

A COMPARISON OF
AUDIO-LINGUAL-HAPTIC AND INTERACTIVE VOCABULARY APPROACHES
FOR
COMPREHENSION TRANSFER OF SECONDARY ESL STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Educators of non-English-speaking students are continually searching for effective methods of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). The existing methods of accomplishing this task are nearly as diverse as the principles involved. They range from bilingual curricula, with gradual insertion of English education, to immersion--a total English curriculum taught entirely in the second language.

Although ESL teaching and learning problems are common to all instructional levels, secondary teachers are faced with a particularly difficult task. In addition to functional language acquisition students are expected to progress to a level of competency that would allow them to succeed in content courses characterized by heavily conceptual reading and complex language.

In addition to explanatory lecture, secondary teachers tend to use extensive writing practice and reading comprehension exercises to help these students acquire the content material they need in the "regular" curriculum. These same instructors continue to find the second language acquisition process to be extremely slow in relation to academic needs of students.

METHOD

Subjects

The audio-lingual-haptic (control) group for this study consisted of a class of eighteen functionally bilingual students, ranging from fifteen to eighteen years of age. All were classified as B students, that is, they had no less than one and no more than three consecutive years of intensive English training in American schools. In addition to two hours of intensive English instruction, they carried a mathematics class, a tutorial (a study hall, originally designed for remedial science or social studies sessions to prepare students for the "mainstream"), physical education and one elective.

The interactive language development (experimental) group in this study was comprised of twenty-three students, ranging in age from fourteen to eighteen years. All were classified as A students, as they had been in the United States less than six months, had no

previous English education and were attending an American school for the first time. At the time of this study, none of the students had been in American schools more than three months. All were scheduled in a three-hour intensive English program in addition to a mathematics class, physical education and one elective.

It is important to note that mathematics and English were the only content area core courses carried by these lower level LEP students.

ASSESSMENT

The post test was a Cloze procedure, created from a textbook passage of average readability, in a content area separate from that of the study, and common to both groups. The control used a text with an average readability on the ninth grade level. The experimental used a text with an average readability of seventh grade. (A pretest was deemed futile because of the obvious disparity in language proficiency between the two groups.)

The Cloze procedure is developed from a passage in which words are regularly deleted. The student must complete the passage by providing the exact words that have been deleted. He relies upon general language knowledge, all levels and types of vocabulary and most heavily, context clues. Thus, the Cloze assesses deep language structure, and the student is classified as potentially frustrated (40%), instructional (40-60%) or independent (60%) in relation to the textbook from which the passage is taken. (Taylor, 1953).

PROCEDURE

This experimental study was conducted over a period of three months, with a post-test only, comparison group design. The control received traditional audio-lingual-haptic instructions, in which students heard the teacher present language structures, repeated them orally and practiced assignments. The textbook and workbook exercises were specifically designed for the learners of a second language. This language acquisition instruction was conducted for half the period. (The regular language arts content was presented during the second half of the period, as these students were scheduled for transition into the mainstream within the year.)

The experimental group received interactive language development instruction in which students used language from the context of teacher-student and student-student conversations that centered on the subject area materials and terms. Due to the variety of first languages represented in the class, students were paired to give an "instructional illusion" of a class half its actual size. Special attention was given to pairing students with different native languages so they were forced to use the only common language for communication: English. Vocabulary development was the key focus. New vocabulary was introduced by the instructor, meanings were derived from conversational context, using appropriate and inappropriate illustrative examples, mnemonics and dictionary entries (as a last resort). Students

created vocabulary activities that stressed functional usage, for example: flashcards with Cloze-style sentences, crossword puzzles, matching games with mnemonics, synonyms, antonyms, categorizing devices, analogies, multiple choice-style "computer games", etc. These were then used alone for practice, or paired with other games such as chess, checkers, playing card games, Boggle, etc. Pairs of students were taught different sets of three or four words, and then the pairs were recombined to teach other students their items. Using this technique of peer tutoring, the instructor was able to develop the subject area content as the basis and substance of second language acquisition.

RESULTS

Following three months of instruction, both groups were tested with Cloze tests, constructed from selections of two American History texts on the seventh and ninth grade levels. Scores were analyzed with ANOVA.

Cloze score performances of the experimental group were significantly higher (at the .001 level) than those of the control group, despite the brevity of the study and the considerably lesser initial English language competency of the experimental group (see Table I).

Table I. Means, standard Deviations and t Scores for Cloze Performances of Experimental (Interactive Approach) and Control (Audio-Lingual-Haptic Approach) Groups on two passages used as a Post test.

<u>SEVENTH GRADE PASSAGE</u>		
	Experimental	Control
Number	17	13
Mean	44.06	29.8
Standard Deviation	7.83	9.6
<u>NINTH GRADE PASSAGE</u>		
	Experimental	Control
Number	11	15
Mean	37.47	9.01
Standard Deviation	2.98	6.8

$$t = 14.81 \quad p < .0001$$

Discussion and Conclusions

This comparison of comprehension transference of traditionally and interactively educated LEP students suggested the following:

- Direction translation was not necessary for student learning of content.

The use of "real" language, with emphasis on context clue development, was a workable curriculum base for second language development. Older LEP students arrive in schools with one fully developed language. The very concepts, patterns and techniques they employ in their first language can be used as "bridges" as opposed to serving as barriers.

- The best learning took place by "doing".

As in all new language, (English, French, Algebra, Physics, etc.), comprehensive learning is contingent upon vocabulary application and mastery. Every effort was made to teach vocabulary on the functional level. Words that were used were reinforced in lessons, and those that were taught were used repetitively in a variety of ways. Original verbal practice was employed in nearly every lesson.

- Students of different languages relied on each other for necessary instruction, when teachers and aides were engaged with other students.

In the absence of same language teachers, potentially effective one-on-one instruction was provided by peer students themselves. They were divided into pairs of heterogeneous first languages. Besides aiding classroom management, students taught each other by talking through assignments, arguing, defending, providing alternatives and socializing. Using activities designed to include oral exchange among students, the teacher was free to circulate, provide instruction, diagnose difficulties, provide immediate remediation and clarify vocabulary meanings, and repeat instruction.

- Students constructed teaching aids which were modified to accommodate learning levels.

The author found in these students invaluable resources for time-efficiency. Their teaching vocabulary was simpler, and upon re-writing the grade level materials in their own words, the reading levels were automatically lower, allowing other students to proceed at the pace appropriate for understanding.

The evidence that the interactive students outperformed the audio-lingual-haptic students on the Cloze assessment should not be particularly surprising, for it has long been realized that the use of manipulatives and other practical procedures enhances both learning and retention. For this reason, it is logical that the concept should be applied to the secondary LEP learner. The initial disparity in second language competency between these groups was great, yet the comprehension skills learned in one content area were demonstrated in another by the interactive group. The results obtained by the experimental method after a period of only three months are considered astounding.

ESL is only one of many types of compensatory education. It seems likely that our general, fundamental and basic skills students could benefit from similar techniques and activities in striving to attain competency in the content areas. This supposition generates several questions. Although diverse, the subjects in this study were fairly motivated. Would these techniques be as effective in the skills and basic education classes? Would age, maturity or interest levels be significant factors for consideration in a monolingual group of "low achievers?"

In light of the test results in this initial study, it seems that further studies ought to be conducted to explore these variables. The interactive method was clearly more conducive than the traditional audio-lingual-haptic approach to not only second language comprehension, but also the transfer of comprehension from the language arts to another content area (Social Studies).