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ABSTRACT

Many problems in English as a second language (ESL) programs arise because learners and teachers have subscribed to false statements and labels concerning cultural situations and teaching methods. The teaching approach should make provision for the differing learning styles of the pupils. A bilingual-bicultural program should be instituted in all schools to enable the ESL learner to develop his native language skills and to understand his cultural heritage as a source of pride, as well as to know English well enough to communicate with his English-speaking neighbors and to avail himself of all educational opportunities. Colleges and educational agencies must develop teachers and other personnel to teach ESL with these concepts in mind. (VM)

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Section 3: Curricular Innovations

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES: PROBLEMS AND PRIORITIES

Mary Finocchiaro

(Adapted from the address given recently by TESOL President Professor Mary Finocchiaro at the first meeting of the new NEW YORK TESOL Affiliate [New York City, 11-11-1970])

The most challenging problem facing schools in every sector of New York State today is that of determining how best to help linguistically handicapped youngsters learn English well enough to function in a regular school program with profit to themselves and to their peers. The school's responsibility does not end there however. While its primary goal—in cooperation with other social and educational agencies—may be that of helping learners become well-adjusted participating school and community members it must also prepare the learners for their future roles as citizens, parents and workers.

On the surface, this may seem like a simple task. In reality it is fraught with frustration, feelings of failure and fear on the part of concerned school personnel and community leaders. There exists an urgent need to view the situation more realistically than we have done in the past lest another generation of learners become school "drop-outs" or "push-outs." In the following discussions I plan to concentrate on the elementary and secondary schools where problems are most acute. I shall not touch on programs for literate, motivated foreign students at the college level or those for adults-literate or illiterate—who are generally highly motivated.

Before discussing some of the factors that contribute to the retardation of a quick or easy solution to a complex, emotionally charged problem, I should like to take a few moments to recall and comment upon a few highlights of my own experience as an English as a Second Language teacher. You will thus realize that many of the factors impeding progress today have their roots in decades of inflexible dogma which has been allowed to go unquestioned by concerned teachers and parents; you will realize, too, that cultural and/or parent-school conflicts of fifty years ago find numerous parallels today.

When I started teaching English as a second language, the supervisor asked me to use the Basic English method. I remember receiving a poor teaching evaluation because I had had the temerity to teach the word "mirror" and I had compounded the felony by taking a pocket mirror out of my purse to use as a visual aid! When I was forced to translate Blood, Sweat and Tears to "red water from the body," etc., I thought "there must be another way" and began searching for it. It took a lot of soul searching and trials and errors to realize, of course, that there *is not just one other way.*

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Then came the period of the "mimicry and memorization" of long dialogues; of the priority of habit formation; and of thinking that meaning and vocabulary were secondary or even comparatively unimportant. The teaching emphasis was primarily on helping students learn the signals and develop habits of using the sounds and structural signals of English.

With the "New Key" enthusiasts of the late fifties, listening and speaking skills assumed priority and reading was deferred for *one hundred hours!* Teaching grammar rules was considered comparable to breaking one of the commandments; translation was not to be mentioned under any circumstances.

In the middle sixties, some scholars began to think that language acquisition had nothing to do with habit formation and that a cognitive-code theory of language acquisition should *replace* the habit formation theory. The late nineteen sixties found staunch supporters of either one or the other learning theory; of those who believed more in communication than in manipulation; of those who preferred a transformational generative grammatical analysis to a structural one. There is a proliferation of articles and books about renewed emphasis on meaning and about an *unstructured, free* choice of learning experiences on the part of learners because they possess their own built-in "capacities and strategies." The teacher has become the "facilitator" of learning rather than the "model" or "dispenser" of learning. She is the creator of a climate "in which learning can flourish." I could add countless new clichés but the result would be the same. Many conscientious teachers today are not only confused about their role but they also continue to feel unhappy about having to select one school or the other of linguistics or psychology. Their major concern remains that of doing an effective job of teaching English to speakers of other languages.

I have over-simplified shamefully but the fact remains that despite the heat generated by the thousands of arguments, experiments and claims, few people have been really happy about the outcomes of most of the programs in English as a second language. Despite carefully written "performance objectives," attention to "cultural immersion," "manipulation" and "communication goals," I think it is fair to say that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the results achieved in the past. Is it because we have not defined terms carefully or is it because we have accepted—without questioning—some of the "findings" of psychologists, sociologists or "educators" related to learning and teaching? In my opinion, it is a little of both.

I think it is also fair to say that 99.9% of all teachers of English as a second language want to fulfill their responsibilities to learners in terms of helping them to communicate and to achieve their aspirations and of making them well-integrated, well-adjusted human beings. Teachers want to be responsive to the needs and goals of the communities which they serve.

What stands in the way of establishing programs of excellence? Where do the problems lie? Some stem from the attitudes of the pupils themselves, of their parents and of some ill-informed teachers; some can be laid at the door of linguists, sociologists, anthropologists who have either allowed distortions of their principles to continue to flourish uncorrected or, worse still, have published "research findings" based on inadequate experimentation. A large measure of responsibility for failure must also be ascribed to educators and supervisors who have found it "useful" to make statements which, while giving parents and community leaders false hopes, give conscientious teachers feelings of insecurity; to wit, a youngster (no matter at what age he was admitted to school) needed only a few weeks in the school —in a regular classroom—to become fully "integrated"; reading grades jumped four years after use of this or that piece of equipment or technique.

Important though they are, I shall not touch upon pupil and parent attitudes and motivation. I am convinced that a good English program which gives students the skills they need to become part of the mainstream of the school, which strengthens their assurance that what they are learning is useful to them *now* and not just at some vague future time, is intrinsically motivating. And it would be the unnatural parent who were not caught up in the enthusiasm engendered by the feeling of success and achievement which he notes in his offspring.

Allow me to examine briefly instead some of the labels or statements which have done learners and their teachers no little harm. As I mention them in random order, I shall also note some obvious implications. Let me start with those things in which *I do not believe.*

1. *I do not believe,* for example that any learner is "culturally deprived."

All human beings have culture. All youngsters come to school with two priceless assets—their native language and their culture. I do not even believe that people are as culturally "different" as some would have us think. Teachers, curriculum planners and textbook writers should emphasize the universality of human values and should point out the role of geographical and historical factors in the development of cultural differences—if these do, in fact, exist.

2. *I do not believe* that children of low socio-economic status come to school without language and without concepts. It may take a longer time for the language they know to be brought to the surface but it can be done because *language is there.* Moreover, whether or not parents can "reinforce" the school's language activities, teachers still have the major responsibility for reviewing and "re-entering" the English that has been taught as often as feasible in varied experiences which will require the use of utterances of increasing complexity.

3. *I do not believe* that English can be acquired by osmosis. Even very young children need systematic language development unless they live in a predominantly English-speaking community where they interact constantly with their English-speaking peers. The mere sitting in the same classroom with English-speaking children is generally valueless (as far as language acquisition is concerned) without a carefully planned language program in which all the features of English pronunciation, morphology and syntax are presented and practiced intensively in activities appropriate to the maturity level of the learners.

4. *I do not believe* that the learners growth will be stunted if—at an early age—and with a sympathetic, skilled teacher—he is encouraged and helped to use a "standard" English pronunciation and grammar. *The majority of parents want this for their children.*

5. *I do not feel* that the judicious use of the learner's native language—by the teacher, a paraprofessional or a student "buddy" will have a harmful effect on him. The native language—used sparingly of course in ESL classes—will clarify needed directions or concepts, will orient the newcomer and more especially, will enable him to establish a more immediate rapport with some other human being in the strange classroom.

6. *I do not believe* that a contrastive analysis of English and the student's native language alone should determine the selection and gradation of the linguistic material to be taught. The items for initial presentation should not necessarily be those which contrast with those in the learner's native tongue. Not only may the learning of possible parallel features give him a greater feeling of security but there are, in addition, two other major considerations:

a) When English is taught as a *second* language; that is, for immediate use in the surrounding community, the items needed to help the learner function in the situation must be given priority.

b) Often the interference between the learner's native language and English may not be as serious as that caused by a partially learned feature of the English language and segments of the feature not yet presented or practiced. Learners often make false analogies because they try to apply partially or incompletely assimilated material to other contexts.

7. *I do not believe* that all teachers, particularly those in service for many years, should be required to learn the native language of their students particularly when they teach English to more than one ethnic group. I think it would be most desirable if all teachers learned to use expressions of greeting and concern and some of the requests and formulas useful in facilitating classroom management. The learners would be the losers, however, if teachers were made to feel inadequate in their task of teaching English and if their morale were lowered by such an unrealistic demand.

I would urge, nonetheless, that teachers gain some knowledge not only of the broad features of pronunciation or grammar which will cause problems in their students' acquisition of English but also of possible cognates in the two languages.

Prospective teachers *can* be expected to study a foreign language intensively, particularly the dominant foreign language of the community in which they plan to teach. Colleges serving community schools have a grave responsibility in pre-service training programs for teachers. They should introduce strong relevant courses in those foreign languages spoken by the minority groups in the community and should make these *required* courses for the Bachelors degree.

While we cannot expect teachers without previous extensive experience in foreign language to become bilingual enough to use the students' native language in teaching ESL or teach curriculum areas in the students' native tongue, we should insist that *all* teachers become *bi-cultural*. It is imperative that all teachers of ESL gain a deep insight into the life styles and cultures of their learners, even when more than one ethnic group is involved.

8. *I do not believe* that learners should be required to speak only about *English* culture in English.

It would be a great source of pride for them if they could talk about their culture in the target language. Such a procedure would serve another valuable purpose: that of enabling learners to perceive that English can be an instrument of communication in just the same way as is their native tongue. The insistence on "cultural immersion" as it has been advocated up to now is totally unrealistic, ignoring as it does, basic psychological principles of human learning.

9. *I do not believe* that units written for English language learners should concentrate primarily on aspects of slums or ghettoes, where the non-English newcomers may be living temporarily. While I consider it important to start with children where they are in terms of ability, background, environment, etc., it is disheartening to see entire units in the English language devoted to vocabulary and concepts related to slum living. These might *occasionally* be used by a teacher whom learners consider empathetic as a point of departure for the introduction of language material. The emphasis in the curriculum (used in the broadest sense of the word) should be (a) making pupils and their parents aware that the learning of English may be one way of moving out of the slums; (b) giving them the skills and tools which are indispensable to further their education and (3) ini-

tiating projects with other agencies in the community which can serve not only to improve conditions but also to enable learners to use English which is meaningful and relevant to them.

I also question the advisability of books for young children written in so-called Black English. To begin with, not all black children speak Black English! Moreover, I am not convinced that this intermediate step of reading in the second *dialect* before reading in the standard dialect is necessary. Much more experimentation and discussion with concerned parents is needed before teachers are allowed to make widespread use of such books in their classrooms. Not enough has been written and said about the time and manner of making the transition to the reading in the standard dialect. Furthermore, English dialect speakers understand "standard" English when spoken or read aloud. We should not confuse the learning problems of the non-English speaker and the dialect speaker although some teaching techniques may be similar for both groups.

10. *I do not believe* that group IQ tests should be used as a basis for placing learners into any level or grade of an English program. All of us are aware that (a) most IQ tests are not culture free; (b) they do not test many of the faccts of intelligence which should be included under the term of "general aptitude" (c) they should be studied with all other factors or records concerning the learner: and (d) results are often interpreted incorrectly. In any case, in an English speaking community, English *must* be taught to *all* normal pupils.

11. *I do not believe* that with the majority of learners above the ages of twelve or thirteen the ESL curriculum should require—as intermediate or terminal behavior—a mastery of all features of pronunciation. Any improvement in pronunciation at that age level will generally be gradual and not dramatic. The goal should be comprehensibility at all times but not necessarily allophonic perfection. With many learners, the inordinate amount of time spent on "drilling out" an accent which does not impede comprehension, could be more profitably used in other productive learning activities.

12. *I do not believe* that *functionally illiterate* students admitted to schools and placed with their age peers in the upper junior high schools or in the secondary schools can close the five-or-more-year gap without an intensive, specially designed program in English and in their native tongue.

And now let me turn to some facets of the ESL programs in which I have come to believe after several decades of teaching at all levels, observation of many classrooms and talks with teachers, supervisors and concerned parents.

Despite the extravagant claims made by some language schools, learning one's first language and one's second language are not the same. Every normal child learning his first language has an innate capacity for doing so but in learning the new language such factors as age, the duration of the learning period, the opportunity for using the new language, linguistic interference and attitudes require quite different approaches and techniques and may force schools to write quite different performance objectives as well as to modify terminal goals.

Professional leaders in our field and community resource persons must become increasingly aware of the fact that it is asking superhuman efforts of teachers to expect them to work with English-speaking children and language learners within the same classroom. The former may be reading at different "grade" levels; the latter may be at various levels of literacy not only in their native tongue but also in English. Each learner will be on a

different point on the continua of the English communication skills (listening with understanding, speaking, reading and writing).

Homogeneous grouping of English language learners for intensive English instruction for a flexible period of time; with a teacher well-trained in teaching ESL; with specially designed instructional materials; and with continuous evaluation of the learners' progress *and* of the program is the only viable organizational pattern at the present time. Even in this pattern, I am assuming, of course, that the ESL learners will spend at least two hours each day with native English-speaking youngsters in art, music, physical education classes and in other activities where a language deficiency is not a serious handicap.

Temporary homogeneous grouping which will accelerate the learners' admission to the regular school program should not be equated with segregation. I have seen ESL learners seated in classrooms with native English speakers but not involved in any way with the learning activities. That, in my mind, constitutes the worse kind of segregation.

"Pull-out" programs in which ESL learners come together from various classrooms for English instruction—unless carefully planned—do not provide long enough periods of intensive help; do not ensure continuity of instruction for the learners; and generally, do not make it possible for them to integrate the English they have learned in the special English class with that needed in the other curriculum areas.

Provision must be made for individualized instruction but it is essential that Boards of Education and other agencies assist teachers in the herculean task of preparing material which will enable learners to acquire the essential features of English phonology, grammar and lexicon and culture so that they can encode and decode language. While the material must be individualized according to need, blocks of material should be presented to the entire class whether the class is composed both of native and non-native English speakers or of ESL learners alone. This is necessary if the learners are to be given the feeling that they are part of a group and that they are capable of sharing experiences with their peers.

Emphasis in teacher education programs should be placed on the values of grouping and the techniques of group dynamics. Diagnosing individual pupil needs, identifying possible experiences to be shared, preparing materials and evaluating progress so that pupils can be moved in or out of groups as needed should all be included among the skills which a teacher should acquire.

The discrete items within the English program (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, cultural facts) should be presented and practiced within two major contexts: the every day authentic situations needed for living in the community and, as quickly as possible thereafter or *concurrently*, the basic vocabulary, forms and patterns required for effective participation in all the curriculum areas offered by the school for learners of that age level.

There should be no one inflexible approach or method for teaching English espoused by a teacher, school, education board or community member. Since we do not really know how people learn, the approach should be eclectic and should make provision for the possible different learning styles of pupils. For example, reading should not be deferred for a specific number of hours. All the pupil factors of age, literacy, need and motivation must be considered before determining the number of hours of possible deferment.

To illustrate further, grammar should be taught to pupils over the age of ten or eleven—not the traditional grammar rules but generalizations

based on numerous examples of the item being presented. It is naive of educators to keep discussing habit formation versus cognitive code theory. Both are necessary if students are to attain a desirable level of competence and performance in English.

Teachers should be permitted to discard or to modify techniques which they find basically counter-productive. To cite one example, asking students to memorize long dialogues without the further, judicious exploitation of the dialogue does not contribute enough to the growth of language ability and especially to the free, spontaneous use of English.

Colleges or other training agencies must help teachers acquire an understanding of and practice in: (1) helping students acquire reading skill at all levels; (2) adapting texts in all the curriculum areas for at least two or three levels of literacy and (3) exploiting happenings and relevant school-community situations which, "discussed" in English, will be motivating to learners.

We should study more fully and apply to programs in the United States the comparatively unfamiliar concept of registers which has gained currency in England and in many other countries. After a basic corpus of materials has been presented—adequate for functioning in the school and community—the language items selected for inclusion should depend, wherever possible, on the "felt" needs and aspirations of the learners. Since needs and aspiration change, however, learners must be taught *how to learn* so that they can continue their study of additional "registers" after leaving the school program.

After a thorough study of all the components which should be considered before instituting *any* program, a bilingual-bicultural program should be designed by all schools which will enable the ESL learner (1) to develop his native language not only for self-realization but also—with learners past primary school age—as a vehicle for learning basic concepts of living in the school and in the unfamiliar community; (2) to gain a deeper understanding of his cultural heritage as a source of pride and enhanced self-concept and as a means of accelerating his integration into the English culture; (3) to understand, speak, read and write English well enough to communicate with his English speaking neighbors; (4) to avail himself of all educational opportunities and to become part of the movement for upward mobility which our country offers.

Scholars in all areas related to the teaching and learning of ESL should be held accountable for specificity and clarity in reporting the results of their experimentation. Such factors as the numbers of persons involved in the experiment and the conditions under which it was performed should be carefully stated. Cautions or undesirable "side effects" should also be set forth. Too many educators or community leaders in the desire to be "innovative" rush to make use of the results of reported experiments without realizing that what may have worked with a small group or with one type of pupil population, with all the resources that are generally poured into an experiment, cannot be duplicated in their communities where the variables are not comparable.

Since a characteristic of many in-migrations is a high degree of mobility (due to such community factors as inadequate housing or poor vocational opportunities) leaders in the ESL field should cooperate in the preparation of a basic corpus of materials in English. This would make possible better placement for the learner as well as continuity of instruction and it would facilitate the conscientious teacher's task who must know "where learners are." (A proficiency test—while valuable—would not serve the same purpose.) Needless repetition of learned material could be avoided

when the need for newcomers is to move ahead as quickly as feasible. By the same token, the large gaps between what the teacher thinks the learner should know in grammar etc. and what the learner has actually been taught would be lessened.

Two comments should be added: (1) The basic corpus would have to be supplemented or modified depending upon the ESL and school program to which the learner seeks admission; (2) Forms for reporting the points on the corpus which the learner had reached as well as the degree of competence and performance in each of the features or skills would also have to be devised cooperatively and disseminated on a nation-wide basis.

Last but not least, while I am convinced that well-planned bilingual education programs should be expanded and that more efforts should be made within them to make native English speakers bilingual and bicultural, I should like to express other concerns. Some confusion seems to exist at the present time about the terminal goals of many programs; about the ESL component; about our obligation to other minority groups such as Turks, Poles, Italians or French who are coming to the United States in greater numbers.

If we believe honestly that bilingual programs have merit—and of course they do—and if we believe that every learner should have the benefit of equal educational opportunities, we cannot justify the exclusion of any groups.

Moreover, we should ask ourselves in this educational endeavor as in any other, questions such as, *Who is the learner we are considering?* (How old is he?; How literate is he in his native tongue?; How much previous schooling has he had? etc.), What is the dominant language of the community?, What human resources do we have to implement the program?, What will be the role of teachers and of paraprofessionals?, When do we start a bilingual education program? (For what age group, for example?) What curriculum areas should be studied in the learner's native language?, which in English?, When will the transition be made from the dominant language to English in the curriculum areas?, How do all the members of the community feel about the introduction of the program?, How can we ensure that a strong English component will be introduced and maintained? (After all, the learner is living in an English-speaking community.) How can we make sure that the learner's native language will be developed to his greatest potential?

Numerous other questions come to mind. There is no one right answer to any question but some answers may be considered undesirable because they have been borrowed from other communities without adaptation or, worse still, they have been born out of political expediency or community pressures.

In conclusion, let me talk briefly about the priorities mentioned in the title of this paper. Some are implicit in much of what I have said but I should like to single out four of them which in my judgment require immediate discussion and action:

1. The need for community orientation and involvement. For example, English speaking parents will want to understand why in some classes some of their children may not have a full day's instruction with the teacher because she will have to spend time to teach English to language learners. Parents of language learners will want to understand why their children are (or are not) placed in special classes; what the grading system means; what opportunities their children will have to enter college, etc. etc.

2. The need for viable language learning "centers" where English as a or in any building where large numbers of newcomers make such a center second language can be taught intensively. The centers can be within a

school, within a community (children might have to be bussed to a community center), within an agency but under board of education supervision desirable. All the safeguards for the learners of continuous evaluation, special curriculum, opportunities for shared experiences with English-speakers and others noted throughout this paper must be guaranteed.

3. The need for special programs for the older functional illiterate for whom the junior or senior high school may be the terminal point of instruction.

4. Most important, the need for colleges and other agencies to develop teachers and other personnel both at the pre-service and in-service levels who possess the skills, knowledge, insights and attitudes required in teaching English as a second language. It must be obvious by now that:

Being a native English speaker is not enough.
Loving the children is not enough.
Knowing the structure of the English language is not enough.
Becoming familiar with methods of teaching ESL is not enough.

All of these qualifications are essential but, more, much more is needed to teach a group of human beings English as a second language.

Our responsibilities in this area are grave and, as can be noted, multifaceted. The best thinking of many persons of good will *working together* is needed if the non-English speakers in our midst are to become bilingual and bicultural. For persons living in an English speaking community, a command of English is still the key to personal-social adjustment, to integration and to upward mobility.

We cannot afford to lose another generation of children. More than ever, our nation needs all its human resources functioning at top capacity. Teachers of English as a second language have a crucial role to play in helping our country to achieve its goal, and more important, in enabling the tapestry which is America to become enriched and more colorful by the contributions which newcomers can, and will make to it, if given the opportunities.
