

The Teaching of English in Polish Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native teachers of English in Polish schools, and is the result of the Dr. Butler's experience as a teacher of English in Poland. It is argued that native teachers of English should be employed in Poland because they teach in their own language, use current idioms, provide information about English speaking countries and enhance the credibility of programs. Furthermore, the importance of non-native instructors in Polish schools is stressed. The theoretical framework for this article is supplied by the general idea of the school as an organization and social institution.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native teachers of English in Polish schools, and is the product of the Dr. Butler's experience teaching English at three Polish higher institutions over a period of fourteen years: The Technical University of Cracow , AGH University of Science and Technology and Rzeszow University of Technology.

Foreign Language Part of the Polish Curriculum

Foreign languages have been part of the Polish school curriculum for some time. Starting in the late 1940's, the Russian language was adopted as the primary foreign language to be instructed to all students from the age of 11 and upwards, regardless of the kind of institution (Janowski, 1992, 43). A "West European language" was offered as a "second foreign language" only to pupils attending full secondary school, in other words, institutions leading to a school leaving certificate (Janowski, 1992, 43). From the 1989-90 academic year onward the learning of Russian ceased to be compulsory, and, at about the same time, the Polish government began to encourage the widespread teaching of West European languages in schools (Janowski, 1992, 50).

New Teacher Training Colleges

Fifty-five new teacher training colleges have been opened throughout Poland in support of the government's policy (Janowski, 1992, 51) and by 1992 two foreign

organizations had endorsed this new training initiative by sending volunteers to Poland: 1) Solidarity Eastern Europe, a Canadian company and 2) the American Peace Corps. Dr. Norman Butler has first-hand knowledge about the activities of these organizations. In 1991, he was recruited by Solidarity Eastern Europe to teach English at Rzeszow University of Technology, and while he was there he got to know one Peace Corps worker.

Polish Students Must Learn English

The motivation for this work is Ireland and Great Britain's current "open door" policies towards Polish workers. Citizens of Poland have the same right to be employed in these countries as Irish and British nationals.¹ Therefore, it is now more important than ever for Polish students to learn English.

The theoretical framework for this article is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

Native and non-native teachers of English

Students are more likely to learn how to speak English when taught by a native as opposed to a non-native teacher of English. It is not natural for Poles to speak to one another in English. Nevertheless, some of Dr. Butler's students at AGH University of Science and Technology have told him that it is easier for them to communicate in English with non-native teachers than it is with their foreign counterparts. Dr. Butler could identify with his students remarks. When Dr. Butler studied Polish it was often easier for him to communicate (in Polish) with his fellow-students than with native Poles.

Native teachers of English employ current idioms when speaking and writing when in fact their Polish tallies make use of outdated ones. This is not surprising because many non-native teachers have limited contact with native speakers of English. It is quite expensive for Poles to travel to English speaking countries.

Native instructors of English interact with non-native teachers enabling them to maintain and increase their level of competence in the target language. For example, when Dr. Butler was employed at Rzeszow University of Technology a Peace Corps volunteer, he organized conversation classes for all members of the teaching staff. Furthermore, native teacher interactions involving colleagues and students leads to increased information about English speaking countries.

As a matter of fact, native instructors enhance the credibility of English language programs. That means that they should be employed in the Polish school system. Interestingly, language schools in Poland advertise that they have native speakers of English on staff in the hope that they will attract more students.

Non-native Teachers of English Have Greater Teaching Strengths

Non-native teachers of English have teaching strengths that native teachers do not possess. They are more familiar with the difficulties in learning English than their foreign counterparts because they have had direct experience in acquiring the target language. For instance, it is easier for non-native teachers to instruct students when to use the present simple tense and the present continuous tense than it is for native teachers. (There is only one present tense in Polish).

Finally, it has been Dr. Butler's experience that it is easier for non-native instructors of English to teach beginners than it is for their foreign counterparts.

Concluding Remarks

It is important to ease the 'cultural shock' that native teachers of English experience upon arriving in Poland, and this can be done by:

1. Assigning non-native teachers to assist the newcomers in such matters as finding accommodation, acquiring a visa etc.
2. Enrolling native teachers in Polish language courses

Note

1. According to the Irish Examiner, thirty three thousand Polish workers have arrived in Ireland since Poland's accession to the EU in May, 2004..

References

1. Irish Examiner, Abuse of Polish workers widespread, says embassy. <file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Norman%20Butler/Moje%20dokumenty/story130329102.asp.htm>, Retrieved: 12 November, 2006.
2. Janowski A. (1992), Polish Education: Changes and Prospects. Oxford Studies in Comparative Education 2 (1), 41-55.