The Effect of Active Listening Skill Instruction on Reading Comprehension Among Latino Students

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BACKGROUND

The population of TDLSS is primarily Latino or Haitian, creating a student body of which 75% are English language learners (ELL). In addition to not hearing the English language at home, the students have exhibited deficient listening skills, which impede academic growth.

• Listening is an active process in which listeners relate what they have heard to their prior knowledge and experience, interpret meaning, create mental images, and formulate responses (Guthrie, 2003).

• Studies suggest that ELL’s generally have less difficulty in developing the word-reading skills that constrain reading in the primary grades than they do with learning the vocabulary and higher order skills that increasingly influence reading comprehension after third grade (Kieffer, 2010).

CURRENT STUDY

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this action research project was to determine the effect of direct instruction in listening skills on the reading comprehension of Latino boys at TDLSS.

Research Questions:

• How does direct instruction on active listening skills affect participants’ reading comprehension skills?

• How did the students understanding of active listening change after the implementation of the listening intervention?

METHOD

This quasi-experimental, mixed-method project employed pre- and post-test listening inventories, semi-structured interviews, and pre- and post-tests on vocabulary and comprehension to address the primary questions of interest. All 21 participants completed the pre-test listening inventory and pre-test in September, 2010 and a post-test listening inventory and post-test in December, 2010. The semi-structured interviews were taped, transcribed, coded, and collapsed for themes.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Results

• The t-test used to examine the difference in participants’ reading comprehension skills before and after the listening intervention revealed statistically significant growth for both grades.

• The t-test used to examine how the participants understanding of active listening changed after the implementation of the listening intervention did not indicate statistically significant growth between the two administrations of the listening inventory for each grade.

Qualitative Results

The results of the semi-structured interviews revealed what the participants thought to be appropriate behavior of a good listener, importance of listening in school, self perception of listening skills, methods to improve listening skills, and varying opinions of class lectures. There was significant reference to the importance of maintaining eye contact, thinking about what the speaker is saying, and the belief that English not being their first language has little affect on their ability to listen.

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION

• Instruction in listening helped increase participants’ reading comprehension. These results are promising in light of the well-documented history of underachievement which has contributed to an entrenched perception that many boys simply will not become thoughtful, accomplished readers (Brozo, 2002).

• All participants recognized the importance of listening and the positive affect it has on their academic achievement at school.

• Guiding the participants on note-taking skills gave the students the purpose for listening they needed and focused their attention on the important components of the lesson.

• Becoming more aware of the verbal context clues in a lecture aided the participants in their vocabulary acquisition, an area of great need for ELL’s.

• While the study indicates that direct instruction in listening aids in improving the reading achievement of ELL students, it cannot be pointed to definitively as a means of improving reading comprehension in general for this population.

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