Comparing Reading Instruction in Hispanic/Limited-English-Proficient Schools and Other Inner-City Schools

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Abstract

Hispanic/LEP students are the largest growing minority group. In addition, they have the lowest educational level and the highest drop-out rates of any other ethnic group in the U. S. Furthermore, there is also evidence that disadvantaged or lower-achieving students generally attend schools that serve them less well than schools that serve more — advantaged students. The present study examined classroom processes taking place during reading instruction in two settings: (a) schools with a large Hispanic limited-English-proficient (LEP) student population and (b) inner-city schools where the student population was much more ethnically diverse. The results of the present study indicated that the type of reading instruction that is taking place in both types of schools in very passive. For examples, students are not given much opportunity to interact with one another or with the teacher. Nonetheless, this situation was observed more often in schools where there was a large number of Hispanic and LEP students than in schools where the population is more diverse and there are smaller number of LEP students.

Introduction

It has been projected that by the year 2000 one third of all students enrolled in public schools will be people of color (Hodgkinson, 1985). Other projections have indicated that by the year 2020 these students will comprise 46% of the student population (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 1992). Hispanic students, in particular, are becoming an increasing proportion in the U. S. For example, in 1982 about 73% of the school age population was white, and by the year 2020 it is projected that this percentage will decline to 54.5% (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Conversely, in 1982 Hispanic students constituted 9.3% of student population less than 17 years of age, but by the year 2020 it is projected that this percentage will increase to 25.3% (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989).

Often with racial and ethnic diversity comes linguistic diversity. The number of school-age children from various language backgrounds has continued to increase. The 1980 Census data

indicated that 9.7% of the total school age population speaks a language other than English at home (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Projected estimates indicate that the number of school-age children from various language backgrounds will reach 3.5 million by the year 2000 (Trueba, 1989; Waggoner, 1984). Projections for the year 2000 also indicate that Spanish-speaking students will constitute approximately 77% of the total language minority student population (O'Malley, 1981).

In addition to being the largest growing minority group, Hispanic/LEP students have the lowest educational level and the highest drop-out rates of any other ethnic group in the U. S. (Robledo, Cardenas, Garcia, Montemayor, Ramos, Supik & Villareal, 1990). The drop-out rate for Hispanic students is approximately 45% (Valadez, 1992). These students are not only less likely to complete high school (Kaufman & Erase, 1990; Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987, but are also more likely to be behind grade level (Walker, 1987), and less likely than Blacks and Whites to go to college (Kaufman & Erase, 1990). The lack of success of these students in schools has been attributed to many factors. Some of the factors that have been associated with the poor academic performance of Hispanic students have included: (a) inferior schools, (b) inexperienced teachers, (c) poverty, and (d) lack of English language proficiency (Valadez, 1992).

The lack of adequate reading and writing skills are additional factors that are likely to place students at risk of failing in schools. Research examining the cognitive reading strategies that students use to comprehend text, for example, has found that Hispanic/Limited English Proficient (LEP) students use significantly fewer and less-sophisticated cognitive reading strategies than English-monolingual students (Padrón, Knight, Waxman, 1986, Knight, Padrón, & Waxman, 1985; Padrón & Waxman, 1988). These findings are especially important since students use of cognitive reading strategies has been found to significantly impact the reading achievement of both Hispanic/LEP students and English-monolingual students (Padrón & Waxman, 1988).

There is also evidence that has found that disadvantaged or lower-achieving students generally attend schools that serve them less well than schools that serve more advantaged students (Cooley, 1993; Moll, 1986). Lower-achieving students or disadvantaged students, for example, have often been denied the opportunity to learn higher-level thinking skills (Foster, 1989). Generally, the

emphasis for low-achieving students has been on remediation and an overemphasis on repetition of content through drill-and-practice (Knapp & Shields, 1990). Such findings suggest that schools must be restructured to meet the need of the disadvantaged students (Allington, 1994). Therefore, examining teacher and student behaviors and the instructional processes that occur in classrooms with low-achieving, disadvantaged students becomes crucial.

Furthermore, considering the importance of reading skills on students' academic success and the lack of achievement among Hispanic/LEP students, it is especially important to examine classroom processes taking place during reading instruction. The present study examined classroom processes taking place during reading instruction in two settings: (a) schools with large Hispanic/limited-English-proficient student population and (b) inner-city schools where the student population was much more ethnically diverse. More specifically, this observational study was conducted to examine the classroom processes taking place during reading instruction in classrooms with students from various ethnic backgrounds.

Methods

Subjects. There were 15 elementary schools that participated in the study. Schools were randomly selected from a large urban school district located in the south central region of the United States. Two types of schools were included in the present study. The first category consisted of Hispanic/LEP schools or schools that had of predominantly Hispanic students (96.5%) the majority of whom were classified Limited-English-Proficient (50.3%). The second category of schools consisted of other schools that were located in same the inner-city school district, but were more culturally diverse (Hispanic, 29.7%; African Americans, 38.1%; White, 26.3%; Other 6%) and had a small number of (17.9%) LEP students.

The average attendance for the Hispanic/LEP Schools (95.5%) and the Other Inner-City Schools (95.7%) were similar. There were eight Hispanic/LEP Schools and seven Other Inner-City Schools. A total of 166 fourth and fifth grade students were randomly selected to be observed for this study. Ninety of the students were from the Hispanic/LEP Schools and 76 students were randomly selected from the Other Inner-City Schools.

Fourth and fifth grade teachers were randomly selected from the 15 elementary schools. There were 47 teachers that participated in the study (see Table 1). The percentage of teachers with advanced degrees in both settings was about the same. Thirty-four percent of the teachers in Hispanic/LEP Schools had advanced degrees compared to 35% in Other Inner-City Schools. Experience differed slightly. For the Hispanic/LEP Schools, the years of experience was as follows: (a) 14.1% of the teachers had 0-3 years of experience, (b) 39.6% of the teachers had 4-10 years of experience, and (c) 46.4% of the teachers had over 11 years of experience. For the Other Inner-City Schools, the years of experience was as follows: (a) nine percent of the teachers had 0-3 years of experience, (b) 29.7% of the teachers had 4-10 years of experience, and (c) 61.1% of the teachers had over 11 years of experience.

Instruments. The Classroom Observation Schedule (COS) was used in the present study to observe all of the students in the study. The COS (Waxman, Wang, Lindvall, & Anderson, 1983) is an instrument that was designed to obtain classroom process data from culturally and linguistically different students. In addition, these classroom processes have been found to be characteristic of effective classroom learning environments. The instrument is a systematic observation schedule designed to document observed student behaviors in the context of ongoing classroom instructional-learning processes. The instrument has been found to be reliable and valid in previous studies (Wang, 1986; Waxman, 1991). In the present study, the median inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa) across all observers for the COS was .94.

Observations for the teachers were conducted using the Teacher Roles Observation Schedule (TROS). The TROS (Waxman, Wang, Lindvall, & Anderson, 1983) is designed to systematically obtain information on teachers behaviors. The instrument is a systematic observation schedule designed to document observed teacher behaviors in the context of ongoing classroom instructional-learning processes. Teachers are observed with reference to: (a) their interactions with students, other teachers, or aides, and the purpose of such interactions, (b) the settings in which observed behaviors occur, (c) the types of material with which they are working, and (d) the specific types of activities in which they engage. The instrument has been found to be reliable and valid in previous studies (Knight, 1991; Wang, 1986; Waxman, 1991). In the present study,

Table 1
Descriptive comparisons between
Hispanic/LEP schools and other inner-city schools

Category	Hispanic Schools M%	Other Inner-LEP City Schools M%
Students (n= 166)		
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	96.5	29.7
African American	1.5	38.1
White	1.9	26.3
Other	.5	6.0
Limited English Proficient	50.3	17.9
Free/Reduced Lunch	86.1	52.1
Average Attendance	95.5	95.7

Table 1
Descriptive comparisons between
Hispanic/LEP schools and other inner-city schools (cont.)

Category	Hispanic/ Schools M%	Other Inner-LEP City Schools M%
Teachers (n= 47)		
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	29.5	5.7
African American	23.1	45.6
White	46.9	48.9
Other	.5	0
Advanced Degrees	34.0	35.0
Teaching Experience in Years		
0-3 years	14.1	9.0
4-10 years	39.6	29.7
11+ years	46.4	61.1

the median inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa) across all observers for the TROS was .96.

Procedures The observations were all conducted during English reading instruction. Each student was observed periodically for a total of 10 30-second intervals during the 45-minute data collection period. Students were observed in reference to: (a) their interactions with teachers and/or peers and the purpose of such interactions, (b) the settings in which observed behaviors occur, (c) the types of material with which they are working, and (d) the specific types of activities in which they engage.

Similarly, teachers were observed for 10 different 30-second intervals with reference to (a) their interactions with students, other teachers, or aides, and the purpose of such interactions, (b) the settings in which observed behaviors occur, (c) the types of material with which they were working, and (d) the specific types of activities in which they engaged.

Results

Student findings. Table 2 reports the percentage of time that the classroom process were observed while students worked in English reading. The results indicate that students in Hispanic/LEP Schools interacted with the teacher 7.72% of the time during reading instruction in English. Students in Other Inner-City Schools interacted with the teacher 33.24% of the time observed. These differences in interaction with the teacher for students in Hispanic/LEP Schools and Other Inner-City Schools was found to be statistically significant ($\underline{t}$= 5.37, $\underline{p}$≤.0001). There was no interaction with the teacher for students in Hispanic/LEP Schools for 82.85% of the time observed and 39.64% of the time observed in Other Inner-City Schools. The differences for the amount of time that no interaction took place in the Hispanic/LEP Schools and Other Inner-City Schools were also found to be a statistically significant difference ($\underline{t}$= 5.14, $\underline{p}$<.0001). Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (9.32%) and Other Inner-City Schools (7.79%) spent little time interacting with other students. The differences in this case, however, were not statistically significant.

There were several other statistically significant differences found using the COS for the two school settings. Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (86.57%) and Other Inner-City Schools (74.41%) were found to generally be working in a Whole-Class

Table 2
T-test results between Hispanic/LEP and other inner-city
schools on observed student behaviors in reading

Behavior Categories	Hispanic LEP Schools (n=90)		Other Inner-City Schools (n=76)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	p-value
1. SETTING						
A. Whole class	86.57	27.93	74.41	30.91	2.66	.0086
B. Small group	9.65	23.77	6.87	19.43	.81	.4173
C. Individual	3.78	16.19	18.71	27.00	4.22	.0001
2. INTERACTION						
A. No interaction/ Independence	82.85	27.86	55.02	39.64	5.14	.0001
B. Interaction with teacher	7.72	20.86	33.24	36.75	5.37	.0001
C. Interaction with other students	9.32	19.24	7.79	16.39	.55	.5851
3. ASSIGNMENT OF ACTIVITIES						
A. Teacher-assigned activity	100.00	0.00	98.23	6.00	2.80	.0057
B. Student-selected activity	0.00	0.00	1.77	6.00	2.80	.0057

Table 2
T-test results between Hispanic/LEP and other inner-city schools on observed student behaviors in reading (cont.)

Behavior Categories	Hispanic LEP Schools (n=90)		Other Inner-City Schools (n=76)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	p-value
4. TYPE OF ACTIVITIES						
A. Working on written assignments	8.89	18.39	30.39	27.83	5.76	.0001
B. Interacting	7.44	15.62	11.97	15.23	1.88	.0615
C. Watching or listening	67.22	30.76	50.66	25.05	3.76	.0002
D. Reading	7.44	13.95	7.89	18.61	.17	.8625
E. Getting/returning materials	1.44	3.54	3.68	6.50	2.68	.0083
F. Coloring, drawing, painting, etc.	1.67	7.38	0.00	0.00	2.14	.0349
G. Working with materials/equipment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
H. Presenting/acting	0.33	1.81	0.92	3.34	1.37	.1720
I. Tutoring peers	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
J. Not attending to task	0.78	4.55	1.45	5.09	.89	.3723
5. MANNER						
A. On task	97.15	14.97	96.23	11.62	.45	.6547
B. Waiting for teacher's help	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
C. Distracted	0.63	2.69	2.06	6.73	1.74	.0850
D. Disrupted	0.00	0.00	0.39	2.55	1.35	.1814

setting. Nonetheless, in Hispanic/LEP Schools, students worked in a Whole-Class setting significantly ($t=$ 2.66, p <.0086) more often than students in Other Inner-City Schools. Students in Other Inner-City Schools (18.71%) were found to work significantly ($t=$ 4.22, p< .0001) more often in an individual setting during the time observed than students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (3.78%). There were no statistically significant differences for the amount of time that students were observed doing small-group work. Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools worked in small groups 9.65% of the time observed; while students in Other Inner-City Schools worked in small groups 6.87% of the time observed. It must be noted that the standard deviations for Setting and Interaction are quite large. This indicates a great deal of variability in the classes observed.

In terms of the Assignment of Activities taking place, the activities were teacher assigned over 98% of the time in both of the settings. Students in Other Inner City-Schools, however, were observed being able to select activities about 2% of the time observed. Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools were not provided the opportunity to select activities during the time observed. There were several statistically significant differences in the type of activities that students participated at each of the school settings. Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (67.22%) spent significantly ($1=3.76$; p<.0002) more time watching and listening to the teacher, than students in Other Inner-City Schools (50.66%). In Hispanic/LEP Schools, students (1.67%) were observed coloring, drawing, or painting significantly ($t=$ 2.14; p<.0349) more often than students in Other Inner-City Schools. Students in Other Inner-City Schools spent significantly ($t=$ 5.76, p <.0001) more time working on written assignments (30.39%) than students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (8.89%). Students in Other Inner City Schools (3.68%) spent more time in getting and returning materials than did students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (1.44%; $t=$ 2 68; p< .0083). Very little time was spent reading in the reading classes observed (approximately 7.5% for both settings). In neither class were students working with materials/equipment, and did not tutor each other.

The students in both types of schools were observed being on task during instruction. Students in Hispanic/LEP Schools were on task 97.15% of the time observed and students in Other Inner-City Schools were on task 96.23% of the time observed. Related to this item is the percentage of time that students were found to be

distracted. Students in Other Inner-City Schools were more distracted (2.06%) during reading instruction than students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (.63%).

Teacher findings. Table 3 reports the t-test results between Hispanic/LEP and Other Inner-City Schools on observed teacher behaviors during reading instruction. The results of this study indicate that teachers had significantly ($t= 2.57$, $p<.0135$) less interaction with students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (2.62%) than with students in Other Inner-City schools (10.53%). Teachers interacted significantly ($t= 3.06$, $p<.0052$) more often for instructional purposes with students in Hispanic/LEP Schools (94.52%) than they did with students in Other Inner-City Schools (80.47%). On the other hand, teachers in Other Inner-City Schools (7.43%) interacted with students significantly ($t= 2.32$, $p<.0276$) more often for managerial reasons than teachers in Hispanic/LEP Schools (2.14%).

There were few significant differences found in the setting in which the instruction occurred for both school settings. That is, teachers were more likely to be conducting instruction in whole class (over 60% of the time), than to be doing small group instruction, traveling, at a students' desk or sitting at their desks.

In both types of schools, the purpose of the interaction was primarily Focusing on the Task Content (68%). More time was spent in Hispanic/LEP Schools (20.36%) discussing students progress, than it was in Other Inner-City Schools (10%). There were several statistically significant differences found for the purpose of interaction. In Other Inner-City Schools (4.74%) teachers spent significantly ($t= 2.42$, $p<.0253$) more time on restructuring specific learning tasks than in Hispanic/LEP Schools (.36%). Also, in Other Inner-City Schools (22.63%) significantly more ($t= 2.97$, $p<.0047$) time was spent on checking students' work than in Hispanic/LEP Schools (8.21%). Praising students' performance was observed significantly more ($t=2.16$, $p<.0398$) often in Other Inner-City Schools (18.94%) than in Hispanic/LEP Schools (8.21%). Teachers in Hispanic/LEP Schools, however, spent significantly ($t=2.77$ $p<.0080$) more time observed questioning (33.07%) students than teachers in Other Inner-City Schools (17.11%).

Table 3
T-test results between Hispanic/LEP and other inner-city
schools on observed teacher behaviors in reading

Behavior Categories	Hispanic LEP Schools (n=28)		Other Inner-City Schools (n=19)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	p
1 . Interaction						
a. No Interactions	2.62	7.50	10.53	13.53	2.57	.0135
b. With Students-Instructional	94.52	9.57	80.47	18.37	3.06	.0052
c. With Students-Managerial	2.14	5.68	7.43	8.74	2.32	.0276
d. With Students-Personal	.71	2.62	1.05	3.15	.40	.6911
2. Setting						
a. Teacher's Desk	5.12	19.70	10.53	24.38	.84	.4061
b. Student's Desk	1.79	4.76	9.12	21.48	1.46	.1592
c. Small Group	5.20	19.65	1.58	5.01	.93	.3598
d. Whole Class	72.81	38.76	63.04	29.06	.93	.3555
e. Traveling	7.95	20.27	15.73	15.10	1.42	.1609
3. Purpose of Interaction						
a. Responding to Student Signal	10.00	20.55	17.37	15.93	1.32	.1948
b. Discussing student's workplans/progress	20.36	28.22	10.00	13.33	1.68	.0996
c. Determining the difficulty of the task	5.00	10.00	5.26	10.73	.09	.9319
d. Communicating the Task's Procedures	17.14	17.18	20.53	17.79	.65	.5169
e. Communicating the Task's Criteria for Success	7.86	16.86	15.79	23.88	1.33	.1880
f. Focus on Task Content	68.57	32.74	68.95	26.01	.04	.9668

Table
T-test results between Hispanic/LEP and other inner-city
schools on observed teacher behaviors in reading (cont.)

Behavior Categories	Hispanic LEP Schools (n=28)		Other Inner-City Schools (n=19)			
	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	p
g. Restructuring Specific Learning Task	.36	1.89	4.74	7.72	2.42	.0253
h. Helping Student Complete Work on Time	3.57	9.51	5.79	15.02	.57	.5729
i. Check Student's Work	8.21	16.11	22.63	16.61	2.97	.0047
j. Encouraging Self-management	3.21	6.70	5.26	6.97	1.01	.3166
k. Encouraging Students to Help Each Other	6.07	17.50	3.68	5.97	.67	.5059
l. Encouraging Students to Succeed	4.29	6.90	8.42	11.67	1.39	.1766
m. Encouraging Extended Student Responses	7.50	17.35	13.68	18.62	1.16	.2504
n. Showing Personal Regard for Student	6.07	11.00	8.95	10.49	.90	.3750
o. Showing Interest in Student's Work	7.14	13.57	6.84	8.85	.85	.9327
p. Praising Student Behavior	.71	2.62	2.63	8.06	1.00	.3280
q. Praise Student performance	8.21	12.49	18.94	19.12	2.16	.0398
r. Correcting Student Behavior	3.57	8.70	3.16	5.82	.18	.8570
s. Correcting Student Performance	3.57	6.21	3.68	5.97	.06	.9508
4. Nature of Interaction						
a. Questioning	33.07	22.74	17.11	12.69	2.77	.0080
b. Explaining	43.09	19.73	44.12	21.28	.17	.8667
c. Cueing or prompting	4.72	8.90	10.09	15.97	1.33	.1946
d. Demonstrating	1.56	3.76	3.61	8.70	.97	.3431
e. Modeling	.38	1.99	.81	2.78	.63	.5319
f. Commenting	9.31	13.24	13.01	13.67	.93	.3580
g. Listening	7.87	10.42	11.25	12.30	1.01	.3159

Discussion

In the present study, teacher and student behaviors and instructional processes that occur in classrooms serving lower-achieving, economically disadvantaged students were examined. The two types of school settings that were investigated were: (a) schools with large numbers of Hispanic/LEP students and (b) other inner-city schools with a more diverse student population and few LEP students. Overall, the results indicate that although students in both settings are experiencing primarily whole class instruction, students in Hispanic/LEP Schools are experiencing more instruction in a Whole-Class setting than students in Other Inner-City Schools. Also, in comparing Hispanic/LEP Schools and Other Inner-City Schools, students in Hispanic/LEP Schools are experiencing little interaction with the teacher, consequently, much of the time is spent in doing independent activities. The activity that takes place most often in both settings is watching and listening during instruction. Nonetheless, watching and listening occurs more often in Hispanic/LEP Schools than in Other Inner-City Schools, Interestingly, students in the reading classes observed did very little reading. In addition, students in Hispanic/LEP Schools and Other Inner-City Schools were not observed working with different materials or tutoring each other. Surprisingly, in both of these settings students were on task over 95% of the time observed even though the instruction is very passive.

Teachers in the Hispanic/LEP Schools were found to be interacting with students for instructional purposes more often than did in Other Inner-City Schools. Teachers in Other Inner-Cit Schools, however, were observed spending more time restructuring a specific learning task than were teachers in Hispanic/LEP Schools. Teachers in Other Inner-City Schools, also were observed more often praising student performance and checking student's work than the teachers observed in Hispanic/LEP Schools. On the other hand, more questioning was observed in Hispanic/LEP Schools than in Other Inner-City Schools. Nonetheless, there was little modeling, demonstrating, cueing, or prompting observed in any of the classes.

The results of the present study indicate that the type of instruction that is taking place in both types of schools in very passive. Students are not given much opportunity to interact with one another or with the teacher. This situation was observed more

often in schools where there was a large number of Hispanic and LEP students than in schools where the population is more diverse and there are smaller number of LEP students. It has been suggested that this type of instruction has contributed to the lack of success of diverse students (Garcia, 1994). It has, therefore, been proposed that pedagogy in the U. S. must be restructured so that it will meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The type of instruction suggested in this new pedagogy sees the academic experience as being constructed by a community of learners. This community of learners define and redefine the meaning of the academic experience. Furthermore, this type of instruction recognizes the importance of students' culture and language in instruction. Discourse strategies, for example, that emphasize student-student interaction are important in enhancing linguistic development (Garcia, 1983). In addition, this type of instruction, acknowledges the critical role that students play in having an active role in the learning process (Garcia, 1994). It also changes the role of teachers. Teachers need to provide many opportunities for their students to speak, listen, read and write (Garcia, 1992). These opportunities were not evident in this observational study.

In conclusion, the increasing number of students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, the high number of minority students dropping out of U. S. schools, the lower achievement levels of diverse students and the implementation of ineffective instructional practices constitute a critical educational problem. These classroom practices must consider the inclusion of the students' culture and native language. This means that teachers must become more knowledgeable about the students' culture and language. This will require training and retraining of teachers. It also requires a great deal of commitment from teachers of diverse students.

Additional studies in this area should investigate instructional processes in reading and at other grade levels and across different types of school settings. While the comparisons between predominantly Hispanic/LEP schools and other inner-city schools was informative in the present study, further causal/comparative studies should be conducted to examine how reading instruction differs according to school context. These studies may similarly point out problems related to reading instruction for Hispanic/LEP students.

Future studies may also want to specifically relate the instructional processes examined in the present study to bilingual students' outcomes. Other studies may need to employ ethnographic procedures to further examine the classroom interactions in greater depth.

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