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THE BLACK CHILD, HIS DIALECT, AND HIS READING

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The language of the black child, his dialect, has for years been a drawback for the school age child. The child who speaks a black dialect has come a long way in learning "his" language and perhaps feels he has mastered it rather well. But when he enters school, he often discovers that his language is unacceptable at best and openly rejected at worst. If his language is not rejected, it is rarely if ever drawn upon and utilized in the materials and learning activities of the school.

Historically, black children have been required to read, or attempt to read, in the standard dialect, and are presently required to do so. There are no indications to suggest otherwise in the future.

How should one introduce the speaker of black dialect to formal reading instruction? Furthermore, what kind of materials should be used?

1. Before any substantial gains can be made toward the solution of the problem of teaching to speakers of black dialect, teachers must become sensitized to the problems of these children and the kind of environment that produced them.

2. Before teachers can effectively work with speakers of black dialect to teach them a dialect or to teach them to read, teachers must develop a genuinely positive attitude toward black dialect.

3. Teachers must acquire an elementary understanding

of black dialect.

4. Schools should implement a systematic program designed to teach black children standard English as a second dialect.

Motivating the child to explore materials

1. Provide a variety of books and specifying times to browse through them, to get children used to handling books, examining their content, and little by little taking steps to decode the print.

2. Read aloud to implant the sound of standard English on attentive ears.

3. Prose folklore is within the grasp of the child who can read and furnishes motivation in a positive way for other children to gain the skill.

4. Children will become venturesome as they explore books if they are confident that they will not be embarrassed or ridiculed.

5. As the child's confidence grows, he will tackle longer passages. If he is successful, he is on his way in reading. If he fails, he will ask the teacher or another classmate, or keep it a secret to himself as he builds courage to try again. When children are properly motivated through involvement with subject matter, they make the effort to discover what it is in print. Now that we've got the child motivated, we must provide the child relevant materials to increase motivation, keep interest high and discouragement low.

Third World Stories

The cultural keystone of storytelling is Africa.

Some contemporary folklorists try to preserve the rhythm and spirit of the original storytellers' speech in language that is easy to read and understand. Many such stories act as a mediator between dialect and standard English. The familiar ring of the sounds in the stories draws children like a magnet.

Some examples of popular books of Black Folklore are:

-The Book of Negro Folklore by Langston Hughes and Arna

Bontemps, ed. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958.

-Step It Down: Games, Plays, Songs and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage, Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes, New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

-An African Treasury, Langston Hughes, New York: Crown Publishers, 1960.

-The Me Nobody Knows, Children's Voices from the Ghetto, Stephen M. Joseph, ed. New York: Avon Books, 1972.

-UNICEF Book of Children's Poems, William I. Kaufman, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1970.

-The Voice of the Children, June Jordan and Terri Bush, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

-Wishes, Lies and Dreams, Kenneth Koch, New York: Random House, 1970.

-Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? Kenneth Koch, New York, Random House, 1973.

-Third World Voices for Children, Robert E. McDowell and Edward Lavitt, eds., New York.

-The Black American in Books for Children, Donmaral MacCann, Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972.

-The Black BC's, Lucille Clifton, New York, Dutton, 1970.

-Black Belief, Henry H. Mitchell, New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

-Black fairy tales, Terry Bergen, New York, Atheneum, 1969.

-Black folklore and humor, Henry D. Spalding, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1972.

-Black folktales, Julius Lester, NY: R. W. Baron, 1969.

Reading Independently

Children of minority groups need to develop a positive self image. Many children are already overburdened by the circumstances of their birth and identifying with the positive values of their culture which gives them a solid base for self esteem.

One step leads to another. If a heading of a particular category becomes intriguing, a boy or girl is impelled to investigate its contents and may ask a teacher to read aloud what he or she is unable to decipher.

Children who are learning to read are apt to be drawn to poetry because its short lines offer greater chance of immediate success than longer sentences and

paragraphs. Not only do selections in poetic style appear simple, but they are also personal in terms of interpretation.

Where are the materials? Scores of children's books pertaining to Afro-Americans and Afro-Antillean cultures are steadily being published. The educational division of every major publishing house has a Black History and/or Black Culture series. Multi-Media bits, filmstrips, transparencies, and other aids are also available. In addition, several smaller publishing houses specialize in Resources for Black Studies, including some organized for the very purpose of servicing the needs of Black and Latin American children of elementary school age.

Another possible source of books is from a child's personal collection at home. Ask children to bring their favorite book to school to share. Be certain the book is clearly marked as the property of the child so that it will be returned.

Providing the black child with the inspiration, correct environment, and materials to which he can relate yields productive children expressing themselves in the ways they know best.

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