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ABSTRACT

Although many would like to see the monolithic structure of society altered to allow cultural pluralism to flourish, it should be realized that for at least the next generation, large segments of minority citizens will remain in a socially and economically disadvantaged status, penalized because their life styles and languages differ from the Establishment norm. ESL (English as a Second Language) and ESD(English as a Standard Dialect) teachers have practical reasons for attempting to broaden the linguistic repertoire of their students: they will have greater social acceptance and mobility, a broader range of options, and greater ability to compete on an equal footing with other members of the mainstream society. However, for many students, long-term goals and such middle class rewards as academic grades, teacher approval or parental support seem ineffective motivation. While the author does not suggest that role playing and sociodrama should replace patterned language drill, he stresses that language, to be usable, must be spontaneous in a specific situational context, and vary in style from context to context. As natural behavior, role playing can provide the bridge between classroom drill and real life. Some Eskimo and Hawaiian classes are described. (AMM)

ROLE PLAYING: REHEARSAL FOR LANGUAGE CHANGE

by

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All of us here today who are professionally concerned with teaching what we like to term "standard English" are in the business of effecting social change. Much as many of us would like to see the monolithic structure of our society altered so as to allow cultural pluralism to flourish, we must live with the reality that, for at least the next generation, large segments of our minority citizens will remain in a socially and economically disadvantaged status. They are penalized because their life styles and languages differ from the Establishment norm. I think that all of us, as we work with our students from day to day and wonder what will happen to them when they leave school, are staggered and dismayed by the enormity of this problem. As we try to teach our students to learn to use this new language or dialect with greater fluency, we cannot help but realize how small a part of the problem their language, or non-standard dialect, seems to be. Yet, we take comfort in the observable fact that the men who emerge as leaders of disadvantaged groups are bi-lingual or bi-dialectal. Their potency as leaders seems to rest upon their

linguistic versatility - their ability, if you will, to adjust to the multiple roles which our day to day living thrusts upon us. They give credence to the theory that the "effective self is the multi-valent personality."[1]

So, as we go about attempting to broaden the linguistic repertoire of our students, we do so for quite practical reasons. We believe that acquisition of the standard dialect will give our students greater social acceptance and mobility - that their range of options will be broadened - and that they will be better able to compete on an equal footing with other members of the mainstream society. In these days of educational ferment, where all of us are taking a critical look as the validity of the things we teach, our task seems to have an intrinsic relevance.

Just as the Eskimo parent teaches his children how to hunt and fish and learn to live hospitably within the rigorous arctic environment, so we are teaching the communications skills which have replaced the gun and the axe as instruments of survival in our culture. If we step back for a moment and regard our function in society as an anthropologist might, we see that we are teaching survival skills: how to use language to get along, to adapt to new conditions, to contribute to and to emerge from the group. In short we are trying to provide the disadvantaged person with the additional skills he will need in order to achieve self-respect and autonomy in the wider society.

Yet, relevance is a time bound concept. Teachers and all other agents of change are inclined to value long-term goals.

Whether this is so because of their greater perspective, or because their day to day teaching seems to produce no noticeable effect is another matter! One thing is sure - the argument that a certain skill will be "good for you someday" is a notably ineffective way to motivate students. Long term rewards and distant goals are incomprehensible to the young, particularly the disadvantaged young, who may be more concerned with dealing with they day to day problems of hunger, alcoholism or brutality which they may face when they leave school and return to the real world of their homes and neighborhoods.

Perhaps the largest problem which the ESL or ESD teacher faces is the resistant student's unspoken question, "What's in it for me?" - not, "What will it do for me, someday?" - because that's too far away - but, "What's in it for me NOW?" Or, in behavioral terms, what are the immediate payoffs? For many students with whom we work, the middle class rewards of academic grades, teacher approval or parental support are not the answer. The food, money, and clothing which the student may someday be able to acquire as a result of his improved ability to communicate do not help him today. But these very items, labeled extrinsic rewards, are successfully being used right now in certain educational settings.

Other student reasons for resistance to language change are more often expressed as follows:

> "What's wrong with the way I talk? It works just fine in my world."

It is a fact that certain teachers, whether they are aware of it or not, implicitly convey negative feelings about the student's

original language or dialect. Obviously, the student in this situation feels defensive and fears that learning a new language or dialect will somehow erase his old one.

"I don't want to change into someone else - they're trying to whitewash me." This was told to me by an Indian girl in Canada who had been made to feel that she must irrevocably transform herself into an image she despised if she was to be able to get along in the white man's world. She has already anticipated the ostracism and ridicule she would encounter if she became a "white Indian" and had utterly rejected the notion of learning the standard dialect.

"Nobody I know talks that way." Although this reason may still hold validity for some students, the impact of the media and the emergence of more minority group leaders who serve as models weaken this argument.

It is clear from the reasons which students express that many interference problems are caused by confused expectations on the part of the teacher and the student. The teachers are frustrated because the students don't use the language outside of class - or even outside of the drill structure within the class. The students can't see the need for the language, are bored with the drills, and have the mistaken idea that the new language or dialect will erase their ethnic identity. This lack of communication between teacher and student can be eased considerably, it seems to me, if both parties begin the language change process with some common understandings.

First, it may be helpful to remember the distinction which Bernstein has made between language and speech. The two levels of language, structure and vocabulary, together constitute what he terms "the totality of options and the attendant rules for doing things with words."[2] Language symbolizes what can be done. Speech, he points out

> "is constrained by the circumstances of the moment, by the dictates of a local social relation and, so, symbolizes not what can be done but rather what is done with different degrees of frequency. Speech indicates which options at the structural vocabulary level are taken up."[3]

Between language and speech is social structure. If we accept this distinction as a premise, language, if it is to be usable, cannot be taught in vacuo. It must be taught as a spontaneous act which is generated in a specific situational context, and one which varies in style from context to context.

Second, each of us play many roles as we go about our daily living. In fact, "the wider our repertoire of honest roles, the more effective we are as communicators."[4] No matter what language or dialect we speak - we are not the same in every social situation - we adapt to variations in place, time, and condition - we behave differently - we vary our language style. A person who does not adjust, someone who behaves in the same way in all situations and circumstances, is considered pathological. Such a person who cannot cope with the reality of multiple roles and multiple role-expectations often becomes confused as to which "self" is his real "self." A dissonance or struggle is set up between the roles he plays and what he thinks he must do. Cognitive dissonance, or the struggle between behaviors and values, is a phenomenon which

deeply affects students in a second language or dialect situation. But it need not exist if both teacher and student are aware of the shifting roles and language styles which are part of the fabric of our daily lives.

Third, the myth of Haole, Honky or Gussuk talk should be explored. Do all white people talk alike? Is there such a thing as White Speech? When the student and teacher both come to realize that a person's dialects and styles are determined, not by his race, but by the role he may be playing at a particular time and place, the fear of "selling out" can be seen to be a dangerous misconception. Unless its members develop linguistic adaptability, a closed society is likely to remain so.

Fourth, if language or dialect is tied to role behavior, the student and teacher should study the ways in which a child develops his linguistic ability and his role-taking skill. One thing is certain: We are mimetic creatures. We learn how to talk by imitating models we see around us. In sum, each of us is unique, but we are composed of bits and pieces of language and behavior patterns we have picked up throughout our lives. We acquire new attitudes and behaviors if they are relevant and useful to us at the time. Though this is largely an unconscious process, it is, nonetheless, the way that we develop and change as individuals. Some of this learning is institutional - embodied in the curricula of our schools. But, we are discovering that most of it is situational - it takes place during the hours when school is not in session and the student is engaged in the process of dealing with real life situations which are important to him.

The language styles which we acquire are appropriate to the roles we see played around us. Childhood play in many cultures foreshadows later adult activities. Games such as "House," "Doctor," "Cops and Robbers," and "School" are early rehearsals for roles the mainstream child may be called upon to play as an adult. A young daughter of a colleague informed her father the other day that the torn, folded, and mutilated punch cards all over the living room floor were the residue of a game called "computer programmer." A student who received his institutional and situational education in the mainstream culture quickly learns the cluster of behavioral and language expectations for each of the many social and vocational roles he sees around him.

The disadvantaged child, on the other hand, lives in a closed society which offers fewer and, often, different options. Whether he lives in Waimanolo, Hawaii; Bethel, Alaska; or Inner City, Los Angeles; he is likely to come from a home which is not geared to mainstream role expectations. His childhood games may have prepared him to become a hunter, a skin sewer, a beach boy, or a gambler - all important survival roles within his own closed society - but not with behaviors he would find useful in the wider variety of roles available in the larger world around him. The responsibility for teaching the skill, attitudes and concepts which the student has not been able to acquire at home then become the school's. Indeed, the school can provide a sheltered environment in which the student can experiment with his language and behavior without the rejection and ridicule he might encounter in daily life.

Finally, the student and the teacher need to understand the peculiar cultural pressures each of them brings into the classroom with him. How has his original culture or sub-culture taught him to perceive language? What are the things which language can and cannot do? For, of course, language is our way of looking at the world.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, one of the Alaskan Eskimo's chief difficulties in using standard English stems from his traditional reluctance to use language in the manipulative ways that we do. Coming from a culture where one's thoughts and feelings are regarded to be sacred and inviolable, he would not dream of trying to influence the actions of others. Indeed, he tries to be as much like his peers as he possibly can. As a child, he learns how to behave by watching people carefully. There is no need for our Western Thou Shalt Nots, when he can see that certain actions are not done. It is not surprising that his tendency to use language in what we would consider to be a passive manner, coupled with the paternalistic setting in which he is taught his new language, causes him to adopt what seems to be a child-like role whenever he finds it necessary to use English. Traditional classroom rewards of praise or prizes which single him out as "different" are notably ineffective.

Contrast this with the Hawaiian homestead student's bombastic use of colorful Pidgin to express his every change in feelings. Traditionally pushed out of the nest with the arrival of his next younger sibling, he spends most of his childhood years trying to gain the status and affection from his peers which his parents

have not supplied. Often, the only attention he receives from his parents takes the form of beating and verbal abuse. Small wonder that sociologists note that the Hawaiian student's chief objective in relating with adults is avoidance of pain. Bestowing or withholding love, our traditional mode of motivating others in and out of the classroom, simply does not work with the Hawaiian child. Adults, as he well knows, are not to be trusted. The rejected black child in the ghetto, with an unstable family situation, also relies upon his peer group for affection and status. Confrontation with authority and subsequent "trouble" are to be avoided at all costs.

These are the built-in pressures which operate against behavioral change in our students. Until we try to understand these forces and design new teaching strategies which take them into account, our content and methods will continue to seem dry, ritualistic and irrelevant.

In each of these three groups, we can see that peer-conformity pressures are far more potent than adult influences. Unless the student is a hopeless social outcast, it is unlikely that he will respond to teacher-adult approval. He simply doesn't need it. It has no payoff. Any behavioral change, if it is to be accepted by the disadvantaged student, must be acceptable to the group as a whole. If the expectations of the teacher can, somehow, be shared by the students as well, then change can occur. But, how to do it? While, in theory the school can serve as a sheltered environment in which the student can try on new attitudes and behaviors, peer group pressures can prevent any experimentation from occurring.

Yet, each one of our students is changing before our eyes, daily, as, indeed, we all are. While our reluctant language student may not choose to adopt any of thenew attitudes and behaviors we are trying to teach, he is, as we are, constantly observing and listening to the language and behavior patterns he sees and hears around him and internalizing them, to a degree, whether he likes them or not. Though he may refuse to adopt the patterns we think he should acquire, he is nonetheless developing as a human being - reacting to stimuli which have meaning to him. Most importantly, if he is an avid television viewer, he may have a greater store of standard English patterns filed away in his mind than we give him credit for.

This realization struck me while I was working in an Hawaiian schoolroom a couple of years ago. I had the opportunity to work with some rural elementary school children on Molokai, a rather isolated plantation island. Most of the children were Hawaiian or Filipino-Hawaiian, spoke only Pidgin, and displayed the boisterous and undisciplined behavior which is typical of such groups. I was using the acting games approach suggested by the Viola Spolin book[5], a method which might be described as a physical-intuitive approach to acting. As we moved out of pantomime and into improvisation, the classes suggested problem situations which they wished to play out. Naturally, many of the problems involved confrontation with authority.

One improvisation sticks in my mind. An extended strike of the pineapple harvesters was in progress at the time and many of the workers and their families were being fed three meals a day

at outdoor union soup kitchens. Two of my fifth grade students, both Pidgin speakers, chose to play out a scene which took place in the plantation manager's office. The Filipino-Hawaiian boy who took the role of the plantation boss opened the scene by lighting an imaginary cigar and answering the telephone. Obviously the call was from his boss in the main office in Honolulu, and he responded with almost perfect standard dialect. As he hung up the phone, his acting partner, playing a pineapple picker, burst into the room and announced in vivid Pidgin that a machine had broken down and that he suspected sabotage. The boss almost exploded at the news (this time in Pidgin) and proceded to berate the hapless worker with a colorful use of profanity that can be appreciated only if one has heard Island Dialect.

Other scenes like this one were played out. What do you do when a policeman accuses you of breaking the law, or, when the principal calls you into the office for fighting on the playground? In almost every case, the student who chose to play the authority figure tried to speak using the standard dialect. In fact, the more successfully the actor avoided Pidgin and used the standard dialect, the more delighted his peers became. Although my objective as a teacher was not to change language behavior per se, here were students whom I had observed in English class speaking almost incomprehensible Island Dialect now choosing not to use it, and receiving the support and encouragement of their peer group at the same time! This classroom exercise and others like it demonstrated to me that non-standard English speakers are more linguistically versatile than their teachers think they are. We cannot ignore the pervasive language changes that the media are

causing on the situational level of learning among the disadvantaged.

An Alaskan colleague of mine who also uses role playing in his elementary classroom in a remote village mentions that his Eskimo students use the standard patterns only when they are in "pretend" situations. In the shelter of the game structure, they are able to use their new language spontaneously and unselfconsciously. The delight of the audience who, in turn, become actors themselves is all the payoff the students need. But, some cautionary notes are in order. Though tempted by the prospect, the language teacher must not use the role playing games in a manipulative fashion - structuring the problem situations in advance so as to load them with standard dialect roles, then suggesting more correct language patterns at the end of the scene. This stifles student enthusiasm and willingness to experiment. As Shaftel points out, a natural refining process takes place as the scene is replayed by other students who may wish to offer an alternate solution.[6] As the students come to feel at ease in the game situation, they spontaneously adjust to the linguistic and behavioral demands of the roles they play. Audience comments at the end of each scene are far more influential than any the teacher might choose to make. Students rarely let an inappropriate behavioral response go by: "You didn't make me think that you were a doctor - doctors don't talk like that!" The next time that student's turn comes to play a standard speaker, he is likely to modify his language style accordingly.

In 1963, Anthony outlined some approaches to English language teaching which have been adopted by our organization. Under

crucial areas of needed research he included

> "...development of feasible ways to teach the situational contexts in which standard English is appropriate thereby enabling the student to differentiate the social and cultural situations in which each of his dialects can be used to best advantage."[7]

I can think of no more natural way, within the context of the schoolroom, to teach these situational contexts more effectively than through language generating activities such as role playing. Perhaps it is because of my theatre-orientation that I believe that acting, or pretending, or "trying on" new behaviors is a natural part of human development. We do not live out our lives according to a prepared script (unless we believe in pre-destination) but, rather, we improvise our way from youth to old age, adapting ourselves to an environment which is constantly changing. We are able to live successfully to the extent that we are able to experience our world and learn from it.

I am not suggesting that role playing and sociodrama should replace the careful linguistic research which has led to contrastive analysis and development of patterned language teaching. Drill is, and will always be an important way to practice new behaviors. We must not lose sight, however, of the way that every human being learns new behaviors or makes them "his own." He "tries them on" somewhat cautiously in a situation where he anticipates no criticism, and if they "work" he may use them again in another more threatening situation. As he develops confidence in their usefulness, they become a part of him. Speaking is, after all, a spontaneous and improvisatory activity, and it should be rehearsed in as life-like an atmosphere as possible. As a natural human behavior, role playing can provide the bridge between classroom drill and real-life.

utilization of new language patterns. It can give zest and relevance to the process of language change.

Footnotes:

1. John W. Keltner. Interpersonal Speech-Communication: Elements and Structures (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), p. 58.

2. Basil Bernstein. "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," in Alfred G. Smith, Communication and Culture: Readings in the Codes of Human Interaction (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 428.

3. Ibid.

4. Keltner, op. cit., p. 56

5. Viola Spolin. Improvisation for the Theater. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963).

6. Fannie R. Shaftel and George Shaftel. Role-Playing for Social Values: Decision-Making in the Social Studies (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967).

7. Edward M. Anthony. "Approach Method and Technique," English Language Teaching (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).