

Literacy/Learning Strategies for Teachers of American Indian Students

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This column presents six culturally compatible literacy strategies in use by teachers serving Arapaho and Shoshone children of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. These strategies include *Reciprocal Teaching* (Palincsar, 1982), *Media Analysis, Story Impressions* (McGinley & Denner, 1987), *Sentence Combining* (Strong, 2004) and *Reverse StoryBoard*, and *Talking Drawings* (McConnell, 1993). These methods have proven to be effective with American Indian children and youth. The methods discussed here have been examined using multiple-baseline across groups design similar to that employed by Palincsar (1982) in her milestone study of Reciprocal Teaching.

Reciprocal Teaching has been, since its creation, a small group method. Palincsar developed it as a way of teaching poor middle-grade readers four things that good readers do—predict, summarize, question, and critique. She used a small-group, round-robin process to teach and enable supervised student practice. In it the role of teacher passes from one group member to the next, as each person performs and talks about each of the four steps. Prediction and summarization need no explanation.

Questioning requires readers to ask a question based on what they have read. (We say, “What kind of question would a teacher ask?” or, “Ask a question that might be on the State Test?”) “Critique” means that the reader tells us what was particularly hard, confusing, or interesting in the paragraph or selection they just read.

Media Analysis is a cooperative information processing method well suited to the culture and experiences of American Indian students. It is derived from the List-Group-Label procedure developed by Hilda Taba (1967) and addresses the evidence showing that children derive little from most of the high quality instructional media to which they are exposed in school. The method includes:

1. Whole class “brainstorming” if information from a videotape or DVD after it is viewed. In this phase the teacher writes (on chalkboard, Smart Board, or overhead projector) words called out by the class members.
2. In phase two, small groups of students are asked to arrange all of the words into at least two lists of words that have a common theme.

3. Small groups are then asked to label or title each of their lists.
4. All students are asked to complete a writing task that causes them to connect the words in each list. For example, “For each list write a paragraph that uses all (or some number) of the words in the list.”

Media Analysis benefits students in three ways—it uses the combined recall of all members of the class, it allows consensus to be formed through small group discussion, and it causes individuals to frame the relationships between concepts through a writing-to-learn activity.

Story Impressions (McGinley & Denner, 1987) is a prep-reading collaborative method in which students work from a list of words drawn by their teacher from a text that they will read subsequently. It is designed to engage students in an assignment by having them use words from it to predict the content of the reading selection. The teacher creates a list of words from the story that reveal key aspects of the story, including setting, character names or descriptions, plot, and



Dr. Rush leads Wyoming Indian Schools' kindergarteners in the story impressions pre-reading activity about rodeos.

resolution. In the case of content area texts, students use the technical vocabulary to predict the key concepts and relationships between them. The students write the passage using these words and phrases. The stories are then shared with the group before the actual story is read. The procedure followed include:

1. Students are given the list of words and phrases prepared ahead of time by the teacher.
2. Individually, or in pairs, they are asked to create a short story, using the words and phrases in the order they were given.
3. The stories are then shared with the class.
4. Next, the assigned text is read.
5. Finally, a discussion is held centering on the similarities and differences between the class creations and the real text.
6. In content area reading, student versions of the assigned reading were used by teachers to clarify and extend the information in the text.

In our research, story impressions were done in secondary science and social studies classes. Positive effects on comprehension and learning resulted when students wrote story impressions prior to reading their assignments.

Reverse Storyboard is a group method of identifying, organizing, and

learning information obtained from nearly any source. Audio, video, text, or first-hand experiences are possible sources of information. The steps in the process include:

1. Learners watch a video episode of five to ten minutes,
2. After viewing, on a four by six inch index card, each learner draws a scene from the episode and writes a caption under it,
3. On a chalkboard ledge or table, learners arrange their scene card in the same sequence as in the video. (Cards depicting the same scene are placed together, side-by-side.)
4. Discussion of the sequence occurs naturally as the cards, but a class or small group summary of the card sequence should be written. (In fact, the captions make good topic sentences.)

Sentence Combining (Strong, 2005) is a form of sentence manipulation. Since at least the 1970s studies have suggested that regular sentence combining experiences help students improve their writing, reading, listening and speaking. Our research supports these conclusions. Significantly, we have observed that sentence combining can also enhance learning. Sentence Combining requires that students combine several short, kernel sentences into a single more fluent, coherent sentence. For example Kernel Sentences could include: The dog barked,

The barking was at the postman, The barking was angry, and The barking was loud. Two possible combinations of these sentences are: "The dog barked angrily and loudly at the postman" and "The angry dog barked at the postman loudly." In our research, when kernel sentences are derived from content area texts, the combining experience results in increased learning. Our studies involved combining done by individuals and pairs of students in biology and American History texts.

Talking Drawings (McConnell, 1993) is a method that activates prior knowledge, engages learners with the topic to be taught, and provides concrete evidence of learning. Step-by-step instructions for this method are included at the end of this paper. The essentials are:

1. Each learner draws a picture that shows what she/he already knows about the topic.
2. In pairs, learners discuss what they drew and why
3. The new information is presented
4. Learners elaborate or make new drawings showing what they now know
5. Learners discuss the changes and additions to their original drawings.

Summary

Informal classroom research shows that these instructional methods enhance the learning of American Indian children, especially their reading comprehension. Each method is learned through teacher demonstration and practiced in cooperative, mutually supportive, small-group interaction. The group methods seem to transfer to everyday, individual practice. My colleagues and I continue to examine each of these methods systematically at the secondary and adult/occupational levels. ★

References

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