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ABSTRACT

A program, initiated during the Fall of 1970 by the Language Research Foundation, which develops a curriculum for training teachers in cross-cultural communication is described in this paper. The three-phase project focuses on: (1) research, (2) curriculum development, and (3) curriculum trial-evaluation. Proceedings of a conference held under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council on student-teacher communications are the central focus of this report. (RL)

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Teacher-Training for Cross-Cultural Communication

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Teacher-Training for Cross-Cultural Communication

Over the past ten years the amount of research and literature on the language of minority cultures has mushroomed. At every meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, at least one session is devoted to "social dialects"; professional journals of linguistics spend more and more space every month on issues surrounding the question of "Black English". New courses in social dialectology are appearing in college catalogues around the country. Language usage among minority cultures in America is being investigated and documented in the literature of sociolinguistics. In short, the study of "non-standard" dialects has become a substantial sub-specialty and those who concentrate on this area have joined a new sub-culture of professionals.

The impetus for this deluge of new research has its origins in the social consciousness which blossomed in the sixties. As the socio-political contradictions of life in America became increasingly clear during the course of the last decade, professionals began trying to relate their work to the world around them. Concerning the question of language, much of this new effort arose around problems of education. Minority children were being failed by the schools and language differences were pinpointed as a possible contributor to this failure. Analyses differed: some said that minority children performed poorly because they had language deficiencies; others said that the cause was not lack of language, but lack of

mutual understanding. The arguments are by now familiar to us all--the particular analyses are not important--the point here is that the concern with language in education contributed to the rush of research by linguists and sociolinguists which floods our journals today.

Thus, a cycle which began in the society at large went from there to the schoolroom, to the social consciousness of the professionals, to the research "laboratories" (which were often the schools or the streets), to the pages of the professional journals and stopped there. Most of the articles were (and are) written in such a way that only initiates to the sub-culture could understand them; they appeared in places which were (and are) inaccessible to teachers. The result is that professionals felt gratified by the "relevance" of their work, and classrooms operated just as they always have. The research that had its origins in social concern rarely found its way back to social application.

There are notable exceptions to this in the work of educational laboratories around the country and isolated school systems situated near research centers. There has been a scattering of attempts to translate the technology of linguistics for teachers, and/or to tell them how they ought to feel about the language of minority children.

In the fall of 1970 a program was initiated to marry the findings of researchers and the needs of teachers. This program, conducted by the Language Research Foundation of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is to develop a curriculum for training teachers in cross-cultural communication based on the existing body of linguistic and sociolinguistic research and supplemented by primary research in

areas where no work has been done. This project is divided into three phases: a research phase, a curriculum development phase, and a curriculum trial-evaluation phase.

The project is based on the notion that the failure of communication in the classroom has its roots with teachers as much as with children and that the burden of accommodation must shift away from children. Today the language norm of the classroom is the mythical Standard English--it is the language of the teachers. If the form of the child's language in the classroom does not meet this norm, the content of what he/she has to say is dismissed. The medium becomes the message to such an extent that children with language differences are often considered less intelligent and, in extreme cases, retarded. The basic principle of the Language Research Foundation project is that communication itself is more important than communication in Standard English. The goal is to work towards an understanding and acceptance of this principle by teachers.

At the onset of the program four areas of focus for the curriculum were delineated: teacher attitudes; linguistic aspects of language differences; sociolinguistic aspects of language differences; and tools for more effective classroom interaction. The program is designed to: 1) bring teachers to an awareness of their attitudes towards culturally different students and the impact of these attitudes on learning/teaching; 2) teach teachers about specific kinds of linguistic differences, the systematicity and variability of dialects; 3) teach teachers about different sociolinguistic codes, style ranges and style shifting; 4) give teachers tools for maximizing communication effectiveness in the classroom.

There are several working principles which guide the design of the curriculum:

1) PROCESS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPECIFIC INFORMATION.

Teachers should be taught how to learn about their own students rather than to absorb a body of data and generalizations collected by outside specialists. The research of specialists should be used primarily to define parameters of investigation, and to provide examples of methodology and tools for analysis. The teachers will be taught how to discover the systematicity and variability among their own students' language.

2) THE POWER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CLASSROOM CRUCIALLY AFFECT COMMUNICATION AND THEREFORE TEACHER TRAINING MUST FOCUS ON THESE RELATIONSHIPS.

Because the teacher's role is defined as one of authority, and because he/she is traditionally the source of knowledge and information, he/she determines the language norm of the classroom. This authority structure inhibits free expression by the children. The teacher is the judge of acceptability; the curriculum must attempt to shift the direction of the flow of information. As the teacher begins to learn from the students about their language, the teacher/taught relationship will change, and with it, the notion that the teacher is the sole judge of acceptability. The mutuality of the learning process will hopefully break down the inhibitions generated by the power dichotomy.

3) THE FORMAT OF THE CURRICULUM IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE TO THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM.

The way that training takes place will affect both its impact

5.

on teachers and the resulting impact of teachers on their classes. Traditional methods of instruction (lectures, assigned reading, papers) will not be used, as it is felt that an intellectual understanding of dialect/culture differences is not sufficient to effect change. The curriculum is designed to involve teachers experientially by creating situations which will lead towards deeper insights. In addition, by breaking down the teacher/taught, subject/object relationship in our work with teachers, we hope to suggest a new model for classroom interaction.

4) THE PROGRAM MUST TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHILD'S COMMUNITY.

The teachers must on the one hand know something about the world of the child beyond the walls of the school, and on the other, learn about this world directly from members of the community (including parents) to the degree that this learning is sanctioned by the community. The boundaries between teacher and community must be handled with extreme care, in such a way that teachers neither close themselves off nor overstep their limits in relation to the child's world.

5) THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM CAN BE MEASURED ONLY IN THE LEGACY IT LEAVES IN THE CLASSROOM.

Two aspects of the legacy are important:

a) the impact on the classroom: unless real change in communication in the classroom takes place the program will be meaningless.

b) the duration of impact beyond the termination of the program: unless a support network among teachers is established so that learning can continue beyond the last formal session, the program

will be useless. In addition, it is hoped that teachers who have participated in this program will be able to influence others who have not.

Conference

At the onset of the curriculum development phase of the project, a conference was organized to discuss general questions of teacher training in cross-cultural communication and specific questions relating to the project. It was held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on April 29-30, 1971, under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council. The conference was designed to pool resources and get feedback from various research and training projects around the country. Linguists, sociolinguists, educators, sociologists and social psychologists, most of whom had worked in the area of language in the classroom, participated.¹

The conference was designed as a series of workshops; no formal papers were presented. Rather, participants were asked to respond to an outline of the Language Research Foundation curriculum indirectly through discussion of their own work and directly through criticism of the proposed curriculum. The conference was divided into four sessions. Each was devoted to a specific aspect of teacher-training and was opened with remarks by a participant involved in that area.

In the introductory session, each participant made a statement about how his/her work relates to the general area of student-teacher communication. The first discussion focussed on goals of teacher education in cross-cultural communication. Session Two was

devoted to sociolinguistic and cultural differences relevant to classroom interaction. Session Three focussed on the teacher sub-culture as it relates to a) classroom interaction and b) curriculum development. The final session was devoted to specific discussion of curriculum form and content.

Session I

During the first session, topics which were to become themes throughout the conference began to appear. Grimshaw launched the discussion with an initial comment on the teacher as part of a larger institution which imposes structural constraints on him/her, saying that these constraints must not be overlooked in the training process. This theme of teacher-as-social-being-within-the-school was explored along several lines. Kochman discussed: 1) the necessity of taking into account the goals of the school system; 2) the hierarchical structure of the classroom; and 3) the impact of (1) and (2) on children from various ethnic backgrounds. His position was that the built-in structure of the classroom, in its hierarchical and authoritarian nature, had a particular impact on "non-standard" children, taking the form of racism and ethnocentrism. Thus, both the power differential and the culture differential were at work with these children.

Holt said that in teacher training it is necessary first of all to get teachers to understand their own role in the classroom before going into the question of the culture of the children. Teachers have a recipe orientation. They want to be told what to do and exactly how to do it. But, Galvan pointed out, it is not possible

to tell teachers what to do. They must arrive at their own solutions through an understanding of their own roles. Thus, Roberts said, the notion of the teacher's power in the classroom must be revised from the traditional "power-to-control" to a new "power-to-learn" notion; the emphasis must shift from teacher as disciplinarian to teacher as discoverer.

From this discussion emerged the theme that it is not possible to divorce technique from philosophy in teaching or in teacher training. Teachers must develop a philosophy of their own and an understanding of their goals in teaching. They must come to an awareness of their role before new techniques can be of use. Teacher training should focus on this process.

A separate theme emerged around the topic of the relationship between the program and the community. Melmed said that a certain re-education of parents would be crucial in effecting change in the classroom. Philips countered that parent re-education is another form of cultural imposition by the schools and that the role of parents should be, rather, to help in re-educating the teachers. She described several sessions at the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon where community people were involved in teaching teachers about Indian culture and perceptions of education.

Thus, the principle themes of the morning were: the teacher as part of an institution, the teacher as philosopher of education, and the parent-teacher relationship.

Session II

The second session focussed on the teacher as participant-observer, or ethnographer. Gumperz opened the discussion with tapes of children in two teaching situations: one where a teacher is teaching reading to third graders; another where children are teaching each other. The use of these tapes in teacher training was discussed, leading into the general question of the relationship between research and teacher training. The question was: should teachers be presented with the results of research or with a methodology for finding things out for themselves? The danger of stereotyping which results from the presentation of findings was emphasized, but Kochman felt that the danger arises not because of the inherent (in)validity of the findings but rather because the context for understanding these findings has not been properly prepared. The general consensus was that it is more important to give teachers tools to discover cultural differences than to tell them about these differences, and it is in this way that analysis of tapes like those of Gumperz can be useful. The teacher's role must evolve towards that of ethnographer or participant-observer.

Session III

Three main questions were raised in the discussion of teacher sub-culture: 1) Can generalizations be made about all teachers or are there so many differences that generalizations are non-productive? 2) What strategies should be used in approaching teachers? 3) What is the relationship between teacher-training and teaching?

Holt argued, regarding the first question, that we must look at

teachers in the same way we are asking them to look at children. The ethnography of teachers must become a framework, just as the ethnography of the children has been. Then the question turned to whether there is such a thing as a teacher-subculture--whether teacher behaviors and outlooks are alike enough to warrant generalizations. Are generalizations about teachers part of the a priori input to the curriculum or part of the content of the curriculum?

The implication of this discussion was that while we are saying to teachers that they must not make assumptions about "kids'" culture but must find out "where their kids are at", we must also try to facilitate an understanding of "where teachers are at" during the earlier stages of the program.

The question then turned to methods of approaching teachers to help them become aware of their own norms and behavior. Can one force realization through embarrassment and exposure or is it better to proceed gradually and gently? Flood maintained that embarrassment will create a destructively uncomfortable atmosphere while others held that "shock" treatment, if handled with care, can be productive.

Specific procedural questions were taken up as it was felt that this was the only way to get a handle on strategies for teacher-training.

Session IV

Session IV was divided into two areas: the first was detailed critiques of proposed units in the Language Research Foundation curriculum outline. These will not be discussed here. The second

was the question of the value-orientation of the curriculum regarding the political implications of the teaching of Standard English. Is it possible to remain neutral regarding this issue or must the program take an explicit position? McGinnis argued that neutrality is excluded by definition: by not taking a position one is implicitly taking a position. Philips felt that unless there is an explicit rejection of it, the curriculum design will lead to the teaching of Standard English. The Language Research Foundation staff felt that the point of the curriculum was to bring teachers towards an acceptance of Non-standard English and an understanding that teaching Standard English is not only unnecessary but impossible.

The implication of the discussion was that the question of Standard English must be raised with teachers in the context of socio-political issues and that these issues cannot be avoided.

Conclusion

At the close of the conference there was a sense of frustration on the part of many of the participants because specific curriculum plans were dealt with only in the last session. Nearly 3/4 of the conference was devoted to very general questions, many of which were left unresolved. At the same time, during the course of the conference there was a strong sense of involvement: participants were excited about the issues raised and the content of discussion. During breaks and meals there was much discussion of the process of the conference itself--how the "experts" in communication were communicating with each other, who took the lead, and how the flow of discussion was regulated.

The process of the conference itself was perhaps the most important input to curriculum that emerged. It became clear that before any real interchange can occur a great deal of group-building must take place. Until people know where they stand vis à vis each other, and feel out a group relationship, the real business of the group cannot begin. This fact has direct application to the teacher-training curriculum.

The second important input to the curriculum was the range of philosophical questions that were raised. A clear understanding of political and social issues is prerequisite to making decisions about the form or content of any curriculum; the conference served as a forum for this clarification process.

Since the conference, details of the form of the curriculum have been worked out. Teachers will be recruited through a Boston teacher-service organization with approval from principals. Before the program begins, each teacher will be interviewed so that Language Research Foundation personnel can get an idea of reasons that teachers are participating and so that the teachers can ask questions about the program. There will be at least two teachers from any given school so that no teacher has to operate in his/her context alone. This will be the beginning of establishing a support network. There will be about thirty participants, including Language Research Foundation staff.

The program will be structured as follows: There will be two weekend retreats on consecutive weekends. Following those two weekends there will be ten weekly meetings. During the first weekend, there will be three foci: 1) group-building (creating an

atmosphere of trust so that participants feel free to be honest with each other); 2) criteria for making judgments (creating awareness that children's competence is judged not purely on the basis of their performance, but because of other factors, including language); 3) communication breakdowns (identifying what teachers feel to be communication breakdowns, and discovering other types of breakdowns and ways to identify them). Tapes, videotapes, and special learning experiences will be designed for each of these areas.

During the following week teachers will be asked to become participant-observers in very specific ways--to watch for particular kinds of things in their own classrooms. In addition, the Language Research Foundation staff will observe and tape a few of the teachers' classes with their permission. The following weekend will be devoted to analysis of the teachers' self-observations and the data collected by Language Research Foundation staff. The two kinds of data will be compared. The group will begin to work out alternatives for classroom interaction, and ways to collect new data about their classes.

During the ten following weeks, Language Research Foundation staff will work with teachers in their classes. Teachers will continue working on tools for collecting data, and analyzing it, finding systematicity and difference within their classes. They will get some outside cultural data as they need it to understand the in-class dynamics. The program will evolve towards developing new strategies for classroom interaction coupled with an understanding of the deeper political and philosophical issues surrounding urban education.

Throughout the program teachers will be involved in an evaluation process, giving feedback on the impact of the curriculum. They will work with the staff to shape the particular direction of the program (although the staff will have a wide range of resources from which to choose, as needs arise).

After the program terminates, there will be a period of evaluation and consolidation of materials; a manual will be finalized for use elsewhere. During the summer of 1972, an intensive workshop will be conducted with some participants from the trial program and people around the country interested in conducting the program in their schools.

Note

1. Participants in Workshop on Student-Teacher Communication,
April 29-30, 1971, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Cazden, Courtney	Harvard University
Dulay, Heidi	Language Research Foundation & Harvard University
Fergesen, Charles	Stanford University
Flood, Lily	Stanford University
Fraser, Bruce	Language Research Foundation & Harvard University
Galvan, Mary	University of Texas
Grimshaw, Allen	Indiana University
Gumperz, John	Language Behavior Research Laboratory, Berkeley, California
Holt, Grace	University of Illinois
Hymes, Dell	University of Pennsylvania
Kernan, Claudia	Harvard University
Kochman, Thomas	University of Illinois
Kratz, Dennis	Language Research Foundation & The Roxbury Latin School
Martus, Marjorie	Ford Foundation
Matlin, John	University of California
McGinnis, James	University of California
Mehan, Hugh	Indiana University
Melmed, Paul	Emeryville, California
Philips, Susan	Portland, Oregon
Roberts, Elsa	Language Research Foundation & Northwestern University
Rodriguez, Carmelo	Language Research Foundation & Harvard University
Ruiz, Juan	Language Research Foundation & Harvard University
Shultz, Jeffrey	Language Research Foundation & Harvard University
Tucker, Richard	McGill University
Williams, George	Language Research Foundation & M.I.T.

The author, Elsa Roberts, is a Ph.D. candidate in Linguistics at Northwestern University and Research Associate at the Language Research Foundation, Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was primarily responsible for organizing and conducting the Workshop being reported on.