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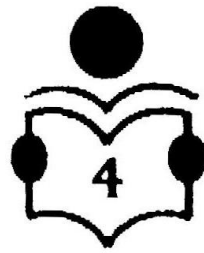
Inculcating Information Transfer Skills: From Oral to Written Communication

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Abstract

Language is primarily oral but the edu-cated world promotes language more in the written form. However, oral language could provide the background on which writing could be built. This was our experience at the 2000 Calabar Vacation Reading Village, especially in arousing and sustaining the interest of children who found reading unat-tractive. This paper therefore reports on the different approaches that were used to en-courage reading and writing skills through oral presentation of information.

Information could be communicated to an individual through verbal and non-verbal oral or written form. Verbal communication involves the use of words in the oral or written forms whereas the non-verbal form is the domain of drawings and paralanguage etc. In the teaching of lan-guage, both oral and written forms are used. The In-verbal (such as drawing/graphics) usually function as aids to teaching and learning. In this paper we report how we integrated the information with the entire communication encounter as a key compo-nent of the whole process. This was done by means of Information transfer technique; a technique where the information transmitted verbally is transferred to a non-verbal form (Weir, 1990: 77), and vice-versa.

The children who participated in this project spoke and listened, drew, labelled and then wrote down their experiences in a composition form. But first, we shall briefly discuss what information transfer entails, before we present how this was effected.

Theories of Learning

In inculcating information transfer skills from oral to written communication, certain theories of learning are applicable. The theories as reported by Inyang-Abia (2001) are Gestalt Learning Principles, the different stages of intellectual development ex-pounded by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner as well as Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Of these varied theories, we would like to look at Gestalt Learning Princi-ples, Bruner's Stages of Intellectual Develop-ment and Bloom's approach to learning. These theories have been chosen because of their amenability to research. The major claims of these theories are presented here. The Gestalt theory which is a reaction to the Associationists Principle believes that any intellectual development must view various parts of the issue as well as note the rela-tionship among the various parts. For Ge-stalt, learning is a pattern which must be seen as a perceptual whole or a total pat-tern. For this pattern to occur there must be constant interaction between the individual and his/her environment. As rightly summed up by Denga (1986:102): "Children should be encouraged to be in touch with their envi-ronment in order to facilitate their interac-tion with the environment."

On the other hand, Bruner's intellectual development lays emphasis on the mastery of language. The mastery of language will give the child the required tool to fit into any society he finds himself. Bruner classifies the intellectual development into three stages and these are presented in a table form by Unoh (1982:7) thus:

Table 1: The Stages of Intellectual Development

Brunner's Three Stages	Characteristics
1. Enactive Representation (0-2+yrs)	Activities (Action)
2. Iconic Representation (5-7+yrs)	Imaging (Imagery)
3. Symbolic Representation (Adolescence yrs+)	Use of Language as Symbol

From the description of the stages, this theory encapsulates all the stages that are necessary for the transfer of information from reading to writing. It promotes a hierarchical pattern of development which is meant to inculcate the smooth shift from the primary skills of listening and speaking to the secondary skills of reading and writing. As Unoh (1982:4) observes, there is "a relationship between verbal communication and the thought process with emphasis on hierarchical patterns of development."

Closely related to the above is Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Umoh (1990:62) illustrates the six levels of this taxonomy in an ascending order of complexity. The levels are Level 1 - Knowledge; Level 2 - Comprehension; Level 3 - Application; Level 4 - Analysis; Level 5 - Synthesis; and Level 6 - Evaluation. These different levels are suitable for the children to move from reading to writing.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that information transfer is an essential component of any language programme meant for children. This position motivated RAN Calabar Branch to make this a key activity at her 2000 Vacation Reading Village (VRV). Of the 170 children who registered for the VRV about forty percent fell within the age

bracket of five years to eight years. To enable the children achieve the transfer of information, they were exposed to the environment and the knowledge so acquired was applied in reading and writing in order to cope with the complexity of intellectual progress.

Applicability of Information Transfer Theory to Language Skills

This section describes what we did. Our action was predicated upon the following advice in Gamde (1970:146). In the elementary stages, reading and writing should be used to consolidate what has been learned orally. The pupils should have learned to use the material orally before they try to read it or write it. In this way, the meaning of whatever they read or write will be established, so that in reading they will only have to associate the printed sentences with the ones they have learned to speak, and in writing they will only have to put down in print sentences which they have already memorised.

Methodology

Following the complaint from parents of seventeen of the children in the five to eight age groups and who were in primary 3 and 4 classes, that they did not like to read or write, these children were exposed to the planned information transfer theory reading activities. Since these were normal children who could discuss intelligently, answer questions, describe events and could read simple words such as *cat, ball, pencil* etc. if flashed at them, we decided to introduce them to a different approach in the teaching of reading. The approach comprises three stages that are hierarchical: Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced. We shall describe each of the stages in detail.

Stage 1 (Beginning)

The children were taken around the library complex for sight seeing and at the end of the outing, they described what they saw and narrated their experiences. Some of the things the children said included: *I saw a car; a house; a truck,* etc. The next step was that the children drew the various objects that they saw.

Thereafter, they wrote simple sentences about the different items that they had drawn e.g. This is a house.

The teacher then wrote the sentences on the blackboard, where necessary, corrections were made so that only correct sentences were put on the board. The teacher effectively invigorated the children's vocabulary. The children read the sentences chorally.

Stage II (Intermediate)

The ten children were given some items to identify using their senses except sight. The action set them thinking and they had to imagine what the objects could be. The items included salt, sugar, toilet soap, stone, garri, body cream, "ndiya", onion and plastic containers.

The children talked about their experiences freely in the form of unguided discourse. After a while they were directed to express their likes and dislikes about some of the items which they had identified.

Next they were asked to draw and label some of the items and also construct sentences around the words. The teacher then wrote some of the sentences on the board while the children read them aloud. Later they copied those sentences from the board into their books

Stage III (Advanced)

This is the consolidation stage where elements from Stages I and II are combined. The main aim was to get them to write a guided composition starting from the primary skills of listening and speaking to writing through the mid-wife role of graphics. They were given the following instructions:

Talk about a birthday you recently attended by describing what you wore, ate, saw, and did. Draw any aspect of the party. Write six sentences based on (a) and (b) above.

Read your essay aloud

Discuss various points raised in the essay (while the teacher writes samples drawn from their attempts on the board).

All read out the sentences together after which they copied the sentences into their exercise books.

Gains Derived from Applying Information Transfer Activities

By using this approach, the following were the insights derived:

All the language skills were used (starting from listening and speaking; writing and reading in that order).

All the curriculum domains of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor were touched on; a situation which is not often reached during teaching

Five out of Bloom's six-staged taxonomy of educational objectives (which reflect different hierarchic levels of learning) were touched on. Schematic knowledge (or the previous knowledge; cultural or environment), of the learner was taken into account. For instance, when one of the subjects drew the house that she "saw" in Stage 1, she drew the shape of the house found in the northern part of the country, whereas such a design was not found around the vicinity where the children were taken for sight seeing in Calabar. Such a reaction of pictorial representation stems from the child's cultural background.

Pedagogical Implications

These centered mostly on the concept of teachability and to a lesser extent on learnability. For teachability, the teacher's method/ approach and resources were highlighted. The inductive teaching approach proved useful and effective because units of knowledge were presented from simple to complex; known to unknown; immediate to distant; specific to general, and this facilitated learning. Indeed, the Brunerian theory of instruction (1977:33) was practicalized, for it is stated that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development". And this was what took place in this information transfer technique.

All the domains were touched on while the different levels of abstraction (based on Bloom's taxonomy of learning) were taken into consideration. There was parsimony in terms of time used, yet a lot was learnt. In terms of resources, the children provided what they needed especially, the graphics, drawings and illustrations while the teachers

acted as guides.

The exercise as learner-centered. With regard to learna ility; the children found meaning in wha they were learning and made good use f their schematic know edge. Since they were at the centre of learning, they were a vays full of activities. Indeed we saw Alc rn, Kinder and Schunert's maxim as quoted by Umoh (1996) coming true viz - people always remember 90% of what they say as t ley do a thing. This proved true as the childr n were trained to say (talk and read aloud) and do (listen, draw and write) their comp sitions.

Conclusion

Most teachers come across hyperactive, uninterested, bor d, or simply put, children that task their t aching ability in the language class. Yet hese children are normal and all they ma need is a different approach to reading instruction. That is one of the gains of the information transfer approach. It prese s a holistic view of language and thus e ablishes a basis for future language develop nent and use. We hope that this innovative exercise would prove useful to other ractising reading, and indeed, language te ichers.

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