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ABSTRACT

Educational innovation in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) should promote control of the profession by those who practice it. ESL teachers should provide the criteria by which they wish to be evaluated and by which a conscientious teacher can evaluate her own performance. The members of the Florida affiliate of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have undertaken the process of developing criteria for ESL teacher behavior in academic skills and in classroom management skills. The specifications are written in behavioral terms, complete with the condition under which these behaviors are to be performed and the criteria by which they are evaluated. The Florida TESOL members discuss the specifications in face-to-face meetings whenever possible. The current list of criteria, awaiting a fourth revision, is included here. (VM)

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PERFORMANCE CRITERIA FOR TEACHERS: DESIGN OF A MODEL FOR INNOVATION

Richard R. Lee

It's hard to find the person who doesn't feel that education needs changing. There is enough public demand for titles like Crisis in the Classroom and How Children Fail to make it profitable to publish them in paperback. Every election for members of the school board precipitates another public discussion about what's wrong with our schools. Among educators themselves, there is no less sense of urgency to change, to improve, to make the schools better.

The person who sets out to influence education is also going to find the halls crowded with others of like intent. Congress sends seed money for innovative programs. State legislatures encourage here and punish there by their allocation of state revenues. The individual citizen votes for or against school bond issues and talks with school administrators and the school board. Who shall teach, and what the teachers shall know is the concern of schools of education and state credentialing departments. What the student shall study is influenced by textbook adoption boards, the books published by commercial publishers, and by curriculum guideline committees that stretch from national professional organizations, through state departments of education, through local curriculum committees and finally through the preferences of the classroom teacher.

A central axiom of this paper is that while education is an enormous and complex system, the heart of the system is the classroom. There, in relative privacy, teachers and students act out their roles. After the bell rings and the door is closed, all of the other forces impinging on education fade into irrelevance when compared with the importance of

the teacher's transactions with her students. Significant change in education happens only when there is a significant change in the teacher's behavior.

Concern has been expressed within TESOL for the up-grading of English to speakers of other languages. In her presidential address in 1971, Mary Finnochiaro reiterated this concern, and urged that efforts be expended in four areas: the development of better teaching materials, more precise tests, more detailed curriculum and the continuing development of guidelines for teacher qualification and teacher training.[1] There is no question that development in these four areas is desirable. The question arises, however, of efficiency. TESOL is still small, and the work is necessarily distributed among a relatively few people. It is reasonable to ask where the effort which goes into the development of the profession will effect the greatest change in the quality of teaching.

Guidelines for teacher qualification and training have long been used to up-grade teaching in American education. As a means of effecting change, however, guidelines have limitations. First, they are enforceable only upon teachers coming into the system. The effect is to defer change while teachers retire, to be replaced by those trained under the new guidelines. During the 1950's and 60's, schools were growing rapidly enough to modify the constraining effect of the pipe line. However, the baby boom is over and the rate of school expansion has slowed with the result that the average teacher is now still more than 25 years from retirement.[2] That's a long time to wait for change. Too, guidelines can be implemented in a meaningful way only by the gatekeepers: the 50 state certification offices and the more than 1200 schools of education. Each one, of course, is inclined to weigh guidelines against many other sources of influence, not the least of which is tradition. The demographics and politics of education weaken and postpone the potential for change in guidelines for the selection and preparation of teachers.

Other factors also dilute one-shot efforts to improve the teaching of English as a second language. The national organization can develop new and better teaching material, but the final product must compete in the marketplace of commercial publishing along with other material, all of it attractively packaged and ably promoted. The national organization can develop a sanctioned curriculum, but the curricula actually taught in the classroom are inevitably interpreted by the convictions and interests of the teachers who implement them. But the strongest objection to any of these innovations, new guidelines, new materials, or new curricula, is that they do not touch the most important issue in teaching, the way that teachers teach.

In addition to avoiding dilution, innovation in ESL should also promote control of the profession by those who practice it. This kind of effort exchanges one-shot efforts for on-going improvement. First, ESL teachers are evaluated by administrators who often know nothing about ESL. This fact of life cannot be altered suddenly, but if it is to be effected, we will have to provide the criteria by which we want others to evaluate us. We also need to develop our own behavioral specifications of what a good ESL teacher can do because these specifications are the mechanism by which a conscientious teacher can check her own performance and hence take responsibility for her own ongoing development as a professional.

Parenthetically, it should also be noted that the movement called accountability in education is in fact the demand that teacher evaluation-- and hence control-- be moved from the school to some higher level of organization more responsive to the legislative organizations that control the funds. Accountability in education also means that education is coming to be measured in the same way as any other sector of the economy, in terms of costs and productivity. It is in our own interest to develop evaluative criteria more explicit than those of the managers.

With these considerations in mind, the Florida affiliate of TESOL addressed itself directly to the central problem in classroom instruction: teacher behavior. We work on the assumption that real change comes only when the people who change are directly and continuously involved. Whether writing curricula, or specifying what the competent teacher can do, the benefit accrues to the people who do the work. For that reason, we did not invite the experts to tell us what we should be doing. Instead, we have met face to face in various locations over the past eighteen months to develop a list of specifications of teacher behaviors. The list is in two parts, academic skills and classroom management skills. Many of our 180 members cannot attend all of the meetings, partly for reasons of geography. After each meeting, another version of our specifications are edited and mailed out to all members, who are encouraged to react by mail if they cannot attend the next meeting.

From the beginning, we have written these specifications in behavioral terms, complete with the condition under which these behaviors are to be performed, and the criteria by which they are to be evaluated.[3] We have avoided, at considerable expense of effort, the ambiguities of "The teacher shall meet the student's needs." in favor of statements about classroom management like this: "Within 30 minutes of a new student's entry into an ESL class, T (for "teacher") elicits from at least three other students the correct answer to the question, "What's his name?". The wording of the second statement operationalizes the ideal in the first one, makes it approachable, and improves the liklihood that teachers will act out their ideals.

We also recognize that the creation of teacher specifications by evolution permits disagreement to surface about means and ends in ESL. We admit that we are operating on imperfect information. We could wait for somebody else to specify second-language competence before

we specify the best way to get him there. However, there is encouragement in the fact that language teaching has proceded for 2500 years with some success without that information. By stating what the teacher can do, under what conditions, and to what level of proficiency, each difference of opinion becomes a testable hypothesis. There has been intense debate over what kind of grammar, if any, is most desirable for the teacher to know, i.e., is most instrumental to her ability to impart a language to students. We do not know, but we have the feeling that she should be able to demonstrate the following academic skill, according to one of the included criteria:

> Given a written declarative sentence at least fifteen words long, which contains a relative clause, a participial phrase, and at least two prepositional phrases, T writes a description of its syntax in the notation of one of the following schools of syntactic description:
>
> a. school grammar, with the Reed-Kellog diagram
> b. immediate-constituent analysis
> c. transformational branching-tree diagram
> d. stratificational grammar
>
> or any other system of syntactic analysis described in detail in print.

That objective is no guarantee of good teaching, but it represents a variety of intuitions among the membership about the academic knowledge that the teacher should be able to demonstrate. The objective represents clearly formulated differences of opinion. There is no healthier state of affairs in any profession.

We are also aware that we can formulate objectives which we cannot yet meet. These objectives focus our dissatisfaction and suggest the content of in-service workshops and individual study. Nor are the 30 objectives that we have presently developed in any way complete. The 30 included here are the result of a third revision, and items for a fourth revision are awaiting editing. In our view, the process of developing the objectives is more important than the product that will evolve, although it too has its uses. Florida is moving toward teacher certification by

demonstration of competence. When the new credentialing system is implemented, the competencies will have been specified by the practicing professionals themselves. One incidental result will be that when young teachers come into the schools, they will find not the old fogies, but experienced teachers with whom they share common competencies.

What has been outlined here is a process, not a product, developed by one affiliate to define the profession as we see it according to our present light. We know that light changes, particularly in education. The items that we have developed so far are useful to us, or to any other organization, to the extent that they stimulate further examination of what the fully competent teacher of ESL can already do. The most important element in the educational system is what teachers do with students. Through the process outlined above, the state affiliates seem to be the organizations most capable of working genuine and lasting change in the teaching of English as a second language.

FOOTNOTES

Mr. Lee is Assistant Professor of Communication at the Florida State University, and past president of the Florida Association of TESOL.

[1] Finocchiaro, Mary, "TESOL Presidential Report to the Membership 1971," TESOL Newsletter, V (June, 1971).

[2] The American Almanac, Grosset & Dunlap (New York), 1971.

[3] The format is taken from the five-part planning objective in Robert J. Kibler, Larry L. Barker and David T. Miles, Behavioral Objectives and Instruction, Allyn & Bacon (Boston), 1970.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

1. From memory, T writes or speaks four lines of dialog in a non-native language.

2. Upon hearing a spoken request for a body movement or for social information in a non-native language, T performs the action or says the information in the foreign language.

3. From memory, T writes two defining characteristics of five styles of speech, according to Gleason, Linguistics and English Grammar, Joss, The Five Clocks, or Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevins, Linguistics and Language Teaching.

4. Given a written declarative sentence at least fifteen words long, and which contains a relative clause, a participial phrase and at least two prepositional phrases, T writes a description of its syntax in the notation of one of the following schools of syntactic description:

a. school grammar, with the Reed-Kellogg diagram
b. immediate constituent analysis
c. transformational branching-tree diagram
d. stratificational grammar

OR any other school of syntactic analysis described in detail in print.

5. Given an English sentence written in conventional spelling, T underlines all sounds which would pose phonemic interference for speakers of a foreign language specified by S. The answer will cite a specific study in contrastive analysis.

6. Given a written English sentence T underlines all constructions which would pose syntactic or lexical interference for speakers of a foreign language specified by S. The answer will cite a specific study in contrastive analysis.

7. Given written examples of exceptions to broad, general transformational possibilities in English, T writes three additional examples of each type of exception. For example:

a. "said goodby to him," which is not permutable to *"said him goodbye."
b. "filled his glass for him," which is not permutable to *"filled for him his glass."
c. "John had a cold," which cannot be passivised into *"A cold was had by John."
d. The short answer, "He is.", which cannot be contracted to *"He's."

8. From memory, T writes three vocabulary test items that utilize three different test formats from either David Harris' Testing English as a Second Language or another source more recent. The items shall meet the quality criteria specified in Harris.

9. In 30 minutes and given an expository passage in English no more than 500 words long, T writes objective test items (multiple choice or fill-in) for each of the first three levels specified in the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Cognitive Domain. The questions will be worded to reflect the same knowledge of English demanded by the expository passage.

10. Given a one-paragraph description of a teaching technique, T writes the level of cognitive activity required for the student to accomplish the objective implicit in the technique, according to the six levels in Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Goals, Cognitive Domain, or if the technique requires sub-cognitive behavior, the teacher shall so indicate.

11. After examining any text or package of instructional materials for twenty minutes, T writes which of three general schools of foreign-language teaching methodology it most clearly belongs to (grammar-translation, audio-lingual, cognitive code) and shall write five sentences containing the distinguishing characteristics that motivated the classification.

12. From memory, T lists the names of six professional publications in which she would be likely to find references or advertisement of new classroom texts and other teaching material for English as a Second Language.

13. In two hours, from memory, T writes a summary of trends in ESL teaching methodology which will reflect the most current issue of the Britanicca Review of Foreign Language Education. The report shall identify at least four major schools of thought in methodology, excluding eclectisism, and operationally describe at least two kinds of activities associated with the currently most promising or ascendent school of thought.

14. T prepares her own performance objective, consisting of five parts, as explained in Kibler, Barker and Miles, Behavioral Objectives and Instruction, teach to elicit the behavior specified in the objective, and writes to what extent the objective has been attained by listing the names of the students who did and did not attain it. "Teach" in this objective is understood to mean any form of teacher or student behavior which is intended to cause learning.