECTIVENESS OF APPROACH
 STRONGLY AGREE = 5
 AGREE = 4
 UNDECIDED = 3
 DISAGREE = 2
 STRONGLY DISAGREE = 1

DIRECTIONS: USING THE ABOVE SCALE, PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING METHODS AND APPROACHES AS TO THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE.

NAME OF METHOD OR APPROACH	TEACHERS 1 THROUGH 30																														TOTAL	AVG.		
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5				
LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH	3	2	4	3	5	3	4	2	5	2	5	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	2	3	111	3.70
WHOLE LANGUAGE	3	3	2	2	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	2	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	2	4	3	2	4	4	3	2	94	3.13	
THEMATIC UNITS	4	3	2	4	2	3	4	4	2	3	4	4	3	5	3	4	5	3	3	4	3	3	2	3	4	3	5	4	3	2	101	3.37		
PROCESS WRITING	4	2	3	4	4	4	5	2	4	3	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	110	3.67	
COGNITIVE INSTRUCTION	1	3	1	2	3	4	3	1	4	2	5	3	4	5	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	3	2	4	3	4	2	4	4	4	93	3.10		
COOPERATIVE LEARNING	3	3	4	5	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	2	4	115	3.83	
CALLA	5	4	2	5	4	3	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	4	5	3	4	4	5	5	3	4	3	2	122	4.07		

The results of the survey, as seen in Table 1, showed that CALLA was ranked as having the highest degree of effectiveness with an average score of 4.07, which is equivalent to agree on the Likert scale. Next comes Cooperative Learning with an average score of 3.83, Language Experience Approach with an average score of 3.70, Process Writing with an average score of 3.67, Thematic Units with an average score of 3.37, Whole Language with an average score of 3.13, and Cognitive Instruction with an average score of 3.10.

A phone call was made to each of the ESL instructors wherein the process was explained and questions answered before the survey was completed. A modified Likert scale was used to measure different levels of agreement for how effective each method is. Using the number 5 as equal to strongly agree, the number 4 as equal to agree, the number 3 as equal to undecided, the number 2 as equal to disagree, and the number 1 as equal to strongly disagree, each method was ranked by the thirty ESL instructors. The numbers were totaled for each method and that total number was averaged by dividing it by thirty to give an average score.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In Chapter 1, a general introduction of the purpose of this research paper is given. Chapter 2 provides research that identified seven methods of ESL instruction to be surveyed. In Chapter 3, a research design was developed to rank the seven learning methods using a survey of thirty ESL instructors. Chapter 4 presents the data and analysis of the survey. Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusion and recommendation of this study.

The purpose of this study was to determine what method and/or approach was perceived to best increase second language acquisition in ESL students, grades 1, 2, and 3. The need for this study is significant because of the rapid growth of students who do not speak English natively.

Variables surrounding a student's learning success are reviewed and several methods and approaches are examined in-depth in order to determine how to optimize second language learning for ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

Thirty ESL instructors were asked to rank the seven different methods/approaches as to their effectiveness in teaching a second language. The results of the survey showed that CALLA has the highest degree of

effectiveness in optimizing learning for the ESL students in grades 1, 2, and 3. It was determined that instructors who teach ESL would rate each method based upon their classroom experiences in how to effectively teach ESL. Therefore, thirty ESL instructors were asked to rank the effectiveness of the seven ESL methods and approaches for teaching a second language.

A phone call was made to each of the ESL instructors wherein the process was explained and questions answered before the survey was completed. A modified Likert scale was used to measure different levels of agreement for how effective each method is. Using the number 5 as equal to strongly agree, the number 4 as equal to agree, the number 3 as equal to undecided, the number 2 as equal to disagree, and the number 1 as equal to strongly disagree, each method was ranked by the thirty ESL instructors. The numbers were totaled for each method and that total number was averaged by dividing it by thirty to give an average score.

Conclusions

The results of the survey, as seen in Table 1, showed that according to the perception of thirty practicing ESL teachers CALLA was ranked as having the highest degree of effectiveness with an average score of 4.07, which is equivalent to agree on the Likert scale. Next comes Cooperative Learning with an average score of 3.83, Language Experience Approach with an average score of 3.70, Process Writing with an average score of 3.67, Thematic Units

with an average score of 3.37, Whole Language with an average score of 3.13, and Cognitive Instruction with an average score of 3.10.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, the researcher recommends CALLA as the preferred method of teaching second language acquisition since it was ranked as having the highest degree of effectiveness for teaching ESL students. The researcher suggests another way of finding the results. Instead of surveying the teachers by telephone, meeting them in person would be helpful to all for discussing and clarifying the best method of teaching ESL students before making the survey.

School districts, educators, and administrators should consider the survey of the seven methods and approaches for their own ESL curriculum development. Because ESL instruction techniques are continually being improved, the most effective method should be considered for implementation in the curricula. CALLA should be explored in the classroom as an experiment for a four to six month period in order to evaluate its effectiveness. Based upon this experiment, a long-term curriculum could be developed that incorporates the strengths of CALLA.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

SURVEY OF INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

EFFECTIVENESS OF APPROACH

STRONGLY AGREE	= 5
AGREE	= 4
UNDECIDED	= 3
DISAGREE	= 2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	= 1

DIRECTIONS: USING THE ABOVE SCALE, PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING METHODS AND APPROACHES AS TO THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE.

NAME OF METHOD OR APPROACH	TEACHERS 1 THROUGH 30																														TOTAL	AVG.	
	3	2	4	3	5	3	4	2	5	2	5	3	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	5	2	3			
LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH In this approach students talk about personal experiences, and this recounting is written down by the teacher, an aide, or another student.																																111	3.70
WHOLE LANGUAGE This approach to literacy development is based on the belief that language should not be separated into component skills, but rather component skills, but rather experienced as a whole system of communication.																																94	3.13
THEMATIC UNITS This model seeks to infuse language teaching and learning into all areas of the curriculum where teachers carry out language development activities associated with their individual content areas.																																101	3.37
PROCESS WRITING In process writing approaches students learn that writing involves thinking, reflection, and multiple revisions.																																110	3.67
COGNITIVE INSTRUCTION This approach is used to describe a number of approaches to teaching thinking and to infuse thinking into all areas of the curriculum.																																93	3.10
COOPERATIVE LEARNING In this approach students work in heterogeneous groups on learning tasks that are structured so that all students share in the responsibility for completing the task.																																115	3.83
CALLA This approach is based on a cognitive model of learning and combines aspects from the other approaches.																																122	4.07

APPENDIX B

DEFINITION OF TERMS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- At-risk Learner** - a learner exposed to a variety of factors and is in danger of not graduating from the present grade (McWhirter, et al., 1993).
- CALLA** - Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (Chamot and O'Malley, 1985).
- Cooperative Learning** - learning in groups where every member has a task to achieve a particular goal (Kessler, 1992).
- English as a Second Language Instruction** - A language acquisition program in which English proficiency is the objective (Crawford, 1991).
- Hands On** - refers to classroom activities that allow students to actually handle or manipulate an object (Kessler, 1992).
- Language Acquisition** - a process of gaining fluency in a language by communication and exposure that occurs on a subconscious level (Arizona Department of Education, 1990).
- Language Learning** - gaining fluency in a language by communication and exposure (Ovando and Collier, 1985).
- Metacognition** - reflective ability and self-awareness to one's own thinking patterns, i.e. to understand how one learns (Cummins, 1986).
- Target Language** - the language being taught (Ovando and Collier, 1985)
- Thematic Unit** - a teaching/learning unit of study set up for students within which reading, language arts, math, social studies/science areas are taught/learned and associated skills developed (Enright and McCloskey, 1985).
- Whole Language** - a learning environment in which there is a conversation, active participation and interaction with others (Arizona Department of Education, 1990).

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