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ABSTRACT

Two groups of teachers of English as a second language (ESL), a California group of 133 and a Venezuelan group of 55, were surveyed about their perceived areas of instructional need. The three top needs of the California group were ESL instruction in the content areas, program design for preliterate students, and materials development. The needs expressed by the Venezuelans included strategies to teach reading in English, teacher knowledge of language learning, and methods to use in very large classes. The common elements in the two lists of teacher concerns show the teachers' awareness of some of the themes current in second language learning theory and research. Both groups are interested in using content other than language for teaching English; the Venezuelan group, to provide interest in large classes, and the California group, to improve the fit between English and other secondary school subjects. Both mention mastery of a variety of teaching techniques as important. The differences in the lists demonstrate the profound influence of student population and institutional setting on second language instruction. The results can help those developing materials to serve the needs of teachers in different settings with different objectives. (Author/MSE)

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TEACHER PRIORITIES IN SECONDARY ESL AND EFL INSTRUCTION

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This paper presents the results of two surveys carried out in 1984 with two groups of secondary level English teachers, an ESL group from California (n = 133) and an EFL group from Venezuela (n = 55). Teachers were asked to rank their top three need areas. The California ESL group chose ESL instruction in the content areas, program design for preliterate students, and materials development as their top three priorities. The Venezuelan EFL teachers selected strategies to teach reading in English, teacher knowledge of language learning, and methods to use in very large classes as their major needs. The ten highest-ranking needs noted by each group of English teachers are presented and compared, reasons for similarities and differences discussed, and implications for teacher training, materials development and curriculum planning suggested.

Surveys are useful if used as approximate guides to the concerns of a group. The tradition of survey research is well established in foreign language education, where it has been used to explore such topics as administrator perceptions of language programs (see, for example, Crawford-Lange 1984; Weatherford 1982) and utility of instructional innovations such as computer-assisted instruction (Olsen 1980), among other areas. Educators in English as a second language and bilingual education programs have also used surveys to assess many issues such as

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progress of training program graduates (Johnson 1985; Day 1984); reference materials preferred by researchers (Allwright 1983); and topics thought to be important for language instruction by experts in a field (Huckin and Olsen 1984) or by ESL students (Fox 1984; Beck 1983). Despite their limitations, the surveys used in all of these investigations have provided useful baseline data which suggest additional avenues of research and practical innovation.

Too often excluded from survey research, however, is a critical group whose concerns determine much of what goes on in classrooms: that is, the practitioners who are engaged in the provision of language instruction. They are the persons largely responsible for planning and delivering second language services, and their concerns are thus worthy of note. Also important is the relationship between the instruction they provide and that offered elsewhere in the educational institutions in which they work, for institutional settings can shape academic instruction in a variety of ways (Goodlad 1984; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston 1979). In this connection, the distinction between settings where English is a second language (i.e., where it is present in other areas of the school environment and outside the school) as contrasted with settings where English is a foreign language (where it is used only in the language classroom, analogous to the foreign language classes in many U.S. high schools) becomes central. It is reasonable to expect that concerns voiced by teachers in an ESL setting might differ from those expressed by EFL teachers and illuminating to see where the differences and similarities lie.

The purpose of this small study was to describe the priorities for language instruction identified by two groups of teachers, an ESL group from California and an EFL group from Venezuela, in order to illustrate their concerns. It is hoped that this information will be valuable for teachers, for administrators and teacher trainers who work to prepare language instructors for their professional responsibilities, and for researchers and curriculum developers who seek to understand how instructional settings affect the work of teachers.

Method

To arrive at a list of topics for the survey, three experienced administrators and resource teachers first worked with the investigator to identify possible areas for inclusion in the ESL survey, which was distributed at three large professional meetings in California during the fall of 1983 and winter of 1984.[1] Respondents returned the survey forms to specially-marked boxes at the conferences or mailed them back to the investigator. The EFL survey was a modified version of the ESL survey which was adapted to the situation of teachers working abroad; it was developed with the help of an experienced Venezuelan EFL teacher and distributed to all participants at a

language teachers' conference in Venezuela in June, 1984. The surveys included seven identical or very similar topics (e.g., "Teacher Knowledge of Language Learning at This Level"; "Materials for L_2 Instruction/Secondary Level Language/ Bilingual Instruction") and three topics specific to the ESL or EFL situation. (For example, "Articulation of ESL, Bilingual, and Other Classes" was aimed specifically at the ESL context; "Ways to Use the Communicative Method with a Functional Syllabus" was aimed at the EFL setting, for the Venezuelan Ministry of Education had begun to publish curricular objectives based on a functional syllabus in the academic year prior to the conference.)

The method of survey development and the non-random nature of the respondents place some limitations on the data obtained and the interpretations offered here. It is clear that the instruments were not identical; given the difference in settings and the overlap among similar items, however, this is not a serious problem. Of greater consequence is the matter of a non-random sample of teachers who volunteered first, to attend a professional conference, and second, to answer the survey. There is no guarantee that such teachers are representative of the larger population of teachers who provide language instruction at the secondary level. Indeed, there is reason to believe that such teachers may well be unusually active members of their professional groups who took it upon themselves to expend the time and resources necessary to attend these conferences. Nevertheless, precisely because such teachers have demonstrated considerable professional interest through participating in these conferences, their opinions merit attention. Hence, while these two groups of teachers are not statistically typical samples of secondary-level language teachers, they are educationally important groups whose judgments reflect their experiences and can serve as indicators of instructor priorities in these two settings.

For both surveys, respondents were asked to rank their top three priority areas for concerns related to second language instruction by numbering them 1, 2, and 3. Respondents' choices were then weighted, with three points given to a first choice, two to a second, and one to a third. In a small number of cases (not more than fifteen for each group), respondents simply checked three areas without ranking them; each was then weighted equally. Each survey contained a blank item for teachers who wished to rank a topic not originally envisioned. (Fewer than ten did so on either survey.) There was also space for respondents to make additional comments; this, too, was used by few respondents.

Results

Results from the two teacher surveys are displayed in Table 1. As is evident, secondary teachers in both settings

Table 1

Instructional Priorities Identified by ESL and EFL Teachers

(Rank Orders)

Secondary ESL Teachers (Grades 7-12) In California (n=133)		Secondary EFL Teachers (Grades 7-11) In Venezuela (n=55)	
Rank	Area	Rank	Area
1	Strategies for ESL Instruction in the Content Areas	1 **	Strategies Needed to Teach Reading to Students at This Level
2 **	ESL Program Design for Preliterate Students	2	Teacher Knowledge of Language Learning at This Level
3	Materials Development for Secondary ESL Classes	3	Methods to Use in Very Large (40-50) Language Classes
4	Methodology for L_2 Instruction at the High School Level	4	Ways to Use Language Classes to Teach Content Other Than Language
5	Assessment and Placement for ESL and Bilingual Programs	5	Methods to Enhance Transfer of L_1 Skills of Use in English
6	Materials Development for Secondary Bilingual Classes	6	Materials for Secondary Level Language Instruction
7	Teacher Knowledge of L_2 Learning at the High School Level	7	Self-Concept as a Function of First Language Achievement
8 **	Articulation of ESL, Bilingual and Other Classes	8	Methods for Language Testing, Especially for Oral Performance Testing
9 **	Literacy Skills for English-Dominant Lg. Minority Students	9 **	Ways to Use the Communicative Method with a Functional Syllabus
10	Optimum Level of L_1 Development Needed for Progress in High School	10 **	Strategies for Teaching Students ESP for Future Use

** These items are specific to the particular group, ESL or EFL, in which they appear. The other seven items, though phrased differently, reflect similar concerns.

For the seven similar items, Spearman's rho, a measure of rank correlation (see Hatch and Farhady 1982: 205-207), is .09, which is not significant.

share some instructional concerns, but the differences between the two groups are considerable. These differences show that the instructional realities for ESL teachers working in American high schools and EFL teachers in Venezuelan secondary schools are distinct. While there is a common core of pedagogical concerns related to teacher expertise, methodology, and materials that each group sees as moderately important, the differences between the groups are marked and suggest somewhat divergent courses for teacher training, materials preparation, and future research.

Examination of the rank orders listed by these two groups of secondary-level teachers reveals differences in the nature and goals of the English instruction they offer their students. For the ESL teachers working in California, strategies for ESL instruction in the content areas was ranked first, followed by concerns of ESL program design for preliterate students. (This is a topic completely absent from the issues raised by EFL teachers; evidently this concern is a common one for the secondary-level teachers in California who responded, while the possibility that students might not be literate in Spanish was not considered relevant in the Venezuelan context.) Ranked third, fourth, and fifth for the ESL group are items that pertain to universal pedagogical concerns: appropriate materials, methodologies, and means of assessment for the programs they offer. Appropriate materials for bilingual instruction appeared in sixth place. Combining this concern with the interest in appropriate ESL materials (ranked third), we can conclude that, for these teachers, good materials for both ESL and bilingual instruction at the secondary level are very much needed. Indeed, a recent national study of ESL professional literature and practitioner opinion also reveals great teacher interest in materials which will facilitate development of academic skills, not only conversational fluency, for ESL students (Chamot 1985). A concern for staff development is reflected in the seventh-ranked topic, teacher knowledge of second language learning at the high school level.

The particular responsibilities of high school ESL teachers in California (and, we may speculate, in other parts of the United States serving large numbers of ESL students at the secondary level) are revealed in the topics ranked eighth and ninth, the articulation of ESL and bilingual classes with other high school classes and literacy skills for English-dominant language minority students. Clearly the respondents felt that ESL and bilingual instruction should form part of a cohesive academic program for their students. In addition, they had evidently had enough experience with different types of students in high schools to list literacy skills for English-dominant language minority students as an issue; for these teachers, the line between an ESL student and a student in need of additiona. English language skill development in reading and writing is not always clearly defined. The item ranked tenth by these teachers, the optimum level of first language development needed for

progress in high school, again reflects the variety of first language proficiency demonstrated by ESL students at the secondary level in California. The overall picture suggested by this list of concerns is one of teachers who are eager to see ESL instruction integrated into the academic program of their students; who deal with a great variety of levels of student language proficiency, ranging from students who do not yet read and write in their first language to students from a language minority background who are dominant in English; and who see a need for materials, methods, and assessment measures tailored to the academic demands of the high school scene.

The list of concerns generated by the EFL group, in contrast, reveals a group of teachers who want to provide their students with a level of English language skill sufficient for reading and for limited oral use and who must seek to do so within the very large classes they teach. Ranked first for the EFL group was a need to know how to teach reading to secondary students of English; this was evidently the skill that teachers hoped the students would master to a functional level while studying English in secondary school. The item ranked second, teacher knowledge of language learning at this level, may reflect the need felt by these teachers, many of them graduates of teacher training institutes or normales with limited access to additional opportunities for staff development, to improve their own understanding of second language learning. Third was the need for methods to use in teaching very large English classes, a situation typical not only of Venezuela but of other parts of Latin America (Baltra 1985) and, undoubtedly, of many other parts of the world. The EFL teachers also indicated interest in ways to use language classes to teach content other than language; ranked fourth, this item probably reflects to a degree the mention of using authentic materials which appears in the official curricular objectives published by the Ministry of Education. Interestingly, these teachers also expressed interest in helping their students transfer first language skills for use in English, ranked fifth, and noted an additional concern for self-concept as a function of first language achievement, ranked seventh. These two concerns reveal that even for EFL teachers the matter of student first language skill is an issue; clearly teachers would like to know how to use such skill to enhance second language instruction. Ranked sixth and eighth are the need for materials for secondary language instruction and a concern for assessment, particularly for oral language testing. Given the large classes taught by these teachers, it is understandable that they would be especially interested in ways of testing oral skills that would be feasible in such a setting. The ninth item, ways to use the communicative method with a functional syllabus, is again an expression of the EFL teachers' need for methods suited both to their classroom teaching circumstances and the new official syllabus, which places considerable emphasis on achieving functional proficiency in English but offers little guidance as to how this is to be done.

The last item, strategies for teaching students English for Specified Purposes (ESP) for future use, once more identifies teachers who want to equip their students with second language skills that will be usable in future activities.

Discussion

These two lists of teacher concerns demonstrate that teaching English in a California high school is a different enterprise from teaching English in a Venezuelan secondary institution. The commonalities between the two lists of teacher concerns show the teachers' awareness of some of the themes now current in second language learning theory and research. It is plain that both the ESL and EFL groups are interested in using content other than language to teach English, the EFL group to provide interest in large classes and the ESL group to improve the fit between English and other secondary school subjects. Both groups mention teacher mastery of a variety of language teaching methods as important. The EFL group is particularly concerned with methods to use in the large classes commonly found in their setting. Both groups of teachers are also interested in understanding the role of student first language skills as factors which affect the learning of a second language. For the ESL group, this concern is expressed in the topics which have to do with optimum levels of first language instruction needed for second language achievement and in those which mention the relationships between ESL and bilingual instruction in high school. The EFL group is also interested in helping students transfer first language skills for use in English and in understanding how first language skills in Spanish affect achievement and self-concept. Both groups of teachers indicate needs for materials and methods of assessment adapted to their level of English language instruction. Thus, although the relationships between the ESL and EFL lists are not statistically significant, there are obvious areas of common pedagogical concern which speak to all those who train teachers, write materials, and develop curricula for either ESL or EFL.

The differences between these two lists of teacher concerns demonstrate the profound influence of student population and institutional setting on second language instruction. The ESL teachers mention the need to serve preliterate students as a major theme; this is not an issue for the EFL group. California ESL teachers also seek to improve the fit between their classes and others offered at the high school level. In addition, they want to know how to improve the literacy skills of English-dominant language minority students. The ESL teachers, then, see their role as preparing students to function in English in the regular high school curriculum as soon as is reasonable. Their students demonstrate a great variety of language skills in both the first language and in English, and ESL teachers express concern for helping students progress in both through appropriate instruction, materials, and assessment.

The Venezuelan EFL teachers as a group are shown to be instructors who want to insure that their students leave the EFL classroom with some usable second language skill. They are particularly concerned about providing students with reading skills in English which pertain to students' presumed future needs. While there is also interest in using communicative methods and finding appropriate methods of assessing oral language skills, these teachers see their principal effort as one of enabling students to use English in other contexts after they have left the EFL classroom. Because their students, unlike ESL students in California, do not have to learn English in order to take all of their additional high school subjects, the priorities of these teachers are somewhat different from those of the ESL teachers. The ESL teachers want to see that their students can function in English in the regular high school classroom, and see their job as making this possible. The EFL teachers want to see that their students complete their English classes with a degree of English skill sufficient for later use.

Implications

The findings from this survey imply that teacher trainers provide some differentiated preparation as well as a common cluster of skills to teacher candidates. Both prospective EFL and ESL teachers at the secondary level need to become familiar with basic teaching methods, materials, and assessment tools suitable for classroom use. According to the groups surveyed here, secondary EFL teachers express special needs for methods which can be used in very large classes; for ways to tap oral skills in such classes; and for ways to help students develop a level of reading proficiency in English that will serve them later. Junior and high school ESL teachers, in contrast, seek to prepare students to function in English across an entire secondary curriculum. Training programs for them might thus include attention to issues of curricular articulation of ESL instruction, bilingual classes where applicable, and other high school classes. In addition, secondary ESL teachers need to know how to teach preliterate students; hence training programs should provide some guidance in this area.

The needs for materials expressed by these two groups of teachers also suggest somewhat different emphases. While both groups note the importance of using content materials to teach English, the secondary EFL teachers are principally concerned with making English interesting and helping students develop reading proficiency. The ESL teachers, on the other hand, want materials for both ESL and bilingual instruction that will reflect the other subjects students must take in high school so that language instruction can support academic progress in other areas. Those who develop materials and set curricula for EFL or ESL classes could help English teachers accomplish these goals by preparing texts and supplementary materials with these priorities

in mind.

Both the similarities and the differences between these two groups of secondary-level English teachers are illuminating. Examining this short survey, ESL and EFL teachers can see how their concerns resemble those of their professional peers who work in other settings. Furthermore, this information will help those who train English teachers and create materials for their use to provide the pedagogical skills and instructional resources needed to make second language instruction effective in an ESL or EFL context.

Note

[1]Thanks are due many people who assisted in the design and administration of these surveys. Leslie Jo Adams, Mary Faith Albert, Virginia López, and Josefina Naya worked on the initial survey design or adaptation and were also instrumental in distributing it at the CATESOL, California Association of Bilingual Education (CABE), and California Association of Secondary Bilingual Education (CASBE) conferences in 1984. Gladys Amador de Escalona and the English department faculty of the Instituto Universitario Pedagógico Experimental de Barquisimeto (IUPEB) in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, made it possible to distribute the survey to all registrants at the June 1984, Fifth National Modern Languge Teachers' Conference held there. Henry C. O'Roark assisted in the tabulation of the results. My sincere thanks to all these people and, in particular, to the ESL and EFL teachers whose responses show some of the concerns affecting secondary-level English instruction here and abroad.

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