EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR BI-CULTURAL, BI-LINGUAL SCHOOLS

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Teachers in bi-cultural, bi-lingual schools are faced with a special set of situations and problems. As a teacher in such a setting for over three years, I have often asked the question, "Why do I seem to be more effective with students of my cultural background?" In this paper, I will explore this question and its many facets: the ideological and practical problems facing bi-cultural, bi-lingual schools in the United States and overseas, the need for awareness of culturally different students' learning styles and possibilities for bi-cognitive development, the importance of non-verbal as well as verbal communication in the classroom, and prescribed teaching strategies and attitudes. Teacher training, personality characteristics, as well as applicable methods and understandings in this currently important educational arena will be discussed.

I. Bi-cultural, Bi-lingual Schools

A bi-cultural, bi-lingual school is, in actuality, a microcosm of any educational situation. Its culturally different groups of students, speaking different native languages, exemplify the different groups in all schools, where students are separated by differences in family background, language or dialect, ability, experience, or social class. Attempts to individualize instruction are aimed at the solution of this problem of differentiation: in democratic societies, this has become a basic expectation of educational institutions. In 1974, the lawsuit of Lau vs. Nichols brought this controversy to public attention. Non-English-speaking Chinese students, expected to perform in California classrooms, brought suit against the San Francisco Board of Education. Attorneys posed the question to the United States Supreme Court: in a culturally

and linguistically diverse society, is equal treatment for all sufficient? [1].

Cultural Pluralism vs. the Melting Pot Theory

Many educational theorists have addressed themselves to the above question. A dichotomy centers around the "melting pot" theory and cultural pluralism, also termed cultural democracy. Manuel Ramirez and Alfredo Castañeda define the "melting pot" theory as the ideology of cultural assimilation, as seen in the United States in the 1900's. People of many different national, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds immigrated to America where

> the melted product was envisioned as superior to any of the individual ingredients comprising the mix. [2].

The implications for education were to promote assimilation, especially conformity to the English language. The non-acculturated individual was seen as an outsider, a threat.

Cultural democracy, on the other hand, is the acceptance, even encouragement, of cultural pluralism. Havighurst defines cultural pluralism as:

> 1. Mutual appreciation and understanding of the various cultures in the society.
>
> 2. Cooperation of the various groups in the civic and economic institutions of the society.
>
> 3. Peaceful coexistence of diverse life styles, folkways, manners, language patterns, religious beliefs, and family structures.
>
> 4. Autonomy for each subcultural group to work out its own future, as long as it does not interfere with the same right for the other groups. [3].

In the last decade in the United States, ethnic and racial minority groups have begun expressing pride in their heritages, at the same time demanding respect for their right to be different, speak different languages, dress differently. They also expect their children to be educated to know and respect

themselves as part of their particular minority group. These demands for cultural plurality in the schools were answered in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in which Constitutional guarantees of the right to be different were affirmed.

Due to the emergence of consciousness of the multi-cultural nature of society, "the melting pot theory is no longer tenable". [4] As educators, we must adapt methods and attitudes to our culturally pluralistic classrooms. Many movements in the U.S. and abroad compel us to do so; integration, ethnic awareness movements, the women's movement, Title III, and Title VII. In becoming responsive to the differences among our students, we have adopted individualized programs, remedial skills programs, and English as a Second Language programs.

II. Bi-Cognitive Developments: Different Learning Styles

The values of a particular culture determine its socialization practices, the methods through which children learn how to interact with their environment. These methods, in turn, determine the individual's cognitive styles: learning style, incentive style, human-relational style, and communication style. Ramirez and Castañeda's work on variant learning styles ascertains that the Mexican American child is apt to have a field dependent learning style, where the mainstream American or "Anglo" child more often has a field independent style. Field dependent, sometimes called field sensitive, behaviors are generally defined as having a high incidence of interaction with others (peers, parents, siblings, teachers). Field independent behaviors are likely to be competetive in nature, more task-oriented. (See Appendix A.)

Many teachers and administrators are unaware of these different learning styles and operate as if they had completely homogeneous classrooms.

> (Juanito) comes to school with a language that has served him quite well for his first five years and with possibly some knowledge of English. He has grown up in a Mexican-American family with traditional values unique to this culture and has been socialized in this culture. He goes to a school which reflects the values of the dominant society . . . . He finds himself in a strange and threatening situation, not only with the need to master a new language, but to make immediate use of it in order to

> function as a student. Moreover, many of the social relationships and cultural attitudes on which the total school program is based are completely outside his experience since the schools have made no effort to use the wealth of experience he brings with him. The erroneous presumption is made that this child has existed in a cultural vacuum prior to the time he entered school. [5]

Because the student does not appear to "fit in" to the school setting, he or she is labelled as a poor student, slow learner, or deficient in skills. However, in all likelihood, the school has not attempted to communicate with the student in an appropriate way.

The typical "Anglo" teacher rewards competetiveness, having the right answer first, finishing before the others, doing independent work. But, as we have seen, the typical "Latin" child is non-competetive, does best when working with peers under direct supervision, with lots of warmth and guidance from the teacher. Obviously, the teaching style and learning style here do not coincide. Add to this the fact that the teacher and the student have different native languages and the gap widens.

There are several possible solutions to this problem. Ramirez and Castañeda suggest that through teacher awareness of and training in both cognitive styles, we may develop a <u>bi-cognitive</u> approach. [6] First, teachers must learn to assess cognitive styles in children by becoming acquainted with their backgrounds and by identifying observable behaviors. Then teachers must learn to teach in both styles, one of which will probably be unfamiliar. The use of micro-teaching with a video-tape recorder and playback would be extremely useful. Specific teaching strategies will be dealt with later in this paper. The final goal would be to incorporate both styles in a bi-cognitive curriculum, using bi-cognitive methods, teaching students to operate bi-cognitively. That is, we would offer activities, strategies and environments that encourage <u>both</u> cognitive styles. This objective could be measured simply by counting the number of observable behaviors that can be classified as either field-sensitive or field-independent performed by individual students. A truly bi-cognitive student would operate in both modes, thereby increasing his or her flexibility and learning opportunities. In this sense, a really bi-cultural school would be advantageous to all students, regardless of cultural background. Appendix B sets forth

teaching behaviors appropriate to field-sensitive and field-independent learners. Teaching behaviors of both kinds would constitute bi-cognitive teaching.

III. The Importance of Non-Verbal Communication

Much of what we communicate to students is non-verbal in nature. Some of our non-verbal behaviors such as gestures, vocal quality (intonation, tone, speed of speech), and facial expressions send unintentional messages.

In his book, Body Language, Julius Fast describes kinesics, the science based on the behavioral patterns of non-verbal communication. He states that a person's stance, hand gestures, and the uninvaded space maintained around one, reveal either openness, acceptance and a positive attitude or else fear and rejection, a negative response. [7]. Often what we say verbally contradicts what we are saying through body language. In a well-known example, a woman signals "hands off", even though she is not consciously aware of doing so:

> To do this she will stand rigidly, cross her legs demurely when sitting, cross her arms over her breasts, and use other such defensive gestures. [8].

Non-verbal messages are often sent and usually received at the sub-conscious level, due to man's evolutionary background in the animal world, where such forms of communication must suffice. [9]. In Assertiveness Training one is instructed to use these signals consciously, as a means of strengthening what we are trying to say, rather than allowing our gestures, or lack of same, to contradict us. Fensterheim tells us to get "feeling messages across with face and body talk":

> Watch for:
> Tone of Voice: A firm, confident, appropriately loud tone marks assertive behavior.
> Eye contact: Look straight at the person to whom you are talking.
> Body expression: Copy the French, who use a lot of gestures as they talk.
> Facial expression: Suit your expression to what you feel and say. Don't smile if you are criticizing someone or expressing anger. Conversely, don't look hostile or moody

> if you express praise or love. Show your inner emotion and put that mask away. [10].

What is more, different cultures have different body languages. In a discussion of personal space, Dr. Edward T. Hall explains that Americans are most comfortable when they have a lot of private space: they become upset when this space is violated by another person. [11]. Latin-Americans, on the other hand, feel more secure in closer personal contact.

> . . . in Latin-America, it is common to stand very close to a person when conversing; excessive distance is interpreted as an insult. [12].

Mexicans do a lot of touching, hugging, and use a lot of hand gestures and facial expression. Faced with this human relational style, the North American may get uptight.

Vocal expression is also important: tone of voice, speed of speech and intonation. Children are extremely sensitive to tone of voice, and will often ignore an encouraging verbal message if the parent's or teacher's tone is in conflict, revealing lack of confidence or other negative information. [13]. Speaking slowly and deliberately can show inner calm, self-confidence, that the verbal message is important, that you want and expect to be understood. Fast, irregular speech, on the other hand, may reveal impatience, intentional "turning off" of the listener, the message that "either you understand me immediately, or you lose."

Non-verbal Communication in the Classroom

Different styles of relating coincide with what we have learned about the pre-disposition of children to different cognitive styles. The field-independent North American or "Anglo" child learns better when he is working independently from others, while his parents are most comfortable when not in close personal contact with strangers. Conversely, the field-sensitive Mexican-American or "Latin" child learns best when in close contact with others (peers, parents, family), while his parents feel best in physically close social situations.

In order to do an effective job of teaching in a bi-cultural setting, teachers must first be sensitive to these differences. Secondly, they must adopt teaching methods appropriate to their

students' needs. Beyond the behaviors mentioned for bi-cognitive development, teachers can use "body talk" to both their own and to their students' advantage. Some practical suggestions for dealing with Latin students and bi-cultural students and groups:

1. Approach students more closely (either individuals or groups) when addressing them or wishing to interact.

2. Loosen up: accentuate verbal communication with hand gestures.

3. Smile a lot when expressing positive messages.

4. Nod when in agreement, frown when angry.

5. Make direct eye contact with students.

6. Let your eyes talk when pleased.

7. Be sensitive to what your tone of voice, speed of speech are communicating, especially in foreign language situations.

I have discovered conflicting information on touching students. The literature reviewed in this paper points to using touch, a pat on the back, arm around shoulder, when communicating encouragement to students, especially Latins. But psychological counselors warn that such contact may arouse stressful sexual feelings in adolescent students.

IV. Teaching Strategies for the Bi-Cultural, Bi-Lingual School

We have already seen field-sensitive and field-independent teacher behaviors, to be matched with student characteristics. We have also seen suggested non-verbal techniques for improved communication with different-culture students. Alfredo Castañeda and Tracy Gray outline field-sensitive and field-independent curricula "to facilitate teaching in the corresponding teaching style". (See Appendix C.) We will now examine additional factors in teaching bi-cultural, bi-lingual students: 1) personality characteristics, attitudes, and understandings of effective bi-cultural teachers; 2) teacher training; 3) specific methods proven productive in bi-cultural bi-lingual situations.

The personality characteristics and attitudes of effective teachers in pluralistic classrooms are outlined by Leona M. Foerster in her article "Teaching Reading in Our Pluralistic Classrooms." [14]. She says they:

1.) are flexible in implementing instruction and in scheduling.
2.) are sincerely interested in their students.
3.) know their students and their subject matter well.
4.) help students set realistic goals of aspiration.
5.) refuse to treat children as if they were all alike, who bring differences out into the open.
6.) are cognizant of the importance of communication skills in our complex and highly technical society.

Richard de Blassie adds to this list: the effective counselor (and teacher) in culturally pluralistic situations:

1.) does not stress minority youths' changing from their own cultural frame of reference to the majority or dominant society at the expense of their own desires and identities.
2.) fights prejudice against minority group young people on a personal and professional basis.
3.) makes efforts to project the image of wanting to help all students.
4.) understands that it is futile to classify persons solely by their cultural characteristics without truly accepting them as they are.
5.) approaches students and problems actively.
6.) considers students as 'culturally different' rather than 'culturally deprived': does not attempt to remold students.
7.) encourages other educators to see children's needs as human, transcending cultural differences. [15].

In summary, an effective teacher in a bi-cultural, bi-lingual situation should be open, knowledgeable, flexible, non-authoritarian, empathetic, understanding of students as individuals and also as members of a group, acquainted with students' cultural background and, I feel, language. Interestingly, these are similar to the characteristics mentioned by Margaret Mead as successful for international personnel. [16].

Teacher Training

Most current teachers were educated under the "melting pot" ideology. In most cases, their teacher education courses did not touch on the complexities of teaching in culturally pluralistic classrooms. If their personality characteristics coincide with those mentioned above, they may be able to adapt to a culturally differentiated situation. More and more universities are offering programs and degrees in Bi-cultural Education, instructing teachers and administrators in the special characteristics and needs of the culturally and/or linguistically pluralistic school population. Still there are numerous teachers, already involved in such situations, who have not had any formal training specifically suited to their students' needs.

What can be done to help these teachers and, in turn, their students?

Problem 1.) Courses in bi-cultural, bi-lingual education are offered, but many teachers are unable (financially or logistically) or unwilling to take them, perhaps not convinced that such knowledge will help them in a practical manner.

Solution: In-service training in this area should be mandatory: all teachers in bi-cultural situations should be required to attend classes or seminars either in the time before school starts in the fall or during the course of the year (teacher preparation days, in-service days, or after school). Credit should be offered for those who wish it.

Problem 2.) Many teachers teach their subject matter as they would in a mono-cultural situation.

Solution: Teachers should be given examples, demonstrations of how to adapt subject matter teaching to bi- or multi-cultural classes.

Problem 3.) Often teachers are not aware of unconscious body language that is sabotaging or confusing their verbal communication.

Solution: Use video-tape recorder and micro-teaching experience to train teachers: show them what they are doing, suggest behavior changes, record practice lessons until desired behavior appears regularly.

This technique was proven successful at the Stanford University School of Education in 1968-1969.

Teaching Strategies

Research results showing that Mexican-American students are field-sensitive, encourage us to match this trait in planning a curriculum. Carol Dixon gives some general suggestions for field-dependent students:

1.) Activities which emphasize the improvement of skills of all the members of the group instead of merely self-improvement may be more successful than those activities which place emphasis only on individual improvement.
2.) Activities which require cooperation rather than competition will reflect the cognitive style of Mexican-American children.
3.) Mexican-American children will profit from educational experiences which allow them to interact with the teacher or other students, so that activities involving the use of books, or paper and pencil tasks may be most effective if human interaction is also included . . .
4.) The use of other children in authority roles may be viewed as natural and desirable in the classroom as a result of the generalization from the use of other children as authority figures in the "home" culture. [17.]

Several specific teaching strategies have been proven successful in the culturally pluralistic classroom. I will mention those that have been effective in classrooms where one of the cultures represented has been Mexican-American or Latin.

Peer teaching makes use of children as teachers, as authority figures, in real classroom teaching situations. For example, one student may help another on a specific task such as learning multiplication tables. Such a situation demands a cooperative approach, interpersonal relationship. [18.]

The language experience approach is based on stories dictated by the student: "the student becomes the author of his own reading program." [19]. Such an approach shows acceptance of the student's background and language, for he will most probably dictate the story in his native language. In order to communicate this to the rest of his classmates, he must find the way, through acting it out, translation, or visuals.

Visuals are an extremely important asset to the bi-cultural teacher. First, they are a form of non-verbal communication that transcends language. Second, they reinforce meaning at all levels of second language proficiency. People learn more quickly and with longer retention when material is received through more than one of the five senses. In addition, visuals provide "context clues", helping students to integrate new knowledge. [20].

Magic Circle helps children to express feelings, to improve personal and social communication skills. This encourages students to understand differences and become less authoritarian.

"Personalized" materials are prepared especially for children of different proficiencies, levels, language/dialect backgrounds, or cognitive styles. This is not easy for the teacher, but oftentimes is highly beneficial to students. Most textbooks, on the other hand, are not at all personalized. [21].

Oral reading can be used to check growth of ability in language and understanding of subject matter. This can be done privately, with the student reading into a cassette recorder; the teacher can play back the cassette and diagnose individual problems.

Short-term grouping puts students at similar skill levels together for short time periods. This is to be distinguished from the practice of "tracking", in which permanent skill level groups are formed. Short term grouping helps teachers diagnose specific problems and students can work together on a common problem. [22].

Role-playing for social values clarification is a technique developed by Dr. Fannie Shaftel of Stanford University. Students role-play situations familiar to or possible for them, in which a single or several social values come into play. The situations can even be written by students. In adolescents,

they often concern conflicts between peers and family, or self and peers. This is an excellent technique in a polycultural group, where students can explore different reactions to the same situation, with the aim of cross-cultural problem solving.

Culture capsules are training sessions for teachers, also for students, where specific aspects of a new culture are explored. Body language, customs and historical background are investigated with the objective of cross-cultural understanding. The comparative approach adds to this the task of clarifying different cultures' responses to the same situation.

Special second language classes are provided in most bi- or multi-cultural schools. Special Spanish language classes should try to incorporate cultural understandings, art history, goods, crafts, legends into language teaching. English as a second language teachers must be aware of all of the elements of cross-cultural learning and interaction seen in this paper, as well as comparative linguistic elements; phonetics, intonation, syntax.

The original purpose of this paper was a personal one; to investigate the research and background materials, to develop methods more suited to my students' needs, thereby making me a more effective teacher. The difficult task is to apply better strategies and change one's teaching behavior. This turns out to be a long process, one in which consciousness of what we are really doing is raised. It is a worthwhile effort if it means that teaching becomes more relevant, sensitive to the needs of all students.

APPENDIX A

FIELD-INDEPENDENT BEHAVIORS

Relationship to peers

1. Prefers to work independently
2. Likes to compete and gain individual recognition
3. Task oriented; is inattentive to social environment when working

Personal relationship to teacher

1. Rarely seeks physical contact with teacher
2. Formal; interactions with teacher are restricted to tasks at hand

Instructional relationship to teacher

1. Likes to try new tasks without teacher's help
2. Impatient to begin tasks; likes to finish first
3. Seeks nonsocial rewards

Characteristics of curriculum that facilitate learning

1. Details of concepts are emphasized; parts have meaning of their own
2. Deals with math and science concepts
3. Based on discovery approach

FIELD-SENSITIVE BEHAVIORS

Relationship to peers

1. Likes to work with others to achieve a common goal
2. Likes to assist others
3. Is sensitive to feelings and opinions of others

Personal relationship to teacher

1. Openly expresses positive feelings for teacher
2. Asks questions about teacher's tastes and personal experiences; seeks to become like teacher

Instructional relationship to teacher

1. Seeks guidance and demonstration from teacher
2. Seeks rewards which strengthen relationship with teacher
3. Is highly motivated when working individually with teacher

Characteristics of curriculum that facilitate learning

1. Performance objectives and global aspects of curriculum are carefully explained
2. Concepts are presented in humanized or story format
3. Concepts are related to personal interests and experiences of children

Ramirez and Castañeda, pp. 139-140

APPENDIX B

FIELD-INDEPENDENT TEACHING STYLE

Personal behaviors

1. Is formal in relationship with students, acts the part of an authority figure
2. Centers attention on instructional objectives; gives social atmosphere secondary importance

Instructional behaviors

1. Encourages independent student achievement; emphasizes the importance of individual effort
2. Encourages competition between individual students
3. Adopts a consultant role; teacher encourages students to seek help only when they experience difficulty
4. Encourages learning through trial and error
5. Encourages task orientation; focuses student attention on assigned tasks

Curriculum-related behaviors

1. Focuses on details of curriculum materials
2. Focuses on facts and principles; teaches students how to solve problems using short cuts and novel approaches
3. Emphasizes math and science abstractions; teacher tends to use graphs charts, and formulas in teaching, even when presenting social studies curriculum
4. Emphasizes inductive learning and the "discovery" approach. Starts with isolated parts and slowly puts them together to construct rules of generalizations

FIELD-SENSITIVE TEACHING STYLE

Personal behaviors

1. Displays physical and verbal expressions of approval and warmth

2. Uses personalized rewards which strengthen the relationship with students

Instructional behaviors

1. Expresses confidence in child's ability to succeed; is sensitive to children who are having difficulty and need help

2. Gives guidance to students; makes purpose and main principles of lesson obvious; presentation of lesson is clear with steps toward "solution" clearly delineated

3. Encourages learning through modeling; asks children to imitate

4. Encourages cooperation and development of group feeling; encourages class to think and work as a unit

5. Holds informal class discussions; provides opportunities for students to see how concepts being learned are related to students' personal experiences

Curriculum-related behaviors

1. Emphasizes global aspects of concepts; before beginning lesson, ensures that students understand the performance objectives; identifies generalizations and helps children apply them to particular instances

2. Personalizes curriculum; teacher relates curriculum materials to the interests and experiences of students as well as to her or his own interests

3. Humanizes curriculum; attributes human characteristics to concepts and principles

4. Uses teaching materials to elicit expression of feelings from students; helps students apply concepts for labeling their personal experiences

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APPENDIX C

CHARACTERISTICS OF FIELD-SENSITIVE AND FIELD-INDEPENDENT CURRICULA

Field-sensitive curriculum*	Field-independent curriculum*
Content	Content
1. Social abstractions: Field-sensitive curriculum is humanized through use of narration, humor, drama, and fantasy. Characterized by social words and human characteristics. Focuses on lives of persons who occupy central roles in the topic of study, such as history or scientific discovery.	1. Math and science abstractions: Field-independent curriculum uses many graphs and formulae.
2. Personalized: The ethnic background of students, as well as their homes and neighborhoods, is reflected. The teacher is given the opportunity to express personal experience and interests.	2. Impersonal: Field-independent curriculum focuses on events, places, and facts in social studies rather than personal histories.
Structure	Structure
1. Global: Emphasis is on description of wholes and generalities; the overall view or general topic is presented first. The purpose or use of the concept or skill is clearly stated using practical examples.	1. Focus on details: The details of a concept are explored followed by the global concept.

2. Rules explicit: Rules and principles are salient. (Children who prefer to learn in the field-sensitive mode are more comfortable given the rules than when asked to discover the underlying principles for themselves.)	2. Discovery: Rules and principles are discovered from the study of details; the general is discovered from the understanding of the particulars.
3. Requires cooperation with others: The curriculum is structured in such a way that children work cooperatively with peers or with the teacher in a variety of activities.	3. Requires independent activity: The curriculum requires children to work individually, minimizing interaction with others.

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*It should be noted that each type of curriculum is designed to facilitate teaching in the corresponding teaching style.

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FOOTNOTES

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5. Sierra, Viola: "Learning Style of the Mexican American"; Council for Exceptional Children, Aug. 1973.

6. Ramirez and Castañeda, op. cit., p. 133.

7. Fast, Julius: Body Language; Pocket Books (1970).

8. Ibid., p. 5.

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10. Fensterheim, Herbert and Baer, Jean: Don't Say Yes When You Want to Say No; Dell (1975) p. 74.

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12. Pickering, Gail; Non-Verbal Communication, University of the Americas, Mexico City, thesis 1975, p. 3.

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19. Ibid., p. 143.

20. Ibid., p. 144.

21. Foerster, op. cit., p. 149.

22. Ibid., p. 150.

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