

## INVITED ADDRESS

### A RATIONALE FOR TEACHING CHILDREN WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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Last spring on National TV, a teenage boy who was a recent immigrant from the Far East and had come to the United States only four years before knowing no English, delivered the valedictory address, in excellent English, for his large high school graduating class. His notable success had been brought to President Reagan's attention. How could he have achieved both the mastery of the language and the mastery of the academic work in four short years? While I have no further information about this individual, I can assure that his success is *not* typical. My purpose this morning is to discuss the problems that millions of boys and girls share in our public schools trying to master both the language and the ability to study in that language.

The 1980 census shows that 4,500,000 school age children, almost all with varying degrees of limited English proficiency, came to the United States in the decade of the 70's. Four and one-half million children represent ten per cent of all the school age children in the country.<sup>1</sup>

And all of us imbued with a Judeo-Christian conscience like the words of Emma Lazarus inscribed on the Statue of Liberty:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door. (Emma Lazarus, 1849-1887).

My German ancestors came to Philadelphia about 1750 and so many other Germans came with them they almost became a *majority* in the state of Pennsylvania. And they spoke only German for a long, long time.

So many Puerto Rican children came to New York City in the early 1950's that the Fund for the Advancement of Education gave the New York City Schools a grant-in-aid in the amount of half a million dollars in 1953. Special ESL teachers were hired, many culturally relevant materials were developed, and many teachers were given fellowships to spend summers in Puerto Rico so they could see where these children "were coming from."<sup>2</sup>

By 1963, huge numbers of Cuban children were enrolling in Dade County, Florida schools. Completely bilingual programs, in grades one, two, and three were set up in 1963 in the Coral Way School in Miami. Approximately half of the instruction was given in Spanish by competent Cuban teachers and half in English by local teachers. The program succeeded and expanded. Richardson reported in 1968 that many completely biliterate children were finishing the sixth grade.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid 1960's, the specialization of teachers of English as a second language was developing to respond to the needs of myriads of both children and adults who needed to learn

English. The practice was already in place for bi-national centers in Capitol cities across the world to hire ESL teachers so that citizens in those countries could study English for nominal fees.

#### The Pattern Practice Methodology of the 1960's

The methodology for ESL teachers was heavily slanted in favor of adult students. Pattern practice, the mim-mem, audiolingual methodology was not so bad for adults. But we soon learned that it could be excruciatingly deadly for little children. The few hundred commonest English language patterns were soon found in a variety of drill books and they gave teachers a systematic approach to presenting the language of English. The Army War College in Monterrey was able to put military personnel through twelve weeks of "total immersion" so they could move into a target country and converse in that language.

Of course language is not really learned apart from meaningful communication and young children generally did not master English by merely drilling its patterns. It soon became clear that the mimicry-memorization, audio-lingual method was not enough to develop effective language users in young children. Some who advocated rigid pattern practice argued that pattern practice might be boring for the teacher but that the children loved it.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, however, what the teacher finds boring, he/she makes boring for those he/she teaches.

Creative teachers were alert to failure of specific methods and were quick to try something else. Generally, they added such activities as folk songs with lots of repetition in lots of verses, rhymes, jingles, singing games, and headphones for listening to cassettes to hear the suprasegmentals (pitch, intonation and stress) of the language. Herbert, A Native American graduate student, told me not long ago that he really finished learning English when he was overseas in the army. When almost everyone else was asleep, he learned that he could listen, out on a remote Pacific Island, to the singing of a great variety of popular songs. He said he listened and sang along hour after hour. He told me his enunciation of English was really not very good before he did that.

Carolyn Graham with *Jazz Chants for Children*<sup>5</sup> and Pamela Beall and Susan Nipp with *Wee Sing and Play*<sup>6</sup> have provided for classroom teachers the cassette tapes to encourage listening to the pitch, intonation and rhythm of the language.

#### The Natural Approach

In the past decade, one method widely accepted by the ESL specialists for teaching English as a second language is called the Natural Approach to Language Learning. The Natural Approach encompasses three major facets:

- 1) a point of view about how language is acquired;
- 2) a provision of maximum input of learning stimuli to the learner which is *always comprehensible* to him;
- 3) a low-anxiety environment in which the child's *affect* is always positive and he feels that he will be successful at whatever he attempts.

Krashen and Terrell emphasize that the comprehensible input and low anxiety resulting from the teacher's skillful af-

fective filter are the two most significant factors in language learning.<sup>7</sup>

About the first point, language acquisition, Terrell writes: Language acquisition refers to the unconscious absorption of general principles of grammar through real experiences of communication using L2. It is the basis for most first language ability and in terms of L2 is commonly known as "picking up the language."<sup>8</sup>

Dulay and Burt differentiate between meaningful messages for the boys and girls and what may be in the teacher's lesson plan:

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a natural communication situation that is most overlooked in language classrooms is that the attention of the speaker and hearer is on the *message* or the content of the verbal exchange rather than on its form. Yet, most language teaching materials focus on the structures to be taught, often with the result that the message of the sentences taught, if there is one, is meaningless for both teachers and children.<sup>9</sup>

Natural language learning requires that the children take an active role in communication and that they are willing to take calculated risks in interacting with others. Further, they need to be able to *negotiate* with others about the language to be presented. Sociolinguistically speaking, this means that useful language must respond to the question: Who says what, to whom, and for what purpose? Negotiation means that the children have choices about the time, the manner, and the extent to which they will initiate language responses or conversation in their interactions with others.

Brian Gray helps teachers develop and expand *concentrated* encounters with children. The encounter is any meaningful situation in which language context is developed, expanded and shared by the teacher and children. Probing and modeling strategies enable teachers to maximize language development. Gray gives "Saddling a Horse" and "Making Toast" as two examples of context in the real life experiences of the boys and girls with whom he works.<sup>10</sup>

Working with aborigine children in Northern Territory, Australia, Gray asks teachers to move *from* the inflexible textbook content planned by experts from far away *to* children's learning-contexts worked out by the children with the help of their teacher. The ESL program of twenty years ago that failed to produce the desired results was designed by someone who decided what to teach and when to teach it, was used by teachers who were asked to follow a guide book, and often was *not mastered* by the children who were not invited to express an opinion about its content. Gray suggests that we start with the children and find out what content is important, interesting, or necessary to them and encourage them to talk about it. Children will talk when or because they want to talk. In this way, children negotiate their own language development. Then the only methodology the teacher needs is that of facilitating effective interaction to get language out of children that can be used for talking, writing, and reading. Concentrated encounters become significant when the teacher finds out what language, in the child's current circumstances, is important to him and serves a need. Once the teacher finds

this out, he can then negotiate to pics of conversation of intrinsic interest to the boys and girls.

### DEVELOPING LISTENING FLUENCY

Asher has contributed two very significant notions to the teaching of English as a second language.<sup>11</sup> First, he has found learners of new languages need *time* to hear the language before trying to respond by using it. So he recommends that language lessons can continue for weeks with the teacher using the language and the learners demonstrating understanding of it without speaking it. The idea is that the mind needs to hear the rhythm, the supra-segmentals, the intonation of the language for some time before the learner needs or is ready to try to imitate it. Asher emphasizes his point about listening in this paragraph:

For at least one semester in college or six months to a year in high school, the goal of foreign language learning should be *listening fluency* only. The listening fluency should be so keen that when the (Spanish) student visits Mexico, he can understand almost anything he hears on the street, on television, or on the radio. When this level of comprehension is achieved, the student may be ready for a graceful transition to speaking Spanish.<sup>12</sup>

### THE TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

The second contribution of Asher has been termed the Total Physical Response. Total physical response is a point of view that in the beginning all the new language should be the learning to understand spoken commands and to exercise these commands — but does not require speaking any language. For example, the teacher says, "Stand up." Those who are directed to do so, stand up. The teacher says "Turn around twice" and everyone in the group turns around twice. The learner executes the command but he need not say anything.<sup>13</sup>

These two concepts — that we should give the learner ample time to get ready to speak the language before demanding oral responses, and that the first learning in the new language should be language to which he can respond through physical activity to show understanding — are very important concepts in the natural approach to language learning.

Tefft<sup>14</sup> in a doctoral study at the University of New Mexico, devised a guide for teaching physical education to Navajo children in the primary grades that would provide a great deal of language "acting out" in meaningful situations. Following are patterns practiced in a first grade class in the fifth week of the semester:

<i>Lesson content</i>	<i>Language</i>
Activity: Ball handling bounce and change hands	Question — answer Teacher: Who can bounce the ball and change hands? Class: I can. He (She) can, too.
bounce and catch	Teacher: Who can bounce and catch the ball? Class: I can. He (She) can, too.

walk a chalk line	Teacher: Can you walk the chalk line?
	Class: Yes, I can walk the chalk line.
	Haske: Yes, I can walk the chalk line.
jump the chalk line	Teacher: Can you jump the chalk line?
	Class: Yes, I can jump the chalk line.
	Anita: Yes, I can jump the chalk line.

### THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF LITERACY IN TWO LANGUAGES

Jim Cummins, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, has made some significant contributions to understanding how the school student learns a second language. He believes that the use of either of two languages, under positive conditions, promotes the development of proficiency in both languages. He has differentiated two levels at which boys and girls use the language and the significance of this difference. And he has concluded, with support from other researchers, that boys and girls need five or more years in school undergirded by the use of their first language to give them enough time to master the second language sufficiently to use it for regular academic work. I'd like to talk about these three things briefly.

There are two diametrically different conceptions about the learning of two languages. One notion is that learning a second language is sure to detract from greater mastery of the first language; the other notion is that the two languages, in long term memory in the brain, complement each other. The first point of view is that if one learns two languages they constitute two separate linguistic systems in the brain. Thus, one has a separate underlying proficiency for each language. This implies that the more one is stimulated to develop one language, the more the other language will be diminished. So, if the second language learners continue to have instruction in language one, they will be less efficient in the learning of language two. While this common assumption is widely believed, *it is just not true*. During the last two decades of bilingual instruction in the public schools, there has been *no* evidence to support this model.<sup>13</sup> I feel that this point of view has been working against adequate education of Spanish-American children in New Mexico ever since New Mexico became a state.

Cummins supports a model of bilingualism which he calls Common Underlying Proficiency. The cognitive/academic proficiency gained in language one is equally useful in language two if the learner knows the labels in both languages. This means that the literacy skills in the two languages are interdependent. This model tells us that the use of either language in meaningful contexts promotes the development of proficiency in both languages if there is adequate exposure to the second language to apply all the concepts learned in the first language.

### THE ACRONYMS BICS AND CALP

The elementary classroom teacher must help the new language learner develop enough sophistication to succeed in the regular classroom and achieve on a par with his agemates.

Cummins has explained that there are two aspects to the language program. First, there are the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) which include all the language needed for the interpersonal communication during the day. Greetings, talk about the weather, personal questions teachers must ask to complete their records; following directions and responding to general commands constitute basic interpersonal communicative skills. These some three-hundred commonest expressions (What's your name?; How old are you?; Come up and see me some time) were the primary content of the ESL drill books twenty years ago.

But another corpus of language needed to insure success in academic subjects is cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). Cognitive/academic language proficiency is the dimension of language related to achievement in school. Understanding concepts of time, measurement and distance in mathematics; understanding metaphor, simile and idiom in literature; and knowing the meanings for concepts of latitude, altitude, the equator and the life zones of the earth are all examples of this cognitive/academic language.<sup>16</sup>

I would like to share a personal example of one person who possessed BICS fluency (interpersonal communication) in Spanish but was not prepared, without some hard work, to use Spanish to convey subject matter. A colleague of mine, Dr. Frank Angle, entered school in San Miquel Co. in New Mexico as a Spanish speaker. All of his school life, of course, he was taught in English only. Then, when he became a college professor and was invited to teach Educational Sociology in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, he needed to give himself a "cram" course in all the Spanish terminology equivalent for the English vocabulary of sociology. Being a fluent speaker of the BICS level of Spanish did not mean that he was prepared to teach content which Cummins has labeled CALP.

### HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

If one accepts the distinction presented in the terms CALP and BICS, then one must think seriously about the levels at which boys and girls are to be *admitted to* and *terminated from* bilingual programs in the schools. In the transitional programs, the directors tend to move children back to the mainstreamed classes, without additional help, as early as possible. It should be clear now that transferring boys and girls out of the bilingual programs must not be based only on measuring their basic interpersonal ability to converse. Such "natural communication"<sup>15</sup> is not sufficient to determine the student's ability to compete with peers in achievement in mathematics and social studies. However, Cummins feels that most bilingual programs are apt to focus on the differences in BICS in language one and BICS in language two and not pay nearly enough attention to CALP in language one and CALP in language two.<sup>17</sup>

Chamot, writing for the National Clearing House for Bilingual Education, says:

Recent Canadian research shows that whereas the LEP child requires only about *two* years to reach native speaker proficiency in BICS, it takes *five* to *seven* years to reach a CALP level comparable to the native speaker.<sup>14</sup> Harris, in Australia, has also emphasized the need for long periods of instruction to master this language as it is used in textbooks.<sup>19</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

Our unresolved problem may be that we talk about ESL teachers as if this were a valid excuse for all the rest of us *not to know*. Classroom teachers are generally totally unprepared. Probably we need to utilize ESL specialists to help regular teachers in much the same way we use reading specialists.

From the learning point of view there are dangers inherent in the concept of drill books that prescribe what to do each day. The items identified in the footnotes for this paper suggest that there is a wealth of good information for those who will pursue the topic. My review of Gray's sound approach suggests that teachers must know something about language acquisition; how to create rich, learning environments in classrooms; and how to give boys and girls freedom to learn what they want and need to learn.

Suggestions which teachers can adapt to their own needs will be found in current literature. I will suggest a few:

- 1) Phillip Gonzales in a recent issue of *Language Arts* gives specific suggestions for teaching English to young non-English speaking children.<sup>20</sup>
- 2) Eustolia Perez, in the *Reading Teacher*, reports a small study that improved the oral language competence of Mexican American third graders.<sup>21</sup>
- 3) Mavis Martin and I have a short article in the *New Mexico Journal of Reading* in which we've tried to illustrate how the teacher can use the schema concept through webbing to show language learners the multiple meanings and the interrelationships which many common words have. We used the word *blue* to point out multiple meanings in color (navy, turquoise, robin's egg), as idiom (blue sky, blue collar, blue blood), as foods (blueberries, bleu cheese), and as parts of animal names (blue jay, blue bird, the blue whale). Our hope was to alert teachers to start with one meaning and build on that until there are dozens.<sup>22</sup>
- 4) Harris, in talks to teachers of aborigine children, discusses informal methods that have been working: the lap method of reading, the shared book experience as elaborated by Don Holdaway<sup>23</sup>, the use of stories with many repetitive lines, listening posts with cassettes, and the impress method in which adult and child read together.<sup>24</sup>
- 5) Elley and Mangubhai experimented with a reading program for teaching English as a second language to Fiji Island children. They hypothesized that repeated exposure to high-interest illustrated story books in the target language mould produce rapid L2 learning.<sup>25</sup> They delineated factors in language learning that cause learning of L2 to be increased: (1) strong motivation; (2) emphasis on meaning; (3) increased exposure to the language; (4) attention to the redundancy in the language and the awareness of the suprasegmentals that add meaning; and (5) the quality of good models (pp. 54-55).

First Elley and Mangubhai tell us briefly their view of the second language program in the South Pacific Region. The *Oral English Syllabus* (Tate, 1971) provides for oral drill practice. This practice does not represent genuine communication,

the repetitions are contrived and often monotonous; the exposure is minimal and carefully controlled, and many of the teachers themselves are teaching in their *second* language.

These authors selected a sample of 380 boys and girls in classes 4 and 5 in eight Fijian rural schools and provided in each classroom 250 high-interest, low vocabulary story books in English. Generally these classrooms had very few books for pupil selection for reading. The sixteen participating teachers used either a usual SSR program or a Shared Book Experience Approach. A control group of 234 boys and girls were taught by the traditional Tate *Oral English Syllabus*. That (the control) method put little emphasis on reading.

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Post-tests after eight months showed that pupils exposed to many stories progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate. At the end of the following year, the gains had increased further and spread to related language skills.

. . . the critical factors which brought about the substantial improvements were related to greater and repeated exposure to print in high-interest contexts, in conditions where pupils were striving for meaning, and receiving sufficient support to achieve it regularly. These features were common in the experimental groups and absent in the controls (p.66).

This study strongly supports the provision of a wide range of suitable, well-illustrated, high-interest story books for children with limited English proficiency and then plan for scheduled time to insure that students read them.

A rationale for teaching any children anything in 1984 may well consider some of the ideas of Leslie Hart in his writing about the brain and what teachers should know about accessing learning for children. Hart writes:

While the teacher may be working hard to "teach" a class of 25 youngsters, he/she needs to be aware that he/she is really not teaching *the whole group* at all. Rather, 25 individual brains, each of which will *tend* to what it chooses, will process the teacher's input in *its own individual* way, relating it only to previous *individual* experience. Teaching — as good guidance — can only facilitate the constructive processes of the learner. Learning goes on incessantly, in *each individual*, in a purely individual way, and each learner builds his own Prosters (program structures) to meet his personal need.\*\*

\*\*Leslie Hart, *Human Brain and Human Learning*, (Longman, 1983), pp. 77-78.

## SUMMARY

With young children, we know that an informal approach in a carefully-planned, rich learning environment with a low anxiety level is a good way to extend and enrich language. This is just as true for children learning English as a new language, or learning a greater depth of English as a second language, as it is for native speakers of English.

Some of the key ideas I have cited for ESL specialists are these:

- 1) children need a rich, comprehensible input of meaningful language (Krashen, 1982);
- 2) children work and learn best under states of low anxiety (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982)<sup>13</sup>
- 3) children need to be taught in rich, well-arranged learning environments;
- 4) improving oral language competence may improve reading ability (Perez, 1981);
- 5) children profit most from the content of language that focuses on the needs and interests of the group (Gray, 1983).

## NOTES

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