INTEGRATION OF CULTURALLY DIFFERENT STUDENTS IN MAINSTREAM CLASSES

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Abstract: Today culturally different students constitute the largest group in need of special attention to their integration in mainstream classes. The lack of congruence between their previous learning experience and the demands of the new educational system places many immigrant children at risk of school failure. A new CoReL (Concentrated Reinforcement Lessons) model aimed at solving the learning problems of new immigrant children at-risk has been developed at the ICELP. The CoReL is a limited-time intervention model based on integration of the “Instrumental Enrichment” program with intensive language arts and math lessons infused with the principles of mediated learning. An evaluation study conducted with four groups of new immigrant students from Ethiopia demonstrated a statistically significant change in cognitive performance as well as reading comprehension and problem solving in mathematics.

Keywords: immigrants; cognitive functions; Instrumental Enrichment; reading; mathematics.

Introduction

The present study is aimed at showing how a cognitive intervention program based on the principles of mediated learning experience can ensure successful integration of immigrant students in mainstream classes.

Today culturally different students constitute the largest group in need of special attention to their integration in mainstream classes. While a few decades ago ethnically, culturally and linguistically different children were a rather rare feature in the European classroom, today in some capital cities of Europe (such as Amsterdam), they constitute almost half the student population. What in the past appeared to be an exception, today is quickly approaching the status of a norm.

Any transition from one culture to another is wrought with difficulties, but a transition from cultures based on oral tradition and informal apprenticeship to the culture of formal education is particularly traumatic. One may suggest that one of the primary causes of such a difficulty is the incongruence between the notions of intelligence, learning and achievement prevalent in different cultures (Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993). Whilst in Western countries in-

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