Language and Language Teaching

INSIDE

Articles, Interview, Landmarks, Book Reviews, Suggested Readings, Classroom Activities, Forthcoming Events

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Language and Language Teaching

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Language and Language Teaching (LLT)
Objectives

Published twice a year in January and July, Language and Language Teaching (LLT) reaches out to language teachers, researchers and teacher educators on issues and practices relevant to language teaching. The primary focus of the publication is language pedagogy in elementary schools. LLT proposes to establish a dialogue between theory and practice so that practice contributes to theory as much as theory informs practice. The purpose is to make new ideas and insights from research on language and its pedagogy accessible to practitioners while at the same time inform theorists about the constraints of implementation of new ideas.

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2. *Language and Language Teaching (LTT)* welcomes papers/articles that have not been published elsewhere and have not been submitted elsewhere for publication at the time of being sent to *LLT*. Copies of letters granting permission to reproduce illustrations, tables, or lengthy quoted passages should be included with the manuscript.

3. Articles should be between 1500- 2000 words in length. Book Reviews and Annotated Bibliography should not exceed 800 and 400 words respectively.

4. The first page should contain the article title, author(s), affiliation(s), a short form of the article. For correspondence, contributor should provide his/ her name, phone number, complete mailing address and email address.

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(Chomsky, 2010: p.27) or (Labov, 2010, p.56) or (Halliday, 2010, pp.56-57)

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John, G. (1977). Is Indish the answer? Youth Times, 2 September, 44-45.
National Council of Educational Research and Training, India. (2005). National curriculum framework (NCF 2005). New Delhi, India.

11. Page numbers for all direct quotations should be provided. Direct quotations of 45 words or more should be indented.

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Articles

Helping Children Become Readers

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Pathways to literacy

Literacy, for the purposes of the census, is the ability to write one's name. But to reduce literacy to a signature is obviously to trivialize it. Nor is literacy merely the ability to recognize alphabets, and to put them together to read words, or to read a text. Although all these skills are part of the road to literacy, true literacy is *the ability to read independently, a text of one's choice, and understand it*. (Note that literacy is not merely the ability to read a textbook and answer questions based on it, just as arithmetic is not simply the ability to learn up the correct solution to every problem in a given book.)

The 'text of one's choice' may be trivial, such as a road sign; or ephemeral (impermanent) such as a newspaper or a poster; it may be an official text, such as a contract at work; or it may be a text that needs a more intellectual and imaginative engagement. But if we ultimately want to be able to read for information, knowledge, and imagination, we must recognize that literacy is a journey. At school, all we can do is start the child off on this journey. What roads the child takes, how far down the road the child goes, and at what pace; these decisions are not in our hands. They are a matter of individual choice.

Our task, therefore, is to empower children to build on and construct their own pathways to literacy. A child who leaves school should do so with the ability to read what he/she wants or chooses to read. A person who can read only what they have been taught to read is not a reader. The aim of teaching reading is to create readers.

A child's ability to read is a skill that stays with him/her through life. However, this skill grows and develops with the child and is not a competence that we can give to the child as a full-blown ability.

In this paper, I shall first attempt to outline models of literacy. I shall then present an argument to highlight the fact that what is missing in our schools is voluntary reading of a text chosen by the child herself/himself; this is a critical step in creating a reader.

Models of reading

There are a variety of 'models' for teaching an individual how to read and the methodology of teaching depends on the model chosen. At one end is the 'bottom-up,' letter or alphabet and word recognition approach; at the other end, the 'top-down', whole word, holistic, meaning-making approach; the interactive compensatory model often brings together the two approaches.

The bottom-up approach

The bottom-up approach draws on the skills involved in proof reading, where every letter is attended to, and reading is slow and painstaking. It is the kind of reading we do as adults, of unfamiliar names (try reading the names *Bryzinski, Urquhart,* or *Cholomondeley;* or the words *semordnilap,*

matutoltpea, scaphoid, pococurante, metencephalic, rhabomancy, and *paraskevidekatriaphobia).* These are all real words that can be found in the online Macmillan English Dictionary and the Random House Dictionary.

While reading the unfamiliar names or the words in the above paragraph, most people will perhaps first read them letter by letter, or syllable by syllable, and then join the letters and syllables to form a word. According to Gough (1985), this is called the *bottom-up* process of reading, where reading proceeds from part to whole. In this model, the reader first identifies the letters, then combines them into spelling patterns like *spr* or *bl*, and finally proceeds to word recognition.

This model gives very little importance to world knowledge, contextual information, or other higher order reading skills of the reader. It equates reading with the decoding of visual symbols. Moreover, it may not present an accurate picture of how a skilled reader actually reads, for it is well known that skilled and fast readers are not very good at proof reading!

The top-down approach

The top-down approach makes use of the skills involved in a quick, holistic recognition of words. It is how we read logos, brand names, or names that are very familiar to us such as name of a place (*Delhi*), product (*Xerox*), and people (*Sachin Tendulkar*); many pre-school children and illiterate adults can recognize signboards of shops, and names of products (popular soaps and toothpastes). That is why smaller local products often imitate the names and logos of the larger well known brands!

All of us read to acquire information. For this, we use our knowledge of the world and contextual information. That is how we can read words that are half hidden, or written in ink that has been washed away. Therefore, one can easily read the words with faint letters in this sentence: "Yesterday we took the children to the zoo. We saw lions and tigers."

According to the top-down model of reading, a reader goes from the whole to the part, is carried forward by the meaning, and brings to the text his/her knowledge of the world, as well knowledge of the language. The top-down model emphasizes that we are very good at *predicting* what occurs next in a text.

The interactive compensatory model

The 'interactive compensatory model' argues that while reading, both sets of skills – bottom up and top down – are utilized by a skilled reader, as and when required. A person who is not very familiar with a language may not be able to predict the words as compared to someone who has knowledge of the language. Such a person would use a bottom-up approach while at the same time attempting to predict from his knowledge of the world, or subject.

Different types of texts use different models of reading. For instance, the rapid reading of detective fiction involves skills quite different from those required for reading a list of culturally unfamiliar names, such as a roster of delegates at an international conference. On the other hand, we read a bus sign very rapidly and selectively, with just a quick glance to confirm that it is indeed the bus we want. We thus have a repertoire of reading skills at our disposal and the models of reading are not mutually exclusive.

These different models of reading offer to us strategies that complement each other in the teaching of reading. Just as there are alternative

routes to good health, whether through diet and exercise, yoga and meditation, or medication and surgery, there are alternative routes to literacy and the pedagogy of reading. Different techniques may be appropriate for different individuals at different times. Thus teachers need to be aware that there are different routes to literacy, and the fact that these routes are not mutually exclusive but can complement each other. In addition to that, the pedagogy of reading must also create awareness of the various models of reading that can be used to teach reading. This awareness is important because different individuals have different preferences, interests and aptitudes. There is no single way of teaching that is suitable for everyone, at all times.

Learner autonomy and learner-chosen texts

A classroom is made up different types of individuals. Pedagogy is not a matter of covering the syllabus or of imparting skills or knowledge, but of affecting individual minds. When the many minds in the classroom engage in a process of cognitive activity, they begin to take charge of this activity and to explore their capacities and limitations in the domain of thinking, just as on the playground they explore the possibilities of physical action. Learning consists of mental activity, and mental muscle is built up during this activity. To teach is therefore to provoke individual mental activity.

Thus, reading is best learnt when a child tries to read and when every child chooses the text which is at the right level of challenge and interest *for that child*. Krashen (1985) uses the term *"i+1"* to describe a cognitive zone of language growth; if your ability is at level *i*, your best learning occurs if you are exposed to language whose complexity is just one step above your ability. The psychologist Vygotsky (1986) describes a 'zone of proximal development,' wherein you can solve with help, problems that are a little more complex than those that you can solve on your own. These insights however, leave the level *'i'* or the zone of proximal development, open to our interpretation. Just as it is difficult to prescribe how hungry someone should be, or how sleepy, it is difficult to prescribe what a person should be able to read. To take care of hunger and sleep, caregivers try to encourage a routine, and provide the facilities to eat and sleep. The same approach needs to be adopted for reading.

Therefore, our schools need to have more of read-aloud stories at the early stages, and additional reading hours at the later stages of reading. Even the prescribed textbook can be taught in a way that encourages learner autonomy. I have described (Amritavalli, 2007) how a group of disadvantaged learners (whose English was much below the standard expected of them) was asked to simply 'find something that they could read' from a textbook. Every student managed to find something, even if it was only a couple of sentences. Most astonishingly, what we were left with at the end of such sessions of finding readable texts, was a 'book within the textbook' that the children could read on their own.

This 'book within the textbook' consisted of: (i) only the picture pages (which contained line drawings); (ii) none of the prescribed reading passages; (iii) poems, and other material such as dialogues for practice, vocabulary exercises, grammar exercises, etc. In short, every piece of text that looked short enough to be read by a learner, had short paragraphs, involved turn-taking and dialogue, short lines (as in poems), and most importantly, was a short text, was chosen. These were not

texts of over two or three pages that had to be 'taught' for two or three days, but texts that could be read and completed in about a quarter of an hour.

When we think about it, most of us read short texts every day, except for those of us who are addicted to reading long novels, or are teachers and academics. Most everyday reading is done for short stretches of time, and for specific interests or information. Researchers in the UK looking at children's reading choices found, to their surprise, that children read a lot of poetry, and that the weakest children choose to read poetry (Hall & Cole, 1999). This is because poems are short texts with short lines, and their rhyme and rhythm, aids in the predictability of the text.

Finally, in our day to day life, we as readers choose what we want to read. Yet, the classroom gives no opportunity for a child to do the same. Let me end with an anecdote to emphasize that a lot of ability and effort underlie the exercise of choice of a text, by a child. A group of nine-year olds learning Telugu as a second language (for about three years) were told by their teacher that after the summer vacation, each of them would have to share with the class something that they had read in Telugu during that vacation. As a result, the children found themselves *looking for texts that they could read and that they could share*. Their parents were also pleasantly surprised that Telugu story books or magazines that had so far lain neglected were now being leafed through and discussed in pairs and groups by these children.

In this short paper, I have not touched upon the 'sub skills' of reading such as 'skimming' and 'scanning', but the reader can easily guess what these sub skills are, and appreciate the fact that a lot of scanning and skimming

happened before each child finally decided on a text to read and present. The children included cartoons and jokes in their search for suitable texts. At work, I came across a group of adult international students, learning English at our institution, again searching for jokes, anecdotes and other such short materials to read in English. None of our prescribed texts had such materials.

Whether child or adult, the learner-reader is the best judge of what he/she wants to read. We need to research into children's reading choices in countries such as the UK, to ascertain what fluent readers in different age groups are reading on their own; this will serve as a benchmark of what the most successful reading programmes for particular age groups can do in our schools.

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Current Research in Language Assessment and its Implications for Language Teaching

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The layperson thinks that the syllabus and classroom teaching mould tests, for educational testing is meant to evaluate what is taught. But sometimes it appears as if the opposite is true, and that testing occupies a disproportionately large space in the curriculum. In the 1980s, a number of studies were conducted on the backwash effect of testing on teaching; it was felt that the nature of the test framework affected the nature of the learning aimed at and even coloured the interpretation of the syllabus. The nature of the test, thus, being crucial to the curriculum, requires that we devise the right kinds of tests.

Of course, testing often being the ultimate end of the game of education, and specific test frameworks adopted for a variety of administrative and other reasons, it is not easy to make changes in the format. Even research in testing has only a limited degree of influence on practice.

I shall start by giving a brief overview of the recent trends in language testing. The role of educational administrators in the choice of test patterns is very important. Also, the massive effort of teacher-training and retraining, has financial and administrative implications that make even slight alterations in the educational system almost impossible. However, with concerted planning and implementation, major changes can be made, as was achieved by the now almost forgotten 'Madras Snowball' English teaching experiment which the British Council launched in the 1940s, on a wide scale in South India. This experiment had a very positive impact on the levels of proficiency in English. So, change can be implemented; why not try for it on at least a small scale?

Language testing has run the gamut between three approaches: i) what can be called 'traditional' testing, based on the grammar-translation approach to teaching; ii) the so-called 'scientific' approach to testing, somewhat pathetically called 'objective testing' based on the approach to teaching developed in the 50s and 60s called 'audio-lingual' and 'audio-visual'; and iii) more recent approaches based on what has been referred to as the 'socio-psycholinguistic' approach to language teaching. The first of these approaches to testing considers language as a fixed set of rules and the use of language mainly as an exemplification of these rules. Typical test elements include: changing voice from active to passive, changing speech from direct to indirect, inserting prepositions, articles and other such small grammatical items in given blanks in sentences. From these highly controlled activities there is a leap to 'global' questions such as answering comprehension questions on unseen passages, summary/précis writing and essay writing.

The second type of approach to testing attempts scientific precision. Since the earlier type of testing was considered unreliable because of assessor bias, tests were devised so that there was only one correct answer to each question. Thus, the so-called 'objective testing', particularly in its most popular form, the multiple-choice format, was born. In this, typically, a sentence or sentence fragment was given, and four different responses were

provided out of which the candidate chose one. These exercises usually focused on grammatical correctness.

This approach required students to discriminate between responses and select one, rather than thinking about the question and produce an independent response. Nor did it tap the student's knowledge of the language in context, or of realistic language use, but instead focused on grammar in isolation. Again, a factor which has consistently been ignored is that the writing of objective tests is an extremely complex and highly specialized task, requiring a great deal of pretesting and standardization if the test is to be fair to all the candidates. Unfortunately, the word 'objective' has lured everybody into thinking that it is a panacea to all test development problems and it has been widely used without any corresponding research on its validity.

What then can we offer by way of a good test? It is worth considering that if we need to assess language ability, we should be able to get evidence that the candidate can use the language in a natural or a semi-natural context, that is, be able to speak and understand oral speech, and read and write its written version. We should also be able to test whether the student can conduct a simple conversation, or write a short note with a reasonable degree of clarity. Surely, the function of language is to communicate information, and this should be done with intelligibility and appropriateness to the context.

The third type of approach to testing, called the 'socio-psycholinguistic' approach, is something we should take seriously. The sociolinguistic part of this test relates to the focus on language in context and awareness of dialectal variety and styles of speech.

The concept of 'language in context' is very important. Language occurs in context, only when one person is speaking/ writing to another and not in isolation as an example of sentence patterns. The relationship between the participants, whether there is a feeling of distance or familiarity between them, whether they are equal in status, or age, and so on, will influence the language used. Words will have to be chosen as per the conventions of politeness and the norms of cultural behaviour, which will make them appropriate to the context. It is important to understand that even grammatically correct language can give rise to great offence if these conventions are flouted.

The other aspect of the test, the psycholinguistic proficiency, relates to the way in which languages are learned by first language learners. From the 70s and 80s, much research has been done on the way first language learners acquire language and whether the processes of second language learners vary. Research indicates very clearly that there are two ways in which second language learning can proceed. In a formal classroom set-up, the focus is on grammar. While this seems to work with highly motivated persons, or those with a markedly academic bent of mind, the larger number of successful learners learn far better through informal contexts which focus on meaning and not grammar; they speak in context, just as a first language learner does, and thereby effortlessly internalize the grammar. Internalizing the grammar implies that the rules of grammar are unconsciously acquired. This enables the learner to generate plausible instances of language, which, instead of being empty grammatical vehicles, convey genuine content. We get a clear example of internalization in language learning by observing neighbours in a building. Hindi speakers living next to Tamilians, for example, have no

difficulty in acquiring Tamil, even though they have major problems learning English at school. It is necessary to recognize that Tamil is far more different from Hindi than English, for Tamil is not even an Indo-European language. Yet, when learnt informally, it seems easier for Hindi speakers to learn Tamil rather than English taught in a formal context.

The question that arises is how to build these insights into the normal round of tests a learner has to undergo at school or college. Tests are what society requires as a proof of learning, and established patterns of measuring learning cannot be changed readily. In India, we have two different standards operating simultaneously. We expect students to demonstrate grammatical knowledge piecemeal on an English test, and take this as evidence of learning, but we also expect that people should be able to speak, listen, read and write in English, in order for us to say that they know English. For example, if an English-speaking foreigner asks someone the way to the station the person should be able to reply intelligibly, or understand the contents of a letter, or be able to draft a reply without just copying a similar letter from the past. The English test, however, does not correspond to the demands of the man on the street. It is just that we are not allowed to do anything different; the pattern is set. In order to make a change in the examination, students will have to be trained in a different manner; courses will have to be run differently and teachers trained accordingly. It is a gigantic task, not easily contemplated.

What then can one do? Fold one's hands and twiddle one's thumbs? Not quite. For one thing, the more awareness there is of what is truly required to test adequately, the more chances there are of changes taking place, even on a small scale. Other steps can also be taken by a committed teacher. Perhaps the ordinary classroom tests can be moulded to measure ability more meaningfully, without the teacher getting into trouble. This could also certainly be done in the lower classes in school where students are not appearing for Board exams, or indeed, in private classes for teaching English. My approach may sound like an undercover operation, but it is difficult to take liberties with established test frameworks. Many things are of course, possible if the university or institution concerned is willing to take the chance. Before I suggest some small changes in the existing test framework that teachers could adopt on their own, let me outline two major projects that were officially launched in Maharashtra.

One of the projects relates to testing the 'Communication Skills in English' course in the First Year BA Programme at Mumbai University. As it involved thousands of students, it was a major project that required almost continuous teacher training in the early years. The test framework was unique, involving different levels in the same end-of-year exam. There were various levels of difficulty in terms of language, thought-content and the nature of the task. All the students were supposed to answer questions at each of the Levels, but it was expected that only the better students would be able to tackle the Level 3 questions, thus separating the better students from the weaker students in a principled way. Level 1 (which carried 50% of the marks) was geared towards the low achiever, and Level 2 was the in-between level. This was an attempt to take care of the wide range of levels of ability in English within Mumbai University, as it caters not only to a city like Mumbai but also the surrounding mofussil areas. It also ensured that the different groups all had their measure of challenge, hence not unduly sacrificing the good or the weak student.

The nature of the tasks set was also of a different kind. I shall deal with the tasks set in the initial version of the test, which remained virtually unchanged for about twenty years. There was a section each on Reading Comprehension, Summary Writing, and Composition. Reading had four unseen passages, two at Level 1, and one each at Levels 2 and 3. There was only one Level in Summary Writing and two levels in Composition. Another major departure from tradition was that the tasks and passages were entirely unseen, so that the content could not be memorized in advance. Students had to demonstrate genuine knowledge of the language in order to succeed. Again, the nature of the questions was markedly different. Each question was worded in such a way that the words in the question were entirely different from those in the passage. Having similar words is a standard trick that makes the answer fall into the lap of the student without his/her making the effort to comprehend it. Care was taken to ensure that the student had to genuinely understand the meaning of the text in order to get at the answer.

Moreover, being a reading test, an attempt was made to word questions in such a way that to answer them the students had to pick out words from the text. Hence, there could be a question such as: "There are 2 words in the text meaning 'beautiful'. State these." Students were not expected to produce their own language, which is a writing task, and even if they did, they were not penalized for incorrect grammar. Correctness of production was tested in the writing component. Another important dimension of the reading task was that it was expected to be a cognitive challenge – the right associations, links, judgments had to be made, which are factors of reading tasks.

It is also necessary to state that the reading tasks in this course involved a number of different cognitive skills. An analysis of the reading questions set for the Communication Skills course (Lukmani, 1982/1994) reveals that the questions demanded the following skills: recognition, identification, discrimination, analysis and interpretation. These skills represent a wide range of cognitive functioning and are routinely required in any genuine reading endeavour.

All this, has had to be stated very briefly (without dealing with the rest of the course), but a more comprehensive description of the reading questions mentioned here, with examples, is provided in the article mentioned above. In addition to this, there is, a detailed description of the course, and its evaluation that was conducted with the support of British Council, after 10 years of its functioning, in Lukmani (1995). The results, based on a study of students of different proficiencies, revealed an enormous progress in the English language ability in the course of a year, particularly in case of the weaker students. It is also interesting to know that at a seminar held in Ratnagiri around that time, teachers from mofussil colleges said that they wanted a course of this kind only to improve the level of their students. Insights into the types of questions used in this course, and documented in the articles mentioned, will give you an idea of what is possible to achieve even within the system. They will also indicate to you how the quality of learning in the classroom can be enhanced by having the right kind of tests as the end point of the course.

Another experiment in testing was initiated by Dr S.V. Sastry at Shivaji University, Kolhapur in Maharashtra in the 1980s and the 90s. Dr Sastry was following on from a research done in the 70s in the US and Britain,

where a wonder task/test had emerged called the Cloze test.

The Cloze test consisted of a passage where every nth word (e.g. the 5th or 7th word) was left blank, regardless of whether it was a function word or a content word. It was believed that if the student could fill the correct words in the blanks, he would demonstrate knowledge of the grammar as well as an understanding of what was being expressed in the text.

As Head of the Department of English at Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Dr Sastry introduced the cloze test in the First Year B.A. English examination. This was a major departure from tradition, and was continued as part of the University examination for about five years. In order to have lasted longer, and to have had the wide-spread salutary effect it was intended to have on classroom teaching, a great deal more teacher training needed to be done. Nevertheless it was a very bold step, and a genuine attempt at improving the system.

The above two experiments have been put forward to show that even extremely innovative changes are possible given the will to change things. But it is certainly possible to introduce some small changes in the test framework during classroom tests in order to provide avenues for greater learning. In order to do this, we must get students to realize that:

1. Language must be produced and understood at a certain pace. If it takes too long to read, write or understand the flow of speech/writing, they cannot use language properly in any natural setting.

2. Language has to be learnt and produced in context, so notions of cultural specificity and appropriateness are important. Equally important is the improvisation of situations in the classroom which approximate to real life.

3. Perhaps most important of all is that what the students say must be intelligible, in both speech and writing, or else they will be producing not language but nonsense constructions, even though the grammar may be beautifully formed. An important aspect of intelligibility is connectedness of ideas, and linkages provided in the language, or what is known in literature as 'coherence' and 'cohesion'. Control over these aspects will certainly help in achieving intelligibility.

I would like to suggest some tests which can measure development in these three areas. These test types can also serve as tasks in the classroom. These tests are:

1. Speed/ fluency tests

Speed Reading gets the eyes to move, and focus on the meaning of the whole passage, and not get tied up in knots over individual words and expressions that they can't understand. For this, only very broad questions can be set, in perhaps a True/False format, to test the global level of comprehension, and a calculation of the reading speed be measured as a measure of progress in speed.

Writing for fluency

In this test, the students are made to write briefly (say for five minutes) on any topic. The objective of fluency writing is simply to get the pen moving – a seemingly impossible task for many students. Nothing is to be tested - not meaningfulness, not connectedness, not grammar. The students can write on anything they choose - and they generally choose topics

very close to their lives – the only condition being that they don't raise their pens from the paper. Having tried this task extensively at all levels of proficiency, from beginners to research students, I can claim that after the first five minutes of writing, it is difficult to get students to stop writing. They begin to enjoy the process immensely.

Speaking for fluency

This is similar to writing for fluency, in that there is production of text without a pause. Students have to speak to their neighbour for five minutes. Once again they are not corrected for anything, not pronunciation, not grammar, not ideas. The sole objective is to build their confidence, their pace of speaking and their ability to carry on speaking. Students are always pleasantly surprised to discover how much they can say in English!

2. Focusing on connectedness of ideas and linkages in language

There are so many possible exercises for focusing on connectedness of ideas and linkages in language, however I shall suggest just a few. I can, however, refer the interested reader to the long list of exercises (in all the skills) that I have proposed, along with examples, in Lukmani (1996). Some of these are as follows:

i) Combining a given pair of sentences in order to indicate the kind of relationship: comparison- contrast, causal link, etc.

ii) 'Unjumbling' a jumbled paragraph. The sentences of a paragraph are presented in a random order and the student has to put them back in the original order. This involves knowledge of the rhetorical development of ideas as well of the

linguistic signals which indicate these relationships.

iii) Editing unsuitable passages of student writing/journalistic writing/office correspondence to improve the rhetorical patterning.

iv) Creating a coherent passage from a collection of different bits of information.

v) Adding the given pieces of information to a passage. Deciding where and how to insert these from the point of view of appropriate organization.

vi) A paragraph is presented to the student. He/she is asked to imagine the situation in which it occurs, and write a suitable beginning and end for it.

3. Appropriateness to context

The easiest way to function in a context is through role play, i.e. by students enacting a scene. It is not a daunting task if done without any words initially, and can also prove to be great fun. In the second round, the same role play can be done but now with the words added. For this test, familiar situations can be chosen, e.g. the student asking his mother for permission to go out and the mother refusing permission, saying that he has to stay back to study. The language in the same basic situation will be different if an elder brother was to refuse the younger the right to go out. Another example could be from an employer-employee encounter when the boss is accusing his junior of not doing his work properly. Any number of such situations can be used and each time the language will differ depending on the relationship, the difference in social status, the nature of the topic, etc.

Another important area is that of feedback, or correction of errors. However, this is a matter of assessment, and not testing, even though it is impossible to separate it from testing.

Teachers may conscientiously wish to correct everything that is not right, but they should also consider the impact of the correction on the learner. If the learner is constantly told that everything he produces is not correct, he is likely to become too diffident to try to improve. That is why it is important to have fluency exercises where no correction is done. Another approach could be that of limited, focused correction, where only one feature is selected and corrected.

Finally, test patterns have to change and teaching has to correspondingly improve so that the student has a chance to learn in the language classroom. Even in a small way teachers can institute some change in the classroom, and then perhaps this could lead to larger changes in the system.

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Using Language in the Community for Enhancing Communication Skills

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Language is something that distinguishes humans from animals and all humans are biologically programmed to gain knowledge with language as the catalyst. Nativists such as Noam Chomsky proposed that all humans have a language acquisition device which contains knowledge of the grammatical rules common to all languages (Shaffer, Wood, & Willoughby, 2002, pp.391-394). Language acquisition is therefore a subconscious process and the person is not consciously aware of the grammatical rules of the language he or she is acquiring. The focus is on understanding the language one encounters, or enabling one's audience to understand what one means. An individual receives 'comprehensible input' from the environment, which is easy to interpret due to the accompanying contextual and non-linguistic cues and also because it is in a 'low stress' situation. The language that we acquire, be it in the form of new vocabulary or new expressions, is therefore always a little beyond the language that we already know.

According to Piaget, a child's language learning capabilities and cognition depend on his/her level of maturation, but this alone does not lead to learning. Interaction with the environment, being in the company of older people who are more fluent in the language, and being driven by an innate desire to communicate, share and be accepted in the adult world, all contribute to a child's language development. The social angle of learning, more specifically collaborative learning, that Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development, wherein the learner learns new skills or concepts in the company of better informed, better trained or better equipped persons, is very true of language learning. The Interactionist also argued that 'children are born with a powerful brain that matures slowly and predisposes them to acquire new understandings that they are motivated to share with others'(Bates, 1993; Tomasello, 1995, as cited in Shaffer, et al., 2002, p.362).

From the above context, it can be noted that the adults who surround the child may not use perfect grammar in their speech. There may be errors, repetitions and omissions in their language; they might even use pidgin language deliberately, for the very young. Their language may have a reduced syntax, no seemingly fixed word order and individual variations in expressions, but these are accompanied by many non-verbal cues such as the situation, objects, people, gestures or emotions. The child thus retains whatever is emotionally dynamic or memorable, and tries to work out the syntax on his/her own through a varied and repeated exposure to a particular 'piece/form of the language'.

If children are able to acquire a fairly perfect/workable syntax of a language through exposure to pidgin, baby talk, and idiosyncratic use of language by the surrounding adults, then there must be something more than mere exposure to language that comes into play. It is the context, the situation, the need, the objects in question or alternately their symbols

(visual cues) and the emotional or social relevance that aid this acquisition of language.

The environment is replete with language, its symbols as well as graphic symbols that are often explicit and occasionally implicit. To begin with, the very act of living is directed by language in the form of instructions, directions, daily talk, signs and symbols, warnings, explanations, public notices, posters, name plates, sign boards, advertisements, hoardings, tags and what not. In addition to that, there are people from different walks of life using the language in their professional, social or idiosyncratic ways.

Thus, if understanding signs and symbols are essential to language acquisition, then the learner needs to be equipped with visual literacy, which allows a person to 'decode non-print messages and bears many similarities to forms of verbal communication' (Rose, 1982). Non-verbal messages such as modes of dress, body language, billboards, road signs and other environmental signals send silent but clear visual messages.

Say, for example, if a sign displays the message 'Restricted Area', we assume that the area in question must be an army area with sections cordoned off with barbed wire, or traffic inhibitors such as barriers. Similarly, if a sign has a horn with a slash across it, there must be a school or a hospital nearby. Houses with large nice lawns may indicate an affluent neighbourhood. The symbols of a man and woman indicate that there is a public utility such as a washroom or a toilet nearby. Often, these symbols are accompanied by text as well, hence the familiarity with the language.

A well-developed visual sense is an asset in verbal communication. A child who can read visual clues effectively has the making of a good reader of verbal clues as well. Both these types of clues stimulate oral or written expression. Emergent literacy also suggests that a child needs to learn that the object and its symbol, whether written in words or in drawing or etching, are all interchangeable as far as meaning is concerned. Once the child becomes aware of this principle, he/she launches on a language learning spree, absorbing all that he/she can see, hear, or feel, constantly translating it into meaning.

Let us look at the following progression suggested by Karel Rose (1982).

> We look.
> We see.
> We think about what we see.
> We talk about what we see.
> We write about what we see.
> The more we are able to see, the more we may want to talk or write about it.

Teachers can help students to see more perceptively, and hence increase the reservoir of knowledge on which their expressions are based. Every youngster can be helped to see more effectively. The more visual clues a person is able to see, the better he/she is able to participate and communicate. It is just like a 'scientist reading the findings on a slide, or a detective reading the body language of a suspect' or a politician reading the mood of the public. This of course does not mean that visually impaired people cannot become proficient readers; in fact, with modern technology, many people with visual impairment become as good or even better readers than 'normal' people.

Visual literacy can be nurtured by taking the learners out in the neighbourhood, noting

public and private places, and observing the details of the messages that various symbols or notices seem to convey. Say, for example, the words 'restricted entry', *'pravesh nishedh'* or *'Illi lorry pravesha nishedha'* (Lorries are not allowed to enter here, in Kannada) can be quickly recognized and acquired from an observation of the situation, i.e. a narrow lane, a low overbridge, an abandoned building, an operation theatre, a dangerous zone, an army area, a place full of inflammable material (smoking is forbidden), a school, a hospital or a college which screams *'mobile ka prayog nishedh'* from every second wall.

Another example, 'Parking at owner's risk' clearly means that the management cannot be held responsible in case of a car theft. It also means that one must lock one's car properly as no one will guard it.

Similarly, a message placed near the lift 'Do not use in case of fire', accompanied by the picture of fire next to a 'Fire exit' (stairs nearby) gives the meaning of 'in case of'.

All libraries have the sign 'Keep silent' or '*Kripaya shant rahe*' along with a poster or a sign. The learner understands that this is a request 'Kripaya' to be silent, as people come to a library to read books. The word *'kripaya'* recurs in places where people need to stand in a queue, keep off the grass, close the water tap after use, or in a holy place for keeping their shoes at the designated place.

A learner attempting to learn Tamil in order to integrate with the Tamil-speaking community will very soon use visual and contextual clues to understand what the word '*venum*' means, when at a tuckshop he/she hears the words '*Mama yenna irruku? (What do you have, Uncle?) Mama onnu coke venum/Randa vada venum/*' *(Uncle, I want a coke/two vadas)*.

If someone says '*Jaasti kaasu venum*' while talking about a project, celebration or purchase, the learner will be able to understand that it means that this requires a lot of money (*kaasu*). Similarly, if the learner encounters the sentence '*Classroomle/Verandahle football bilayadatengo*' *(Don't play football in the classroom or verandah),* the very context will help the learner to guess what '*bilayadatengo*' means. Here, the learner is using logical thinking and reasoning to construct the meaning.

This can be gainfully used in the classroom in the form of role play and the words '*venum*' *or* '*...........le*' (meaning 'in the'*)* and '*bilayadatengo*' or '*bilayadate*' (can play) can be used in other contexts as well. Learners can be given cards which carry the symbols or pictures of various places on one side, and pictures of various activities on the other. They can then use sentences accordingly.

The learner can also figure out not only the syntax and vocabulary, but also its appropriate use in a certain context. Through experience, the learner infers that when asking someone to take out or show something like a ticket, a passbook, a map or an identity card in Tamil, one uses '*kaami*' for persons of one's age or younger, and the word '*kaamingo*' for those one wishes to show respect to. In the same way, the learner concludes that the word '*poo*' is used in an informal context, and can denote petals, buds or fully bloomed flowers. On the other hand, the word '*malar*' is a formal or literary word which the teacher uses in the class, and can only be used for a fully bloomed flower.

There is a word very commonly used in day to day Kannada, '*gallatta*', which may connote a quarrel, a protest, a huge hue and cry, a lot of feverish activity and the noise of children bringing the house down with their screams and shouts. Then there are Bengali

words such as '*daarun*', '*faatiye diyeche*' used as an expression of 'great', or 'awesome', which can be used in a variety of situations from dresses, games, victory at the polls, a successful project, or a good performance. These subtle nuances of language are thus picked up by the learner through greater interaction with people, visits to various places, and by using visual literacy skills and logical thinking. The learner learns to use the formal expressions while writing and the informal versions during day to day interactions.

In the same way, the learner acquires the use of the formal expression 'grahan' meaning 'to take', from his experiences in the world. Expressions such as '*Sthaan grahan karen*' or '*Thoda jal/bhojan grahan karen*', help him distinguish this from colloquial use.

If one compared the public notices or instructions in English to those in the regional languages, one would notice that the English notices often abound in negatives like 'don't or do not'(Do not pluck flowers./ Do not litter./ Do not enter./ Do not make a noise./ Do not touch, etc.). The regional notices on the other hand, are largely positive:

1. '*Joote yahan* rakhen' (Keep your shoes here, in place of, do not take shoes inside/ '*Kripaya shanti rakhen*' (Please do not make a noise)(Hindi).

2. *Eiye dware pravesh karun* (Please enter here, in place of, do not enter by the other door/ *Shabhdahnae vyabohar karun*(Please handle carefully) (Bengali).

3. *Saaman dustbinla podu* (Put the litter in the dustbin, in place of, 'Do not litter')

Imperatives such as the above, that the learner encounters in and around the environment can help him/her to understand the meaning from the context, and gradually also internalize the word order. These can also be practised by the teacher by providing pictures of different places such as parks, religious places, schools, museums. The learners will have to think of the instructions the public would need and construct sentences accordingly.

Thus, if we provide a rich corpus of visual experiences, the language art skills can be fostered.

The aggressive world of advertisement

Children today, are the target of aggressive marketing as they spend a lot of time watching television and also coerce their parents into buying things. They are easily influenced by the aggressive marketing of products which look good on television but are not half as good in reality. There are authoritative voices telling people what to buy and how to think, talk, walk, dress, work, or play. (Rose, 1982)

Similarly, there are posters of various kinds – related to politics, health awareness, announcing events, festivals and sales, etc. The language used in each of these contexts is different. It is usually catchy, with a slogan or two, and an appealing (perhaps even misleading) visual that aims at influencing the public. People are hence often used as receptors of non-print material. The advertisements, television or posters can have an impact on the thinking and learning processes of the children. It is thus important to educate them to receive the onslaught of such material critically and analytically. This would help their intellectual and emotional growth.

Students can bring such posters to class, and critical discussions can be organized wherein the learners analyse the following:

· The purpose stated in the content

· The real purpose behind the poster

· Creative use of language

- Exaggeration, if any (expletives used)
- Role or significance of the visual (is it misleading?)
- Who would be the likely target group?
- What is the behaviour expected from the reader of the poster?
- Who will benefit?
- Vocabulary learnt
- Words comprehended using visual or contextual clues

A whole page advertisement of Security systems says:

> **Secure your world**
>
> With Micro Intelligent Surveillance System (Pictures of CCTV camera, security systems, etc.)
>
> · Live recording
> · Online monitoring
> · CCTV Surveillance
> · Biometric Access Control
> · Integrated Security solution with various types of cameras
>
> To be able to get in touch with dealers and distributors dial :...............
>
> Toll free no: ....
>
> YOUR SECURITY IS OUR CONCERN
>
> Name of company, their email and website Products available at ....

To cite another example, a poster on 'Run for a Healthy Tomorrow/Ek swastha bhavishya ki oar' which shows a bunch of persons from different age groups running enthusiastically, can be analysed too. This poster would perhaps also carry in its corners, pictures of political figures with the logo of the party that is organizing it.

The slogan could be 'Come and join us in our quest in making Preetpur healthy and happy,/ Aayiye Daudiye Preetpur ke swasthya ke liye'. The poster could have the logo of the political party along with the slogan of the day. It might announce gifts and certificates that would be given to people. This poster could be analysed using the above parameters and the students could delve into the real purpose, the real meaning, the tall claims, etc. that are being made. A poster advertising consumer goods could also be analysed as shown above. This will not only give the students an insight into the living language, but also the games people can play with creative use of language.

Use of media, guest lectures, storytelling, recalling anecdotes, or even asking puzzles in a language leads to language acquisition because in all these activities the focus is not so much on the language but on the meaning, the content, or the answer. Learners stand to benefit immensely by visiting different places and interviewing people regarding their work, lives, etc. Children can ask grandparents about life in their times, and recreate it in the form of pictures which they can present in the classroom to their fellow mates in a kind of 'Show and Tell' activity.

Thus, we can see that the language teacher, instead of despairing in the classroom, and bemoaning the paucity of resources, can just look around and put the rich material in the environment to good use for language development. Vygotsky 'repeatedly stressed the importance of past experiences and prior knowledge in making sense of new situations or present experiences. Therefore, all new knowledge and newly introduced skills are greatly influenced by each student's family environment.' (Dahms et al, 2008)

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Acknowledgements

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For the national focus group on the Teaching of Indian Languages at NCERT, the challenge in 2005 National Curriculum Framework was to provide a new perspective for a multilingual country. It was hoped that the gaps resulting from different constitutional provisions and the Three Language Formula would be overcome and there would be a set of recommendations that could actually be implemented and ensure substantially high levels of proficiency in the languages that children would study at school. Most of all, it was hoped that the new language policy will help reduce disparities in society.

It was only after a series of discussions that the group agreed to certain fundamental guiding principles based on contemporary research. These among others included:

- Multilingualism is a normal human state of affairs; it is an asset; it should be treated as a resource, a teaching strategy and as a goal.

- There is a strong positive correlation between multilingualism on the one hand and cognitive growth, divergent thinking, scholastic achievement and levels of social tolerance.

- It is imperative that children achieve substantially high levels of proficiency in different languages. This is particularly true of languages that would be the media of instruction in different subjects. It is inevitable that if language proficiency levels are low, performance levels in content areas will be poor.

- Mother tongues defined as languages of home and neighbourhood must be the media of instruction at school.

- Language teaching should be sensitive to the relationship of language with thought, gender and social power.

It is important to ensure that the language of each child be respected in the classroom. Languages of children of diverse abilities such as sign language and Braille need special care. Ideally, every child should be aware of them and should be able to appreciate their systematic nature.

Hindi: A Language of Serious Discourse?

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The use of Hindi as a language of serious discourse* has been on a decline in the past two decades or so, coinciding with the advent of satellite TV and the era of globalization and liberalization. This is especially evident in a metropolitan city like Delhi; anyone who has spent approximately two decades of his/her life in the city, and has been linguistically observant, would endorse this.

Let us first see in what contexts and for what purposes the adolescents in Delhi engage with language in their daily lives, besides using it for informal purposes such as conversation with friends and family, and for daily life functions such as transactions in markets, buses, banks, offices, etc. How often do the youth read newspapers, magazines and books? What do they read in a newspaper and a magazine? How often do they explore their college library? If they read beyond the demands of the syllabi, what kind of books do they read? What kind of internet sites do the students visit? What is the nature of their engagement with the internet? What kind of listening exposure do they have, or choose to have through the television channels, radio, college or other forums? If we go by a small pilot study done with the undergraduate students of a college on the campus of the Delhi University, students majorly engage in an informal style of Hindi in their daily life. This may be either by choice in some cases, and in other cases because the public spheres of Hindi in Delhi predominantly involve this style of language. Has the engagement with Hindi in a serious discourse been diminishing in the recent past? If that is the case, is some other language replacing Hindi, and being heard, spoken, read and written more? Has the space of Hindi in serious, formal discourses been shrinking over the years, or is our use of language, in general tilting towards functionality (functional purposes of daily life) rather than cognitively and linguistically more challenging and richer engagements?

What are the factors behind these developments? Does education have a role to play in this regard? Let us examine the issue under focus from the lens of education.

Position of language in education

Though the centrality of language to the entire educational enterprise is a well established fact, it is an irony that our education system gives it a very peripheral treatment. Language in education is not merely a literary subject, but is also a medium or a tool to understand various concepts of other disciplines. Thus language is not confined to the literature class alone, but science, social science and math classes are also language classes. In the process of acquiring academic knowledge, students also get an exposure to the registers of these subjects which comprise of specific terminology, phrases, etc., that form the linguistic characteristics of these subjects. Students are constantly using the special language of these disciplines by way of classroom discussions and writing tasks. This kind of engagement with discipline specific language not only enriches students' vocabulary but also enhances their linguistic knowledge.

However, it is unfortunate that we ignore this extremely important role of language across the curriculum, and view it as one of the subjects that is accorded a hierarchically lower status as compared to disciplines such as the sciences, mathematics, etc. Consequently, stakeholders of education, be it parents or the school system, unwittingly ignore Hindi as well as other Indian languages which form a part of the school curriculum. However, English has a unique status in this regard because it is a symbol of power, prestige and upward mobility. It strengthens students' eligibility in the job market.

Unless the significance of language is recognized and emphasized across the curriculum, there cannot be an organized attempt to make the acquisition of its registers a part of the learning process in school.

Medium of education

Linked with the issue of language across the curriculum is the issue of the medium of education. There are innumerable studies and researches that highlight the importance of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, at least till elementary level. Also, there are strong pedagogic, political and identity-related arguments that advocate this. However, in India, the issue of the medium of instruction is linked to the issue of class; usually, students coming from underprivileged backgrounds are perceived to opt for Hindi as a medium of education. Private elite schools invariably have English as the medium of education throughout the school years, while government schools have Hindi as the medium. Non-elite, relatively low-fee-charging private schools have English as the medium of education only for namesake. In such a scenario, if students do not get an opportunity to engage with Hindi to carry out

discourses related to various subjects, they cannot develop discursive skills in the language. After all, one of the most fundamental preconditions of language acquisition is a rich exposure to the language or languages. What about the students of Hindi medium Government schools then, who use Hindi as a tool to understand concepts, across subjects, one may argue. Their command over Hindi is marginally better as far as carrying out a serious discourse in Hindi is concerned. If we examine the issue to find reasons for this, it brings us to the third factor that impacts the higher order linguistic proficiency of students.

Pedagogy: Approach & perspective

The nature and quality of pedagogy adopted in schools across the disciplines is a major factor behind students' ability to use a language for formal discourses. There has been a lot of debate about the concept of knowledge, learning processes, nature of language, abilities of children and pedagogic perspectives in the past few decades. However, there remains a huge gap between the entire educational discourse and ground level pedagogic practices. The latter still reflect the age-old principles which view a child as an empty receptacle to be filled with knowledge. When a child enters school, he/she is considered a blank slate in terms of knowledge and language abilities. The language that he/she comes with is often not the 'standard' language, and the knowledge that she has gained from her experiences and surroundings is not considered valid. A child is supposed to learn by imitating, memorizing and practising what is taught by the teacher in the class; he/she does not have much role to play in the learning process. Therefore, a child is required to be a passive listener in order to learn; the speaking has to

be done by the teacher. This is largely true of both the government and the private schools.

The fresh and progressive perspectives on education are not reflected in our classrooms because the curriculum and syllabi of most of the pre-service teaching programmes such as B.Ed., ETE, M.A. Education, etc. are based on half a century old principles discussed above. In a nutshell, this perspective is so entrenched in the sub-conscious mind of the stakeholders of education that children's creativity, individuality and their active role in the process of learning is rarely of any significance in our formal education system.

The culture of reading

Reading empowers us. It gives a perspective to understand the world, and a confidence to interpret it in our own ways. However, the single textbook approach in our schools limits a student's imagination and hinders independent thinking and learning. A textbook is one of the many resources available for teaching, but in our classrooms it is the only material used. In fact, textbooks in India have come to be perceived as synonymous with syllabi and curriculum. Consequently, the dependence of teachers and students on them is so much that textbooks are viewed as sacrosanct knowledge which cannot be questioned. This does not leave any scope for multiplicity of perspectives, nor does it help students to think independently and critically. This is a reality across the subjects including languages. While the problem pertains to pedagogy on the one hand, on the other hand it is linked with another factor, namely, the culture of reading. Our society, in general, lacks the culture and habit of reading. The very fact that our cities have a negligible number of public libraries and that too with poor infrastructure,

is indicative of the sad state of affairs. In the past few decades, the city of Delhi has expanded manifold geographically, but public libraries do not figure anywhere in the planning of new colonies. To develop a love for reading among students, it is important that teachers too are fond of reading. However, in the existing situation, we cannot expect a teacher to be immune to what ails our society.

Conclusion

Since language, besides being a means of communication, is also a tool or a medium through which most of the knowledge is acquired, one of the objectives of language teaching is to help students develop the ability to understand and use the language of formal discourse by the end of their schooling. What needs to be achieved in the terminal years of school is possible if relevant perspectives and well planned strategies form a part of classroom processes. To begin with, teachers must respect the language and knowledge that children acquire at home because all languages, including dialects are equally scientific and rule-governed. In fact, the rich multilingual and multicultural profile of a classroom can be used as a resource to teach grammar, and to link the content being transacted to their social moorings. Secondly, we must encourage children to think independently. This can happen only if they feel that their views are considered valid and their voices are being heard. For example, instead of telling them *the* meaning of a poem, the students can be encouraged to interpret it in their own ways. A text may have as many interpretations as the number of readers. Also, instead of expecting children to use 'standard' forms of language, they must be encouraged to use language in their own ways, expressing what they think and

feel. What is important is not their grammatical errors, but the content, originality and creativity of what they articulate. Hence new parameters of assessment need to be developed. Thirdly, teachers need not tell them everything; a teachers' role should be to help the children arrive at what they want them to know on their own. For example, instead of telling them the rules of plural formation in a language, we can make the data available to them or write it on the blackboard; they have the ability to observe and analyse the data and come up with the rules on their own. Finally, going beyond the prescribed textbook, we must use a lot of other materials and children's literature in the class; a rich exposure to language enriches the language, cognition and imagination of children. However, everything that is read by them as a part of classroom activity must not be linked with evaluation. One can occasionally have sessions in the class when the entire class, including the teachers is reading a text of their choice.

The goal should be to make children into lifelong readers with a critical perspective. The rest will fall in place.

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* Serious discourse excludes employing language for informal, daily life functions

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Consider the sentences in 1:
1.(a) Mohan jumped from the top of the bank.
  (b) Mad dogs and Indians love to walk in the sun
  (c) Ram saw her duck.
All these sentences have two meanings but for different reasons. I (a) is ambiguous because the word 'bank' has two meanings: a financial institution and say the bank of a river. 1 (b) is ambiguous depending on whether you read 'mad' with both 'dogs' and 'Indians' or with only 'dogs'. 1 (c) has two meanings depending on how you understand 'her duck'; as 'her book' or as some girl/ lady ducking.
(Adapted from An Introduction from Semantic Theory by Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, 1995, Prentice Hall, New Delhi, p. 2)

Reading without Meaning: The Dilemma of Indian Classrooms

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The primary goal of reading is to get the message. The purpose of reading, whether it is reading directions for using a product or reading a complex report on deforestation, is served only if we get the meaning. The ability to comprehend is especially critical in schools because all subjects require literacy to successfully develop knowledge. Therefore, not being able to read independently affects not only the language, but other subject areas as well. Thus, the goal should be to ensure that children develop strategies for comprehending a variety of texts ranging from narrative to expository.

Given the obvious importance of reading comprehension, the situation in Indian classrooms is, by and large, not very heartening. For example, in a study conducted on the children of elite schools of Mumbai, Narasimhan (2004) assessed their comprehension of narrative, expository, and instructional texts. The students displayed a wide range of proficiency in their performance and performed lower than the average in public exams. Narasimhan explained that this result showed that the students did not have the competence to comprehend unfamiliar texts. In a different context, Matreja (2006) studied the seventh, ninth, and eleventhgrade students' comprehension of English texts in the Government schools of Delhi. She found that comprehension was not a priority in English classes and teachers depended on translation of the texts to ensure understanding. Consequently, it was not surprising that they performed poorly in reading comprehension.

While teaching eleventh grade students in an elite school of Delhi, Sinha (1985) found that the students were excessively dependent on the teacher for understanding literature.

No educator will ever deny the importance of reading comprehension, yet these problems persist. To look for an explanation for this state of affairs one needs to examine the prevalent classroom practices to see the possible role they play. The pedagogic practices in the school also unwittingly push students towards non-comprehension. In this paper, I will first describe the process of reading comprehension, and then examine the situation in the early primary and upper primary grades to understand the role the classroom pedagogy plays in aiding reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension

In the past few decades, a lot of research has been done on reading comprehension. In the Indian colleges of teacher education students often say that listening and reading are passive processes while writing and speaking are active processes. Nothing could be further from the truth. Intensive research work (unfortunately not in India) shows that reading comprehension is a complex procedure. The meaning of the text does not get transmitted to the reader the moment he/she decodes the text. One can only examine one's own reading of a text in an unfamiliar area to know that; one may be able to decode it, but one cannot really understand what it says. Comprehension is a very complex "interplay between the knowledge and

capabilities of the reader, the demands of the text, the activities engaged by the reader, and the socio-cultural context in which the reading occurs" (Wilkinson & Son, 2011, p. 359). Further, it is not merely a memory of specific clauses and sentences, but the "overall meaning" made of the text by the interaction of reader, text, and context that matters (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). Clearly, it is a very dynamic constructive process. Some of the things that the reader has to do to remain engaged is to connect the text to his/her prior knowledge (Anderson 1994), be aware whether they are understanding it, and if they fail to comprehend then be able to take a corrective measure (Brown, 1980). Research in this area shows that children are generally not able to make connections to their prior knowledge, nor are they aware of their comprehension failure, and often require corrective strategies (Anderson, 1994) (Brown, 1980). In India too, we need to start focusing on the nature of comprehension instruction because it is critical for survival in school. Therefore, we will examine the situation in the Indian classrooms to see how the instruction influences the reading comprehension of the students. First, I will examine the early primary level where the child learns to read, and then I will proceed to look at the elementary grades.

Reading in the early primary grades: An exercise in meaninglessness

Comprehension instruction is often disregarded in primary education, where the focus is on learning how to decode (Pearson & Duke, 2002). In India, the situation is worse than in other countries because elsewhere, teachers do read out stories to children and they have a wider exposure to children's literature other than textbooks. In India, for a vast majority of children, schools are the only place where they

encounter literacy and schools tend to deal with literacy in what can be best described as a *layered approach* to reading: first, to be able to sound out the word, then worry about its meaning, and lastly, if at all, bother about the function and relevance of written language in further learning. Kaushik (2004), in her study to find out about teachers' conceptions about early reading, found that teachers believed that the most important goal of early reading programmes was to get a sequential mastery of the letters and learn how to blend them to form words. This approach ends up sacrificing meaning for mastery over codes. Textbooks, especially primers, have been blamed for this problem. But the problems also reside with classroom practices. In this section we will first look at the texts and then examine the classroom practices in early primary grades.

Textbooks try to simplify texts so that reading is easy for beginners. However, often this simplification takes place at the price of coherence, meaning, and interest. Primers are one example of this approach. Traditionally, primers are not concerned about teaching children how to comprehend. Their focus is primarily on teaching them how to decode. Sinha (2000) analyzed Hindi primers and found that they are organized around vowel sounds (*matra*). Therefore, the lessons consist of a list of words based on the featured *matra*, followed by some sentences which utilize that particular sound. For example to teach the sound 'i' (vowel in hit) the following words were used: mithas, sitar, barish, palish, takia, bilav, dhania, lifafa, khatia [sweetness, sitar, rain, polish, pillow, tomcat, coriander, envelope, bed] (glosses are given in square brackets; see Sinha, 2000, p. 39).

Although the individual words have a meaning, but put together they are not related (except for the *matra*) and hence they do not

have any collective significance. The sentences following the list of words are also disjointed, and operate only on the logic of sounds. Sinha (2010) questions the merit of primers by claiming that they, "actually teach 'not' to seek meaning while reading. If one reads these texts for comprehension, the experience will be very bizarre because there is no coherent text to comprehend in the first place" (p. 122). So not only is the engagement with the text ruled out, but the child actually learns to not construct meaning. Changes have taken place in the writing of these texts, especially by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in recent years. However, many schools still utilize traditional primers to teach reading, which, even if coherent and not disjointed sentences, are still so insipid that they are not really worth reading.

Even when the texts are better written (for example, the recent attempt made by NCERT to keep the meaning component intact), they are not taught in the classes in a manner that aids comprehension. Children read aloud, copy or memorize the answers. Or else the story is utilized to teach other language skills, e.g. finding examples of nouns or verbs, and the focus is not on understanding. We observed classrooms in two different parts in India to illustrate the point. The first observation was from a grade one class in Jharkhand, where the teacher asked the children to read aloud a chapter several times. The focus was on correctly pronouncing words. Then she asked the children to copy the lesson in neat handwriting. Throughout, there was no discussion of the meaning or any other aspect of the text. The text was coherent and interesting, but nothing was done with it in terms of meaning. In another lesson in Bangalore, while reading the story, the focus was on developing an understanding of the phonological awareness. Children were taught how to identify the syllables in a word. Second grade children spent about half an hour reading one paragraph of a story and they clapped as they heard each syllable. In this process of listening for each syllable and discussing words, the story element was completely destroyed as the children focused only on the sounds. In either case, comprehension was not even an issue in the learning. As a consequence of utilizing stories to teach various language skills, the children get distracted from the meaning of the text. Often, they lose sight of the fact that they are supposed to even look for a meaning.

There is a lot of debate about the different methodologies used to teach children how to read. However, this paper does not try to resolve that. The only point that is being made is that when stories or other texts are used only to focus on language components excluding meaning, children never learn to engage with the meaning of the text. This disengagement can have deadly consequences in terms of a loss of motivation to read (Block, Schaller, Joy & Gaine, 2002). In India, quite often, due to this approach in schools, children do not even realize that they should look for meaning. For them, reading in the early years is an exercise in meaninglessness. Children seek to make sense of the world, not to engage with nonsense. And a children's programme in reading cannot afford to ignore a child's basic nature. To ask a child to wait to make sense is not a sensible approach, as children need to make immediate sense. The postponement of comprehension can prove costly as disengagement with texts can set in and prove hard to rectify. Children may develop the firm belief that reading is nonsensical and fail to use literacy in a productive manner.

Reading in the middle school

In the upper grades, teachers are more concerned with meaning. Typically, they address the issue of comprehension by telling the meanings of difficult words, explaining the text (at least the parts deemed difficult), and asking questions based on the texts. However, the question that needs to be asked about their instructional practices is, do they ensure that the students learn the strategies that will enable them to be independent in reading comprehension? Keeping this question in mind I will discuss some commonly used practices of Indian classrooms.

It is a practice to list difficult words at the beginning of the chapter and to go through them. However, the basis of their being classified as difficult is not very clear. Possibly, the words are selected based on the guess that they may be unfamiliar to children. Although vocabulary contributes to comprehension, yet this method has limited value in terms of understanding a text. Also, the overall value of that particular word may not be significant for understanding the text. Research shows that replacing one sixth of the words of the text with more difficult synonyms did not affect students' understanding of text (Freebody & Anderson, 1983). Thus, unfamiliar words do not always pose a challenge in terms of understanding (Nagy & Hiebert, 2011). In fact, theme related activities such as brainstorming and identifying words are better because they also help in activating prior knowledge (Nagy, 1988).

Explanation of the text post reading aloud by the teacher is a common practice in Indian classrooms. Sah (2009) conducted a study in the sixth grade classrooms in Delhi, and found that providing explanations was a common practice in the Hindi literature classrooms.

Sinha (1985) observed that while teaching English to eleventh grade students, that students were totally dependent on the teacher to get the meaning of texts. In fact, the students got agitated when she refused to provide a line by line explanation and demanded that she do so. This practice of explaining the text is so rampant that the teachers even feel the need to paraphrase some very obvious sentences. They do it with the purpose of making the text accessible to children; however the problem is that although their repackaging of the content may make the content accessible, but they hamper their students' chance of learning to read with comprehension. Hence, it has a crippling effect on the development of reading strategies. The teacher needs to take up the challenge of thinking of different ways of making the text accessible without providing readymade explanations. Sinha (1985) described a procedure in which several poems related to a theme were read and discussed by the students and during the process they lost their sense of dependency on the teacher. *Theme-based reading* will induce some attention to meaning. Prior knowledge discussions, reading related texts on the same topic, and most of all discussions, are ways of developing focus and independence in reading. Also, to take a *problem solving approach* while reading where the teacher "thinks aloud" what to do when she encounters a problem while reading can help students in acquiring strategies to handle a text which is challenging (Pearson & Duke, 2002). Question-answers are routinely used to assess comprehension of texts in the classroom. However, it is important to remember that they are valuable only if they permit the scope for thinking and inference. Factual recall questions can be answered even without comprehending the text as a whole.

To conclude, it is evident that, in spite of concerns about reading comprehension, classroom practices can inadvertently weaken the process of comprehending. It is important to attend to it right from the early primary years and include prior knowledge activation, instruction of reading strategies, and theme based discussions in the reading classroom.

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Children as Authors
To Enhance Writing Skills or to Build Authorial Practice?

Snehlata Gupta, Joseph Mathai and Prabhat Kumar

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and the National Focus Group (NFG) on the teaching of English and Indian Languages have made a decided shift in the approach to language teaching in our country. However, even after this significant step much remains to be done. The new NCERT textbooks launched in 2006 did not completely reflect the thinking articulated in the NCF and the NFG position papers. These changes are also not adequately represented in the approach of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) which also publishes language textbooks, and more importantly conducts the all important class XII examination and structures the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation for schools affiliated to it.

It is worthwhile to study the annual CBSE Secondary School Curriculum to understand the guidance being given to more than twelve thousand schools that are affiliated to it. The 2011 edition, while dealing with the 'Matribhasha Hindi' (mother tongue Hindi) urges the teachers to value 'independent and original thinking'. However, only one of the sixteen objectives points to the importance of students writing from their own experiences and expressing independent opinions. Though the objectives do not seem to be listed in order of importance, it is worth noting that the second objective refers to developing the ability to use the 'viraam-chinh' (comma and full stop) correctly.

Under the section of Communicative English, teachers are urged to develop the 'competencies' of creativity and self-monitoring. Creativity, according to the curriculum, is explained as: 'Students should be encouraged to think on their own and express their ideas using their experience, knowledge and imagination, rather than being text or teacher dependent'. This is followed by a list of twelve abilities that the students need to develop, starting with the ability to 'express ideas in clear and grammatically correct English, using appropriate punctuation and cohesion devices'. Needless to say, the focus throughout is on writing skills and abilities.

The CBSE textbook on *Creative Writing and Translation Studies* acknowledges that creative writing involves the cognitive process of transfer from experience to words. Yet the overriding goal of the course is to sharpen the practical ability of the learner. The course introduces students to different kinds of writing, and contains practical exercises that help students self-check their understanding and how much of that understanding has been translated into ability.

This survey attempts to show that much is left to be desired regarding the changes mentioned in NCF 2005 and NFG in the context of language, especially in the domain of writing. It thus comes as no surprise that writing continues to be seen as a problematic area in the classroom.

It was observed during the survey that often a collective sigh goes up in the class the moment the teacher announces a writing assignment. This reveals the attitude of the students towards writing; it is a chore,

something they hold in dread, and would rather postpone or find an excuse not to do it.

In junior classes, the first response of many students is to immediately head to a corner to start sharpening their pencils. In more senior classes a hunt begins for a functioning pen to do their writing with. Sometimes it takes a good ten minutes for the students to be ready to begin writing. In a thirty-five to fourty minute period, that is a quarter of a class, already gone.

On the one hand, students often complain that they do not know what to write, and wonder how they should begin, or how many words they need to write. Teachers on the other hand, lament the students' inability to write, citing poor handwriting, lack of grammatical accuracy, lack of knowledge of punctuation, poor spelling, lack of fluency, and lack of coherence and organization. It is almost as though these are the only aspects of writing that matter.

So why does writing elicit this near universal distaste from students? And why do teachers lament the poor writing of students?

Let us have a quick look at what students are expected to do when they are asked to write. They are generally expected to:

- copy answers and other extended texts from the blackboard, text book, help book, etc., usually to be learnt by heart, and reproduced as written texts later.

- write/reproduce paragraphs, letters, etc., on tired and clichéd topics such as A Rainy Day, Value of Trees, A Morning Walk, My Favourite TV Programme, and Application to the Principal for Sick Leave.

- Write a report, article, letter, factual description in a given format in a maximum of 200 words.

Teachers either don't believe the students can write on their own, or feel that they cannot be trusted to write on their own. It is assumed that students, if left to write on their own, would make too many errors and the teacher would have to spend too much time correcting those errors. Hence, it is felt that the best solution under the circumstances is to simply not allow students to write on their own. The other strategy is to curtail their writing by rigidly prescribing form and word limits.

Fear and anxiety are a few other major factors that influence the attitude of the students towards writing. Almost anything a student writes has to be graded or evaluated; it has to be given either a right or a wrong and assigned a grade or a mark. Rarely is any writing done for the sheer joy or pleasure of writing. Is it any wonder then that students want to disown any writing exercise as soon as they finish it? Moreover, they are deeply reluctant to revisit their writing. Errors are sought to be hidden under heavy scratches or liberal application of correction fluid.

The experience of Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education (henceforth Ankur) on the question of getting children and young people to write is markedly different.

Ankur is a non-governmental organization that operates in six working class settlements in Delhi. It runs 'Learning Collectives' for the age group 6-11 years, Clubs and Libraries for the age group 10-15 years, and CyberMohallas and 'Young Women Collectives' for the age group 15 years and above. In addition to this, Ankur also works with the entire community of these settlements on issues of housing and demolition, through concrete programmes to enhance the intellectual life of the locality such as the Community Archive, and by holding regular events in the locality. Recently it has entered into a collaborative project with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to

enhance the teaching of Hindi in primary classes in six schools of the settlements where it operates.

The collectives run by Ankur engage in sustained practices. The groups meet every week-day for one and a half to two hours, with an Ankur employee facilitating the interactions. Writing remains a major output of the creative practices of all these collectives. The Learning Collectives generate group creations that get circulated in the form of a poster or a poem. For instance, all the responses to a query such as 'What do you want in Sawda-Ghevra?' (Sawda-Ghevra is a resettlement colony that was set up in 2006 on the North-West outskirts of Delhi) were collated in the form of a poem weaving in the actual text contributed by children into a rhythmic chant, "*park mein ghaas aur pedh chahiye/ shopping mall, chidiya ghar aur dukaan chahiye/ papa ke liye pass mein kaam chahiye/ naaliyon mein paani ka bahav chahiye*" (we want grass and trees in the park/ we want shopping malls, a zoo and shops/ we want work nearby for our fathers/ we want flowing water in drains). Being able to recognize their individual contribution in print form, albeit an A-4 sized laser printout, gives children tremendous levels of confidence, and an eagerness to see more of their works in print.

The rest of the collectives do more of individual writings but they draw sustenance from group practices. The library and the club are an attempt to experiment with different resources that help enrich writing. The club has a non-exclusive focus on the locality, and the library on books. The learning from this experiment is that both resources prove equally rewarding. For now, Ankur plans to merge these programmes and not privilege any one resource over the other. The practitioners have conducted many story-telling sessions in their locality and elsewhere. The writings of the children are now being uploaded onto blogs (http://khichripurtalkies.blogspot.com/ and http://dakshinpuridiaries.blogspot.com/).

CyberMohalla came up with an anthology of writings, which was published in Hindi by Rajkamal Prakashan, as a book entitled *Behroopiya Sheher (*A City with Multiple Forms) and then as an English translation *Trickster City* by Penguin India. An earlier publication *Galiyon Se/From the Bylanes* was self-published by Cyber Mohalla.

The only gender-exclusive group is the Young Women's Collective which has a lot of skill enhancement programmes. They have also recently self-published a booklet entitled *Uddhedbun* (Tangled Weave) based on their writings.

This experiment demonstrates that there is immense creative potential inherent in children and young people, and that this potential only requires an opportunity to flower.

So what are the lessons from Ankur that can be carried into other teaching-learning situations, including formal schools? Let us start by trying to recognize where the urge to write comes from. Nowhere in the pedagogy of writing have we ever felt the need to evoke the desire to write. This desire can only be evoked when we are welcome as writers or listeners to an intellectual context, where we are struck with an idea that we spontaneously want to write about. To quote a writing practitioner in an Ankur facilitated Club:

'*Na aaj mein yeh soch ke thami ki mere paas shabd nahin hain. Naahi iss sawaal ne behkaya ki meri saadi-sapat bhasha kissee ko pasand aayegi ki nahin? Bas man me jin khayolon aur ahsaaso ki tsunami aayi*

thi; unhe ghar jate hee, palang par baith apnee copy ke hawale kar diya'.

(Today I did not stop on the grounds that I did not have the words. Nor was I swayed by the thought of whether or not my simple and sparse style would please anybody. A tsunami of thoughts and emotions stormed my mind and as soon as I got back home, I sat on my bed and just surrendered them to my notebook.)

To our understanding, the closest a pedagogical expert has come to theorizing the anecdote recounted above is Louise Rosenblatt, when she wrote:

Writing is always an event in time, occurring at a particular moment in the writer's biography, in particular circumstances, under external as well as internal pressures … Thus, the writing process must be seen as always embodying both personal and social, or individual and environmental, factors. (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 17)

So while we wait for the personal and individual rhythms to come into sync, what can teachers do to help, as said by Rosenblatt, 'writers facing a blank page' ((Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 16).

Ankur seeks to connect new writers to resources that are close to them. For example: What do we like to eat? What makes us feel happy, sad, curious, and angry? There is also a reconnection with our sense of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. This is done by the practice of writing logs, hence capturing all the inputs we get from our senses in a specific place, in the written form. The impact of this practice can be enhanced or given a special direction by instructing the students to focus writing about the inputs from only one sense. Picture this as akin to students of music practising scales, or martial arts students practising basic punches and defensive moves.

Ankur moves into more advanced writing practices by getting students to engage in conversations with a wide variety of people, and by reading books. They believe that there is a fundamental similarity in the act of listening and reading and encourage practitioners to be active in both processes. Conversations with people, and 'reading transactions' with books continue to energize writing.

But what happens after the first flush of enthusiasm fades, and the writer is left with a small paragraph, or half a page and the spring of thoughts and ideas dries up. Here is where the community of listeners comes in as support. It is the enthusiastic listening, the curiosity and the questions of early listeners that energize the writer. For early stage writers, a close knit and nurturing circle of confidantes are more suitable, but for the more seasoned writer any circle of listeners will do.

Another practitioner of the club writes:

Hamare samne wale Rajesh bhaiya ke sagaai wale din, unke hone wale sasural ke log unke ghar aye hue the. Par ghar mein utni jagah nahin thi ki sab mehmaan uss mein samaa jaye. Iss liye kuch log hamare ghar ke samne, park mein charpai peh baith, batiya rahe the. Wahin kone mein charpai pe baith ke main bhi likh rahee thee. Mujhe dekh, Rakesh bhaiya ke sasur ne puchcha, "Yeh kya likh rahee ho."

Maine apne ghar ki aur ishaara karte hue kaha, "Main apne ghar ke baare mein likh rahi hoon."

Aur phir main apne likhne kee dhun mein kho gayee. Phir doobara unki awaaz aayee, "Kya sunnana chahogee?"

"Kyon nahin."

Mai sunane lagee. Jaise lekh khatam hua sab ki baat cheet dobara shuru ho gayee.

Par ab unkee jubaan par mera lekh tha.

"Arre wah kya likhtee hai."

"Ek din yeh lekhika banegi."

"Arre bada dimaag hai."

Dheere dheere yeh baatein mere papa ke kaanon mein bhi apnee goonj chodhne lagi. Woh bhi meri taraf nai nazaron se dekhne lage.

(On Rajesh *bhaiya*'s engagement his in-laws 'to-be' had come to visit him. Everybody could not be accommodated in their home. Some of the guests sat chatting on *charpai*s in the park close to our house. I was also sitting on the *charpai* absorbed in my writing. After watching me for a while, Rakesh *bhaiya'*s father-in-law asked me, "What are you writing?"

I pointed towards my house and said, "I am writing about my home."

I turned my attention back to my notebook and got lost in my writing. His voice came through my thoughts once again, "Would you like to read it to us?"

"Why not?" I said and started to read out loud. After I finished, their chatter started all over again. But this time the subject of their conversation was my text.

"Wow, how well she writes."

"One day she will become a well known writer."

"She really has a remarkable mind"

The praise reached my father's ears. He too looked at me with new eyes.)

This cycle of writing, sharing written work and returning to the writing process with renewed vigour, has been termed by Ankur as the Generative Communication Spiral. It starts within the collectives of writers and goes beyond to the community; hopefully, it will eventually impact the wider world in some form or the other.

The most important thing is to move beyond the learning activity based approach to writing where each writing event is a discrete unit. There is need to allow writing practitioners to return to their works and treat each episode as a draft that will require some writing, reading and rewriting iterations before it can be treated as a final product. A school student's writing work could actually be the beginning of their portfolio.

A lot of Ankur's practice can be seen in the activities of writing groups or circles that some authors create amongst their peers. The ultimate point of this article is that the teachers need to recreate the conditions of a writers' circle in their classroom. They also need on a one-to-one basis to take on the role of an editor by being respectful to the person of the writer while remaining exacting with their text.

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Towards a Conceptual Framework for Early Literacy: A Balanced and Socially Sensitive Approach

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Introduction

Sixty odd years after attaining independence, we still find large numbers of school going children in India who rote learn their way through school, and for all practical purposes cannot be said to be independent readers and writers. This paper focuses on the special needs of children who do not have support for reading and writing at home, and who require support for enabling a smooth and meaningful transition from the oral cultures in their homes and social worlds to the print based cultures of school.

The paper proposes a balanced and socially sensitive Conceptual Framework for Early Literacy. This framework has evolved through sustained engagement with resource-poor classrooms, along with insights obtained from engagement with current literature and innovative programmes for Early Literacy which are being implemented in India. It is based on the premise that children need meaningful, and socially relevant engagement with books, along with various opportunities to actively and purposefully engage with a variety of print based reading and writing activities. The framework acknowledges the need for tapping the rich resources of spoken language and real world experiences that the children bring into the classroom. In addition to this, it provides the space for an explicit and developmentally appropriate form of learning opportunity/instruction on the awareness of sounds, knowledge of alphabets, and vocabulary and comprehension strategies.

The Indian Context

Strong foundations in reading and writing play a pivotal role in equipping the next generation of young learners to meet the expectations of schooling and of the global world. Within the Indian educational context however, there still isn't enough clarity, and several conflicting approaches to teaching young, beginning level learners to read and write coexist within a fairly confused and 'free for all' situation. These approaches to beginning level reading and writing are often not based on a sound understanding of children's natural learning processes and real life situations, but instead tend to be driven by issues of practicalities and management. As far back as 1993, the Yashpal Committee, in its report on *Learning without Burden* highlighted the meaningless and joyless nature of school based learning in India, and strongly raised the issue of non comprehension in the classroom. However, sixty odd years after attaining independence, the field of Early Literacy in India remains highly under-researched, and issues of school efficiency, classroom participation and school retention continue to be of grave concern (Govinda, 2007).

Based on some of the serious concerns which have been outlined in the preceeding paragraph, Sir Ratan Tata Trust facilitated a Consultation on Early Literacy in April 2011. An important aim of this Consultation was to promote conceptual clarity within the Early Literacy and Elementary Education programmes. Post this Consultation, a

Conceptual Framework for a socially sensitive and balanced approach to Early Literacy was outlined for facilitating further discussion. This paper will present the Conceptual Framework for Early Literacy suggested by this consultation within the context of current thinking on Early Literacy.

Current thinking on early literacy

The foundations for meaningful reading and writing are laid in the first few years of life. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Emergent Literacy perspective was dominant in the field of early reading and writing (Teale and Sulzby 1986). According to their view, children begin to learn naturally about reading and writing at a very young age by observing, interacting and actively participating with adults and other children in a variety of informal, everyday reading and writing activities. These activities could pretend newspaper reading, drawing objects, scribbling pretend shopping lists, reading labels and signboards, listening to read aloud stories and so on. As young preschoolers observe and informally participate in print-based activities in their homes and social groups, they begin to sort out and acquire knowledge about the print itself. For example, they begin to realize that written symbols have meaning, and that there is a connection between the spoken sounds and the symbols of written language. They even 'pick up' some writing conventions such as directionality, and scribble pretend words from the left to the right side of a page. They scribble pretend messages which suggest words and sentences. Nobody has taught the child about all these various aspects of writing. He/she simply 'picks them up' from her real life experience in the same ways that she 'picks up' spoken language from her surroundings.

Gordon Wells (2003) refers to these early experiences as an extended 'apprenticeship' into literacy, through which young preschoolers engage with literate family members in joint activities based on written texts. Through such informal exposure to print, many children enter school already well advanced along the road to literacy, as compared to other children who actively engage with print for the first time only when they enter school classrooms. *All children do not have access to print based experiences in their early childhood and are therefore differentially prepared for schooling.*

A very large number of young learners in India come from rich oral traditions or 'non literacy cultures'. They do not enter school with the same degree of preparedness as children who have already actively experienced various forms of reading and writing at home. This is compounded by the fact that many of these children come from socially disadvantaged groups and are viewed, at times, as being unfit for school learning. Further, most of these young children do not have any support for reading and writing at home. All these factors affect their performance in school.

It is important to realize that all children bring to the school their real world experience and knowledge, along with their competencies in the use of the language spoken at home. They also bring their imaginations, curiosities and natural inclinations to be purposefully engaged. These resources equip young children to engage with their new classroom experiences in meaningful ways. Unfortunately, classroom learning environments and school curricula most often do not provide enough opportunity for young children to use these outside-the-classroom experiences and resources that they bring with them. While working in the Early

Literacy Project (ELP) classrooms, we have interacted with many such school beginners who feel threatened by the unfamiliar print environment and school language inside the classroom and who are very reluctant to read or write.

Theoretical background

Vygotsky (1978) put forth the idea that the earliest roots of literacy have their beginnings in the very first acts of communication, and that expressing through facial expressions, gesturing, playing, talking, drawing, scribbling and writing are all essentially part of a single, unified process of learning to make meaning and to communicate. He also emphasized the need for building a meaningful relationship between the processes of everyday concept formation and scientific concept formation. He believed that everyday concepts, which are rooted in the day-to-day life experiences of children and adults, provide the basis for the learning of scientific concepts which are taught through formal instruction. For example, he argued that the study of language forms and structures which is undertaken in schools can only be possible if children have already acquired the language structures of their spoken language through their everyday experiences and natural processes of learning

Vygotsky's ideas have important implications for school based literacy learning in India in which rote learning and memorization are common substitutes for learning. Within the thousands of schools that are scattered across the length and breadth of India, there are very diverse groups of learners. As mentioned earlier, at one end of the spectrum are the children for whom reading and writing form an integral part of their everyday life at home and in their communities. However, at the other end of the spectrum are a very large number of children for whom reading, writing and print based activities do not form a part of their everyday experience.

This raises two important concerns:

1. The need to ensure that a variety of experiences which support children's natural ways of learning to read and write become available to them inside classrooms. Recent studies have shown that the closer the match between home and community based literacy and language practices, and school based practices; the more likely it is that children will build strong foundations for meaningful reading and writing.

2. The need to address the special literacy learning needs of those children whose first active engagement with written words and print based experiences occur only after they enter school.

Conceptual framework for early literacy

Early Literacy Project (ELP) tried to build some clarity on what reading was and how it should be taught. This has been a highly contentious area within which a large number of conflicting and contradictory viewpoints prevail. ELP has worked intensively over a sustained period of time inside resource-poor classrooms to develop methodologies and supportive environments for promoting meaningful reading and writing. These include equipping young first generation literacy learners with the linguistic knowledge and skills required for processing the sounds and symbols of the *Devanagari* script; and the cognitive skills required for meaning construction.

A conceptual framework for early literacy
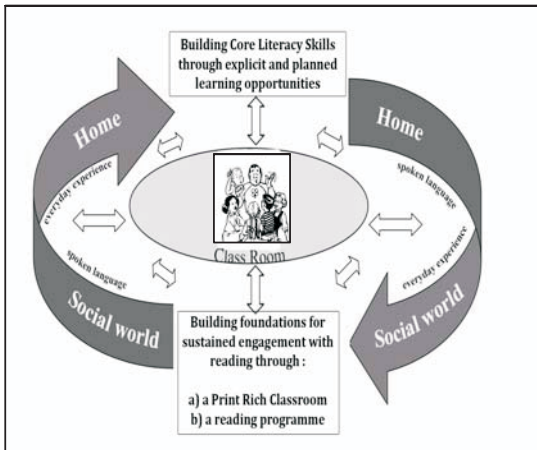
One of the main objectives of the Framework for Early Literacy is to develop a classroom environment and methodologies which equip children from marginalized and non-literacy backgrounds to build strong foundations for reading and writing with understanding (in this case, Hindi). It also aims to build to a sustained involvement with the processes of reading and writing by making them enjoyable and meaningful for young learners. This framework also gives primacy to the spoken languages and daily life experiences of children. This means providing opportunities to children within the classroom, to share their real life experiences and ideas in many different ways, so that children feel free to share and express real feelings, concerns, ideas and imagination in their own words and in many different ways.

Key features
· This Conceptual Framework for Early Literacy draws from the spoken language resources of the children with the understanding that oral language lays the foundation for the early literacy development of a child.
· The Framework gives a central place to children and to their varied individual needs within the Classroom.

· It recognizes children's natural learning processes and the innate desire for all human beings to make sense of the world that they experience.
· It provides an opportunity for building the foundations of literacy by creating a space for children's natural learning processes by enabling their active involvement with a planned and supportive print rich classroom.
· It also focuses on the explicit teaching of the core literacy skills required for phonological processing and word recognition, as well as for the various processes of making meaning.
· It aims to facilitate home to school transitions by providing for a constant two-way flow between classroom literacy practices and the children's home and real world experiences.
· It recognizes the role of children's literature and the environmental print in the process of building independent and engaged reader and writers.

Components
The above Framework is broadly divided into two main components. These are:

A) A focus on building and strengthening the foundations for a sustained and meaningful engagement with reading and writing.
B) A focus on building core literacy skills for sound/phonological processing and for meaning making.

A. Focus on building foundations for sustained engagement with reading and writing

Through the following interventions:
1) The planned and active use of a print rich classroom

Some suggested elements of a print rich classroom

· Classroom labelling
· Display of children's writings, drawings, collections, etc., to be changed from time to time
· Display of a variety of texts, pictures with captions, to be changed from time to time
· Special focus areas such as:
    - Book corner
    - Poem corner
    - Message boards (can include a meaningful and simple daily morning message)
    - Word walls
· Written instructions and captions in the above areas and wherever possible
· Space for free writing and drawing

Some ways in which a print rich classroom can build a foundation for meaningful reading and writing are:

2) A reading programme which provides exposure to literature and information texts.

Some important components of a meaningful reading programme are:

• Opportunity to engage with a variety of books and literature – both fiction and non fiction

• Opportunity to respond to literature in multiple ways

a) Aesthetic – Reading with the primary motive of experiencing the text and responding to it through expressions of feelings, imagination and other experiential ways.

b) Efferent – Reading with the motive of extracting information from the text either for the purpose of building one's knowledge base or for answering questions, locating facts, filling in gaps, summarizing, etc.

• Opportunities for being read to, through engaging and interactive read aloud sessions

• Opportunity to respond, discuss and share readings and books

• Opportunity to use and understand different genres and text types such as a) Narratives b) Poems c) Information books and texts d) Instructions e) Expository texts which present or argue different viewpoints

• Exposure and usage of displayed authentic texts such as messages, letters, newspaper clippings and ads, invitations, posters, bus tickets, labels, etc.

• Opportunity for content area (subject area) reading for building skills such as: identification of key words, identifying main ideas, making outlines and summarizing.

Table 1: Suggested elements of a print rich classroom and the corresponding foundation skills and attitudes for reading and writing which they may support

Print Elements and/or activity based on the print rich classroom	Corresponding foundation concepts, skills and attitudes for reading/writing
Classroom Conversations based on: Classroom displays, poems, texts, pictures.	Use of **spoken language** in a variety of ways based on the displays.
Space for free writing, drawing and make-believe play activities	**Creative expression** through drawing and free writing; Natural **experiences of symbolic representation** such as incorporating reading and writing into play and make-believe; dramatization; drawing, story-making, etc.

Displays of a variety of authentic texts such as labels, newspapers, ads, etc.	**Enrichment of knowledge base and vocabulary** **Building confidence** through non- threatening use of print in a variety of meaningful and fun ways
Reading/book corner Display of books and children's stories/writings/ drawings Informal and non threatening opportunities for meaningful reading	**Enjoying** books and stories **Motivation** to read through book talk, story telling, read aloud sessions, and engagement with books in a variety of ways
Language games based on the displayed print	**Engagement with spoken and written language in a variety of fun ways**
Word Wall	**Support for phonological processing, word recognition and meaning construction** through rhyming words, word activities and word games
Teacher modelling, demonstration during read-aloud sessions	**Develop print concepts, or understanding the basic conventions of print** such as knowing how to handle a book or follow words on a page; title/cover of book, directionality, reading left to right and top to bottom; orientation; concept of 'words', word spaces; punctuation/ intonation; functionality; meaningfulness.
Labelling, written instructions and picture captions	**Enhance Print awareness -** noticing print everywhere; knowing how it is used in different meaningful ways for different purposes Actively facilitating the use of these elements
Name displays and/or attendance charts	**Letter naming** - awareness that letters have names and are different from each other in shapes and sounds Alphabet games, classification activities, etc.
Blackboard and charts	**Follow written directions, read and do,** activities based on weather charts, calendars made by children, etc.
Display of children's work	**Support the development of self confidence and a positive self image** so that children feel confident, are willing to take risks and are excited about learning new things
Teacher modelling and demonstration of the multiple ways in which reading and writing are used	**Exposure to a variety of meaningful ways of using reading and writing**

- Support for reflective reading through opportunities for offering opinions and questioning the content of text.

- Opportunity to engage with books freely and with enjoyment.

B. Building core literacy skills - for phonological processing and for meaning making

In addition to the exposure to a print rich environment, it is important to provide structured opportunities for building script

knowledge and for developing some core literacy skills. These need to be made purposeful and meaningful. Some core literacy skills[1] which need to be addressed explicitly are:

1. Phonemic Awareness – It is the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds within spoken words. Research indicates that children listen to speech sounds in a flow and often do not have an awareness of word boundaries. They need to learn to recognize the larger units of oral language such syllables and words. They also need special activities to help them understand that words are made up of speech sounds or phonemes.

2. Phonics – This refers to the relationship between written letter shapes (symbols) and their sounds (phonemes). Along with phonemic awareness, children require special activities which help them grasp sound – the symbolic correspondence of written alphabets and syllables. Phonics also teaches children how to use this knowledge to read and spell.

   Both the above core skills are required for the process of recognition of written words

3. Word recognition and vocabulary – This refers to the ability of a child to recognize, understand and construct their own written words. A wide vocabulary helps children to read and write with understanding, as well as express themselves better while writing.

4. Comprehension – This refers to the child's ability to read and write with understanding. Reading is not a passive activity. Good readers use a variety of strategies to actively engage in the processes of making meaning. Researchers studying reading have developed various

comprehension strategies which can be taught to children to help them to read and write with understanding and become successful and independent readers.

5. Fluency – This is the ability to read and write accurately, quickly and with a flow. Fluent reading requires efficient word recognition and decoding skills. This leads to speed and automaticity in the reading process and helps children to read with comprehension. Fluent readers read meaningfully with an intonational flow and expression.

Role of the teacher/facilitator

It is vital for a teacher to be sensitive to the children's natural learning processes, their family backgrounds, and their individual differences while fostering meaningful and purposeful ways of engaging with reading and writing.

For this the teacher needs to be sensitized and equipped for the following:

· To understand that a relationship of trust and mutual respect is a crucial component for any meaningful learning to take place.

· To be sensitive to children and be able to reflect on his/her behaviour towards children.

· To be able to engage with the diversity in the classroom and generate respect for individual differences between learners and their parents, and build an environment of shared learning.

· To understand children and their language and literacy learning processes so as to be able to take an initiative and not just mechanically implement what is given.

· To develop the skills of managing young children in effective, nurturing and yet firm ways.

· To be able to demonstrate/model different reading and writing practices.

Conclusions

The balanced and socially sensitive Conceptual Framework that has been presented above is based on the premise that children need a meaningful, social engagement with books, along with various opportunities to actively and purposefully engage with a variety of print based reading and writing activities. In addition, most children also need some explicit, developmentally appropriate form of learning opportunity/instruction on phonological awareness, knowledge of alphabets; and vocabulary and comprehension strategies. It is important that the explicit teaching of these skills is provided in meaningful and interesting ways so that they enhance literacy learning and do not become dull, meaningless and mechanical.

[1] The Balanced Approach to Reading and writing emerged after an extensive and substantive review of research on early Literacy. For details see the report of National Reading Panel, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000): Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction. http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm.

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The teacher's task is therefore clear: it is to train his pupil to take in several words at a glance (one 'eye jump') and to remove the necessity for going backwards to read something a second time. This shows at once that letter by letter or syllable by syllable, or word by word reading, with the finger pointing to the word, carefully fixing each one in turn is wrong. It is wrong because such a method ties the pupil's eye sown to a very short jump, and the aim is to train for the long jump. Moreover, a very short jump is too short to provide any meaning or sense; and it will be found that having struggled with three or four words separately, the pupil has to look at them again, altogether and in one group, in order to get the meaning of the whole phrase.
(From *The Teaching of English Abroad Part I* by F. G. French, 1962, Oxford University Press)

Making a 'Play-text': Innovative Uses of Traditional Arts

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Introduction

This paper explores the possibilities of reworking visual and oral traditions of the Indian subcontinent into new material that can become part of regular classroom practices at the primary level and beyond. We illustrate this from a series of 'play-texts' that were designed, trialed and tested over a period of two years (2000-2002) in the West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). The primary play-text discussed here is centered around the Behula-Lakhindar narrative popular in Bengal, Orissa and elsewhere. It is inspired by the traditions of the vertical pictorial scroll or the *pata*. The form of the scroll lends itself to a rich range of experiments in narrative; working with time and space on the one hand, while moving between different linguistic registers on the other. Along with the ordinary wall calendar and the *baromashi* in Bangla (*baramasa* in Hindi), such play-texts can be effectively used to work with variations in time and space, numbers and words, the registers shifting from the stylised to the colloquial. For reasons of space, here we shall only be looking at the many moods and uses of the scroll.

The play-text

The defining concern with which we began was: If play represents the possibility of infinite generation, then the play-text is that material artefact of whatever size, shape and texture that is *open-ended*. It challenges in every way normative and prescriptive notions of space and pedagogy. In Bangla, the name we gave these texts was *khola-khata*: *khola* means 'open' and *khata* is a notebook or an exercise book. These are texts that children and perhaps, teachers and other local participants, would be creating together; therefore, always open. The texts will emerge in relation to the local environment (nature, work, climate, languages, art and craft forms, technology), but also with a view to expanding the experiential and subjective world of the child. The contents — whether of image or word, would straddle the known and the unknown, the familiar and the fantastic, and perhaps the fantastic in the familiar?

If we want children, parents, teachers and the community to interact with the play-text and generate new ones, *variability* is an essential feature. This quality may be built into the play-texts to ensure participation by a range of children across ages and capacity levels, including children with special needs.

As will be immediately apparent, the *pata* or the scroll presents a stark contrast to the textbook. Its dimensions are also very different from that of the chart paper which uniformly adorns the walls of most classrooms, whether in government or private schools. Any length of material — paper, cloth, jute or canvas — which can be wound and unwound, actually *invites* different ways of handling. A strip of material which moves, or is capable of being moved, demands a different relationship to the eyes and to the body. So both the medium and the material of the scroll are potentially of greater interest to the child than is the textbook on the lap or the desk, or the chart on the wall.

The *pata* is usually composed on a vertical axis, with the topmost segment constituting the first part of the narrative. It is slowly unwound by the teller (*patua*) so that the narrative emerges both in the images as well as through the accompanying *pãla* which is sung. The narratives may be stories of origin as in the *Jadu patas* of the Santhals, or more popularly, themes from the body of texts known as the *Puranas*. In the latter instance, the *patas* focus very often on an episode involving a god or goddess who, for the most part, behaves very much like a mortal! Scrolls can also be based on contemporary events such 9/11, a theme described as '*Laden pata*', after Osama Bin Laden!

The theme for our *pata* was traditional, derived from the Behula-Lakhinder story. Many decades ago I had heard a young woman from Medinipur sing this *pãla* at my parent's home in Calcutta, where she was then working. Snatches of her moving rendition stayed in my memory. In my case, it was the *sound* of the song, rather than the written text or even images that formed the starting point of this venture. As for children, we know that when they play with concentration they learn and absorb more than they ever will from routine textbook instruction or rote learning for examinations.

Contrary to popular perceptions of the traditional being fixed and unchanging, one notes that improvisation, variation and reinvention are central to this traditional form. Multiple versions of the *pata* and of the song circulate even now in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Multiplicity of versions is an integral quality of narratives in the subcontinent. The best known examples are of course the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; there is an extensive scholarship documenting the range and variations in even the so-called central episodes of both epics.

That 'a story' need not be fixed, but can thrive in many versions has major implications for the pedagogic practices we may wish to follow in formal education. For one, it frees the listener/viewer (and the future creator) to believe in and cultivate his/her own powers of improvisation. In all such contexts, improvisation is based on grasping certain elemental or central principles of the narrative, while a certain license is given to elaborate on or deviate from them as well.

More importantly, the *pata* and other similar traditions destabilise the notion of only one 'correct' version. Our play-texts were conceptualised to do away with the idea of one correct version. Real learning takes place when both the child and teacher are free to experiment and to make mistakes. Listening attentively to different versions encourages interpretive skills and naturally brings in multiple perspectives into the classroom, without any overt preaching about tolerance.

Behula'r *pata*

The basic story in the *Padma-Purana* goes as follows: Chand Banik, or Chand the Merchant, draws the wrath of the snake goddess, Manasa Devi, as he chooses to be a votary of Shiva. (Manasa is a wayward daughter of Shiva's.) According to one interpretation, the merchant is trapped in a battle between the gods — an older goddess who cured snakebites (particularly relevant to the watery terrain of Bengal, with dense vegetation) and Shiva, who is considered a later entry into popular worship. Anyway, after a series of disasters that overtake the haughty merchant, and despite every precaution — as in preparing a 'snake-proof' iron bridal chamber, Chand's son Lakhinder (called Lakhua in the song) is bitten to death by one

of Manasa's snakes on his wedding night. The young bride-widow Behula then decides to set sail with the dead body of her husband to Indra's court in heaven.

The part of the story we emphasise is of her journey along the river, braving untold dangers and horrors, and finally arriving at the court of Indra. Here, she pleases the gods with her dazzling dance and thus earns a boon to have her husband back. At the end, Manasa is acknowledged. But it is Behula's moving lament and the vividness of her heroic quest that one remembers most.

We called our *pata* 'Behula'r *pata*' after the questing protagonist who literally brings her husband back from the dead. There are many descriptive passages about what she sees on her way — the towns along the river, the people, the water life and so on. These find place alongside her expression of grief at her loss. One of the great charms of this *pãla* is this aural-visual voyage, weaving in geography, social history, myth and natural history. Children from diverse backgrounds and differing abilities can relate to the sights and sounds of the river voyage meaningfully, individually, straight from the heart.

We chose to make our *pata* a horizontal rather than a vertical one, keeping in mind the limited resources and large numbers of learners in most schools. The horizontal scroll would make it easier for many children to simultaneously interact with one scroll between them. Two children may each hold either end of the scroll and — improvising on the tradition of the usual *pata* performance — may unfold one end and keep folding it slowly as the verses are sung or read out. It could even be 'news' read out in the manner of a television commentary.

The horizontal *pata* could also be laid out on the floor and a cluster of children may engage with the pictures and the couplets, looking at it from above, sideways, and from multiple perspectives as it were. The *pata* could also be pinned on or hung on a wall, though not so high that children cannot see the details of the visuals or the couplets. (This is often the case with charts and other visual displays in classrooms.)

Most of our government schools are impoverished in almost every respect other than the children's own potential; here, the scroll can become a low-cost, multipurpose, many-layered play-text. For optimum use of the play-text, children must be encouraged to create their own narrative on the other side of the *pata*. We have therefore the possibility of two narratives (related or independent of each other) which two sets of children can access from either side. This option deals with the problem of limited floor space. Alternatively, it is possible to continue the same narrative from one side to another, in clockwise or anti-clockwise fashion. This too can lead to amusing scenarios as we found in the course of trialing.

Image, letter, sound and rhythm

In our *pata*, we chose couplets from the nineteenth century poet Ketakadas Kshemananda who lived in western Bengal. Traditionally, the couplets are not written on *pata*s, since singers usually themselves choose or compose the verses they wish to recite or sing. (Each rendering in some sense, is a new one!) For our purposes the couplets were added to help the teacher and students, irrespective of whether they actually knew the song. Where children or teachers are already familiar with the song, visual recognition of the scene or of the particular dramatic moment

would be easier. To some extent, this would also help in the recognition of the letters/words in the couplets which we placed below each segment of our play-text. Simple words that occur repeatedly, such as the name of the protagonist, could be picked out by the teacher and made part of visual recognition exercise.

In a context where the story is completely new, both to the students and the teacher, several options present themselves. A free-flowing participatory session could be initiated with the barest outline of the story being set out. The subsequent interpretation of the visuals, either as individual frames or as a sequence, may generate new sets of narratives by students. These in turn could be collated or juxtaposed and used to generate exercises by the attentive and innovative teacher.

Clearly, only some scenes of the long narrative could be selected for our play-text. This apparent lack can be turned into an advantage and enable the spinning out of many creative exercises. For one, it makes possible a game of missing links, and creates a fill-in-your-own-narrative kind of situation. Children are free to imagine and interpolate the scenes not present, which may or may not be sung in the classroom. The 'gaps' may ideally be sequences or situations that they fill in with incidents from their own lives. It is their sensory and emotional world and their powers of observation which are privileged. Or, a narrative may be spun from any one of the individual frames, generating an unconvential ending. Exercises or tasks could be set depending on the level of the child or his or her individual capabilities. Group work, with a mixed range of children, can be most exciting as well.

What about the relationship between seeing and listening or seeing and telling? In traditional performances, the unraveling of the

horizontal scroll is *in relation to*, but not necessarily in exact synchronisation with the telling. Thus, the viewer may be creating a story from the sequence, while the oral narration may offer something different, even unexpected. For these and many other reasons, the seeing-listening-reading continuum in the *pata* is very different from the way the comic strip with the speech bubbles work. The scroll carries the possibilities of many loops, returns, repetition and surprise and can become most rewarding from a pedagogical point of view.

In every way then, even our adapted horizontal scroll offers a strong contrast to the framing of the lesson as 'a unit' that is composed of so many pages in the textbook. More excitingly, it incites the possibility of multiple closures. The last frame/segment of the *pata*, may well become the first in a new sequence to generate a new narrative. This exercise may actually be tried out with children (and teacher) by quite literally adding new frames/segments to the existing *pata*. The add-ons are potentially endless! Thus the temporal is given a new dimension through play and group work.

Among school children

Younger kids often found it difficult to handle the long vertical scroll, even when two of them were trying to manage it; whereas, they found it fun to work with the same scroll, unfolding it horizontally. This also meant they had the potential to keep on adding new units. The images were read sometimes as a single composition, but more often it was the little detail or the particular juxtaposition of figure and object that drew their attention.

Very few children (even older ones) could actually read the couplets, but once the verses were recited, a lot of them immediately

committed them to memory and made the necessary links.

Not all the children knew the story. Many did not seem to think that there was an existing story, already known or told. All of them were aware though that there were stories hidden in the images. They often started making up bits themselves. Nothing could be more rewarding and exciting. This kind of creative space inviting fearless interventions from children stands in sharp contrast to the routine mechanical exercises dished out by the standard textbook industry.

My experience shows that questions, functioning like cues, help a lot: Where do you think she (Behula) is going? Were you ever tossed in the stormy waters of a river? Would you rather use a bridge to cross a river, or go across in a boat or raft? How do you come to school every day? Is it a difficult journey? What do you see on the way? And hear? Would you like to make a *pata* about an adventure you had on your way to or back from school? (Another one of our play-texts has entire sections with maps and letter recognition based on this every day journey of the school going child.)

Above all, it is the actual art object and its manifold potential that comes into play in this interactive learning situation. The manifold potential can only be revealed in play, and without the usual forms of 'instructing' the child. By this I mean, children must have the freedom to handle the *pata* in whichever way they want. If there is some wear and tear in the process, so be it.

The materiality of the *pata* was quite wonderfully explored. Sometimes it was spread out on the floor, uncoiling like a snake in the next room or spilling over into the adjoining verandah, so that children were in effect looking at it from multiple perspectives and distances, engaging with the detail or the frame.

I would urge teachers to encourage the children to roll and unroll the scroll, go back and forth, and so cover and discover, in as many ways they wish to, a tapestry of colour, sound and meaning. Already, this will set in motion glimpses of other worlds. Colours take on life and movement. Sounds metamorphose into chants and songs, sense and nonsense.

Rhymes form a crucial component of 'telling'. Lines or phrases from a contemporary jingle (even an advertising jingle or a film song) can be adapted into something new, and become part of the learner's own world. Classroom observations show how students are constantly trying to relate formal learning to what they have picked up or internalised in other spaces.

*Pata*s work with stylised figuration, quite different from the same-looking global cartoon type figures that crowd our visual field today. It is possible that children may initially have trouble or even show resistance in responding to these figures. But, if the story is enthralling, the colours inviting, and above all, if they are given agency in exploring the composition, they are bound to *invest* significance to the frames. The use of primary colours can be a powerful source of stimulation, although I find black and white illustrations equally striking and capable of leaving a deep visual imprint, as in Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose's creative collaboration in the *Sahaj Path* (Easy Reading or Easy Lessons) series which came out in 1930s.

The play-text *can* be turned into something unique through a blend of individual selection and critical questioning. Variability in its composition and flexibility in its use are the twin keys to its success. This way, the classroom

or any learning space — at home or outdoors — will invite an exchange between the local and the universal. And children will gift to tradition something of their own lives.

Nature will not however, do all the work. The learning of a language can be helped and nurtured by the teacher who should at all times be aware of the opportunities given to him to explain to the children the generalization of form and meaning that arise in the course of working with the materials. At appropriate times the teacher will also want to draw together the strands of what has been met in the stories and dialogues and try to make clear the systematic regularities that underlie a language. We do not wish to handcuff the teacher to his materials – rather the reverse, we wish him to feel free to adapt them to the specific needs of his class. Our one request to the teacher is that he draws the language system out of the experience children have with the language and does not teach systems for their own sake. After all, the children themselves are making systems of their own in their contact with the language, and they must be allowed and encouraged to do this, even if at times their systems have to be modified by the teacher.

(From the *Epilogue of Language Teaching Texts* by H. G. Widdowson, 1971, Oxford University Press, London, p. 243-244)

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Collaborative Spaces on the Web and Language Teaching: Blogs and Wikis

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Introduction

This paper investigates how web-based technology is used with particular reference to collaborative spaces on the Internet, for teaching English language in the context of second language learners. After an initial overview of how web-based resources work favourably for ESL learners and teachers, the paper describes the role of collaborative spaces, particularly the blogs and the wikis, in teaching English in non-native contexts. The paper also provides samples of blogs, wikis and some activities that a teacher may use. The paper concludes with an optimistic note on the possibility of creative use of web-based applications in the English language classrooms in India. However, this can be done only if certain positive steps are taken to train teachers in using these applications and also to integrate technology in the curriculum. Also, there is no reason to believe that what works for English would not also work for other languages.

Web-based programmes and the English Language classroom

Web-based programmes facilitate a range of communication channels that come together to shape dynamic texts as pedagogical materials, and also promote a language learning environment. In addition to this, the use of web-based programmes for education promises a unique non-threatening learning environment that motivates learners to participate in these programmes without feeling inadequate in any way as they are not subject to the fear of being exposed before their peers. These programmes also help learners to work collectively in an atmosphere with an ideal stress/anxiety level, which helps them to remain energetic and lively. Educators such as Stevick (1976), Littlewood (1981) and Rivers (1992) emphasize the importance of creating a non-threatening classroom atmosphere for learners so that they feel comfortable enough to interact willingly with other learners in the target language. Egbert, Chao & Hanson-Smith (1999) attest that appropriate use of computer assisted language learning in the classroom can help to create "optimal conditions for language learning environments". Jonassen (1999) also argues in favour of technology to keep students active, constructive, and collaborative.

Collaboration

Language is a social phenomenon and people use language in different situations, independent of the group they are affiliated with. From a small thing such as doing home work, to presenting an argument in a court of law, it is the individual who uses the language. Therefore the best explanation of collaborative tasks is how individuals collectively perform a task while also performing the individual roles assigned to them by the task master. Collaboration does not imply arriving at a consensus, nor is it synonymous with teamwork. It is more about interaction among participants while doing a task together. Collaborative tasks aim at developing collaborative skills, while also maintaining the individuality of learners wherein

they think as individuals without forgetting that they belong to a group. Therefore they become a part of a 'learning network' (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles & Turoff, 1995) that may be seen as a social process that develops through communication. The focus, in collaborative learning, makes a shift from a mere teacher-student interaction to the role of peer relationships (Johnson, 1981), and implies a learner-centred instruction. This also has implications for the classroom teaching. The teacher has to take upon himself/herself the role of a facilitator in the process of knowledge construction, instead of simply transferring information from his own reservoir of knowledge to that of the students.

Collaborative activities such as seminar presentations and discussions, negotiations, group projects, simulation and role-playing, collaborative essay writing, etc., encourage a many-way participative environment. Various studies have emphasized the use of collaborative learning strategies for better student involvement with the course (Hiltz, 1994), and more commitment and involvement with the learning process (Harasim, 1990). Collaborative learning methods are also perceived as more effective in promoting student learning and achievement (Johnson, 1981). Though collaborative activities are possible both with and without using computer technology, technology-mediated activities are far more enjoyable and exciting than traditional methods, especially for learners who have grown up with computers. In connection with e-learning, it has been said, the 'e' should be interpreted to mean exciting, energetic, emotional and educational, enthusiastic, emotional, in addition to 'electronic', which is the traditional interpretation.

Collaborative online spaces

Collaborative spaces are electronic spaces on the Internet that are 'associated with web applications to facilitate interactive information sharing and collaboration on the World Wide Web'. If used in education, they encourage a virtual learning environment that promotes learner participation, and place an increased emphasis on social learning and the use of social software such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and virtual worlds' as they are not author-controlled. Collaboration, being an important step to the process of learning, it is significant to recognize the utility of cyberspaces such as Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Blogger, YouTube, etc., in language teaching. These spaces encourage users to share audios, videos, pictures and texts either through hyperlinks or by uploading self-designed content. The teacher befriends the learners through the social network, and together they comment on, tag, blog, or even edit the content created. A history or a log of the online activity is maintained in cyberspace, through which the learner can trace his/her progress. The teacher and the learner now chat together while doing a real task in an authentic learning environment. Geography teachers can take their learners on virtual field trips within seconds through use of Google Earth street view. Science teachers can use readymade software to teach various science concepts. Language teachers can use various websites and audio/video files for practice in language skills. Using synchronous tasks in the virtual learning environment ensures that learners, whether local or across the globe, are able to access the classroom at the same time. Technology also helps in instant exchange of ideas through text chat, video and audio chat, or even through email. And through use of asynchronous tasks, teachers enable the learners to access their classrooms anytime and

anywhere using the emailing facility. Using such tools and innovative ideas in the classroom would at the very least, bring a "motivated excitement to the class as the distance that many a time separates the teacher and the taught gets reduced". (Lunyal, 2010, p. 23)

Wikis and Blogs

Blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and image and video sharing sites have become very popular with people. These tools can be used to encourage specific objectives of self-regulated learning that include setting a goal, self-monitoring and help-seeking. A big benefit of working with wikis and blogs for language learning and process writing is that learners, while working towards the final draft, are able to retain all the rough drafts. This helps the learners to measure their progress which in itself is an invaluable learning experience. Besides, the teacher is also able to chart the progress of the learners by looking at the rough versions of the document. Goodwin-Jones (2003) asserts that students actively create information and develop a sense of ownership of the virtual space where they publish their work.

Wikis

A Wiki is an online collection of pages that permits the site users to easily create, edit, link, and even track changes to selected pages on the web. Wikis have a versioning capability which allows the author to retrieve older versions of the content. Dudeney (2000) describes it a "tool, allowing multiple users to add pages to a website without any specialized [HTML] knowledge" (p. 127). Wikis are tools in the hands of educators to 'promote student collaborative learning' (Richardson, 2006). They are highly collaborative, with a loosely structured set of pages linked in multiple ways to each other and to the web resources. They have an open-editing system as they allow anyone to edit any page. The open-editing and review structure of wikis makes them a suitable collaborative tool to support writing (Parker
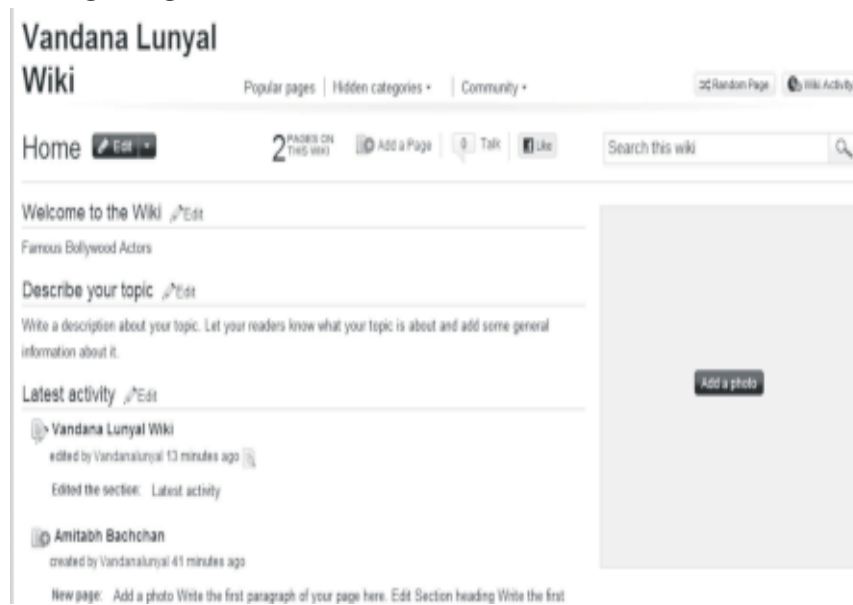
& Chao, 2007)

A sample wiki

Wiki-based sample language activities

Activity 1: A Class Wiki
For Classes 9 and 10

Read **Amitabh Bachchan's blogs dated 11 and 12 February 2011** at http://bigb.bigadda.com/.

You will do the following task in groups.

Get into two groups. Both groups will read the blog.

Group A	Group B
1. Write a summary of the blogs in your own language. 2. Make a list of everything Amitabh did on these two days.	1. Edit the language of the summary. 2. Change some of the words used by Group A.

For this you will:

a. Click on **'Start a wiki'** and give your wiki a **name**.

b. **Group A** will do the assigned tasks.

c. **Group B** will read the summary (written by Group A)

d. **Group B** will make the required changes.

e. **Group A** will go back to the changes made to check whether the changes make it a better piece of writing and re-edit it to make it as flawless as possible.

f. For feedback send me a link to your wiki at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com

Teaching through Wikis

As we can see in the above activity, wikis can be used to engage learners in collaborative tasks that may require them to create edit and manage content, as well as get teacher and peer feedback. Such wikis particularly encourage reading and process writing skills due to their multi-user capability, versioning feature and simple creation. Such activities can be both synchronous and asynchronous, and can also involve learners from different classes, schools, cities, or even countries.

Teachers can design global synchronous projects where learners at different locations can simultaneously build a page on a predefined topic by adding their knowledge to the page, e.g. a story page can be created by learners of different cultures. A story can be posted on a wiki page and the readers (learners) can be assigned the task of reading the story and adding a page by posting a similar story from their culture. Another task for learners could be to edit the stories, according to predefined guidelines, and add a page to the wiki by posting their version of the story. Hence, wikis help learners to publish their work on the Internet, which motivates them to write for real people rather than writing for evaluation by a teacher. Synchronizing the task helps the teacher/author to give his/her feedback collectively by simply adding another page to the wiki. On this page some common problems can be addressed after doing the editing on the individual pages. For asynchronous tasks, students may be notified through email and they may access and perform the task at their own convenience and at their own pace. A password protected page describing some famous people, but with deliberate errors of facts or language can be designed for learners of the group to keep editing until the page becomes factually and linguistically correct. Such activities not only increase their general awareness but also improve their overall language skills. Besides the language skills, learners also get to practice first-hand, the skill of developing an argument, negotiation, discussion and understanding real life situations.

Given below is a wiki activity (activity 2) to help students work in a group together. It will also give them an opportunity to search the web for the required information. Each learner in the group will have a specific role of finding information on given points even though their task will be to create a wiki together. After creating a wiki, different groups will be required to go over each slot and make changes or add to the given information. The task becomes highly collaborative and promotes reading and writing skills.

Activity 2: Creating a Wiki

The tutor will create a wiki on the topic **'Places to travel in my country'.**

The wiki will be divided in six slots.

Class will be divided in 6 groups. Each group will be given the name of a place.

Agra
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Lucknow
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Mumbai
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Haridwar
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Chandigarh
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Thiruvanantpuram
- o Where to stay
- o Where to stay
- o How to reach there
- o Things to buy
- o Places to see
- o Pictures of places
- o Additional information

Directions to the groups.

Provide the required information under each slot.

You may go to www.makemytrip.com for information.
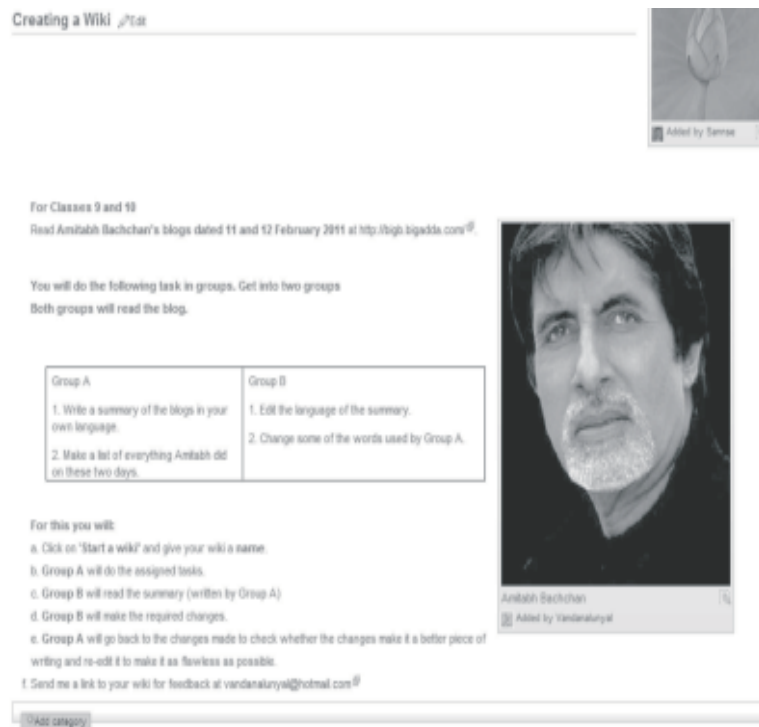
Go over to each slot after completing yours.

Add to the information under the slot 'additional information. When the Wiki is ready send the link to me at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com

Creating a Wiki

Added by Samse

For Classes 9 and 10
Read Amitabh Bachchan's blogs dated 11 and 12 February 2011 at http://bigb.bigadda.com

You will do the following task in groups. Get into two groups
Both groups will read the blog.

Group A	Group B
1. Write a summary of the blogs in your own language.	1. Edit the language of the summary.
2. Make a list of everything Amitabh did on these two days.	2. Change some of the words used by Group A.

For this you will:
a. Click on 'Start a wiki' and give your wiki a name.
b. Group A will do the assigned tasks.
c. Group B will read the summary (written by Group A)
d. Group B will make the required changes.
e. Group A will go back to the changes made to check whether the changes make it a better piece of writing and re-edit it to make it as flawless as possible.
f. Send me a link to your wiki for feedback at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com

Add category

Amitabh Bachchan
Added by Vandanalunyal

Blogs

Blogs are categorized as social software since they establish a connection between the blogs, the blog writers and the

readers. The possibility of sending messages or posting comments on the bloggers' page makes it social networking site. Weblogs are amongst the most interest-generating, democratic and collaborative sites that encourage people to air their opinion about anything they feel strongly about without getting intimidated by the other people sharing the platform. Basically, weblogs are online journals that people keep, to maintain a record of what they write. Creative writers often upload their poems, stories and articles to share with the world. Practicing teachers can also think of various possibilities of using blogs, such as creating a class blog, or encouraging students to have their own blogs (student blog), or creating an open to all tutor blog on which the student can post content for learners to read, listen, watch and comment. This encourages the students to be more analytical in their thinking as blogging is similar to presenting and defending an argument

A blog-based sample language activity
For classes +1 and + 2
Assumption: All students have their own individual blogs which they use to do group blogging when required.
Get into 4 groups and do the tasks assigned to your group. Every student must read Amitabh Bachchan's blogs dated 11 and 12 February **2011** at http://bigb.bigadda.com/.

Group 1 **Step1** Select the 11 Feb 2011 blog and, copy- paste it on a word document. **Step 2** Using the 'highlight' option in the word file, highlight all the new words in yellow. **Step 3** Send file to me at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com	Group 2 **Step1** Look at the highlighted words. (done by Group 1) Right click keeping the cursor on the word. Go to synonyms and click on a synonym and replace. Take care that the meaning of the original text does not change. Keep the words highlighted. **Step 2** Send file to me at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com
Group 3 **Step1** Look at the highlighted words. (done by Group 2) **Step 2** Use some of the highlighted words to write a paragraph on ' **A Day in My life'** in your blog. **Step 3** Send me the link at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com	Group 4 **Step1** Read the blog created by Group 3 and write your comments. Each member will write about something similar that may have happened in his/her life. **Step 2** Send the link to me at vandanalunyal@hotmail.com

For this
a. Group 3 will click on 'Start a blog' and give a name to it.
b. All the groups will read Amitabh's Blog and then go on to do the activities assigned to them.
c. Group 3 will write an essay on the blog and when it is done, click on 'publish'.
d. All the groups will do the activities assigned to them.
Speaking Activity (Next Day)/
Class Discussion on '**How different are the lives of celebrities from ours?'**
Presentation
Class to be divided in 4 groups. They will make presentation of five slides on the topic given above.
Steps for the task
Select a celebrity of your choice
Search Wikipedia
Select relevant information
Design the presentation
You will have to give the presentation on _____

Teaching Language through Blogs

Blogs, like wikis, encourage enhancement of all language skills. Apparently, blogs promote reading and writing skills. Technology has even made it possible to import and embed audio and video files and even hyperlinks to some important resources for learners in the blogs. However, such resources need to be evaluated for their appropriateness of content before being used. Looking at the blog-based sample language activity given above, it may be said that appropriate blogs can spark off excellent asynchronous activities as they can be accessed anytime and anywhere, by both local and global learners. What is really interesting in a blog is the possibility of having many threads. In the above activity, there is a possibility of starting a forum discussion on the given topic with the help of the 'comment' feature. This allows the learners to share their thoughts on a topic they might find interesting, in addition to the practicing their writing skills. On a single blog a teacher can create different pages posting activities on different topics for learners of different abilities, age, class and interest. For example, to promote reading and writing, a teacher can post a film review of a forthcoming film with a hyperlink to a YouTube promotional video of the film. Learners could go through the review, watch the video and write their comments on whether they agree with the viewer or not, stating their reasons. To promote listening and speaking, the teacher can embed a news video, or a podcast that the students can listen to, and then give their views on a similar topic individually, or in a group. This speaking activity can be recorded as their podcast and the audio file thus created can be sent to the teacher for feedback. Such real activities will not only improve their language and computer skills, but also teach the students to work collaboratively in a team.

A sample Blog
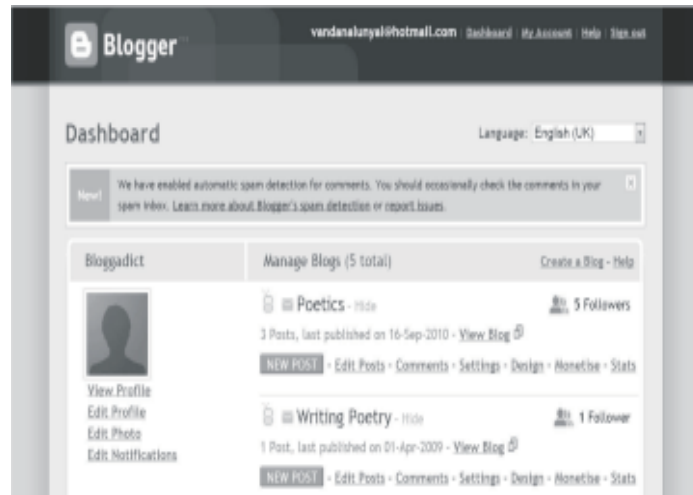
The role of a teacher

Learning through technology with an imaginative and motivated teacher, who has some training in the methodology of teaching, can be very exciting and useful; and blogs and wikis, in particular, become a flexible platform for collaborative work. A teacher with an orientation in ELT would try and strike a balance between the selection of tools and the methods to be used. Giving a free reign to technology that usually tends to get out of hand in the classroom without the intervention of the teacher may not be advisable, as it poses a danger for learner, of drifting away from the purpose. The teacher needs to switch between the roles of a facilitator and a moderator, and expose the learners to the positives of technology; and as a monitor, to steer them away from its negatives. Monitoring the appropriateness of content can be an issue where the teacher's role can be very significant. Basically, as against the traditional role of a

deliverer of information, the teacher needs to assume multiple roles in a technology supported learning environment. He/she needs to be a leader – to be able to lead learners from one activity to the other without getting diverted; a questioner – to be able to keep learners attentive to what is being done in the class and to ascertain whether they are achieving the intended goals; a soothsayer who can predict problems that may occur in such an environment; and a troubleshooter - to be able to plan well for the class in order to troubleshoot all the problems that are associated with technology and be ready with a back-up plan.

Conclusion

Through the use of technology, classrooms are no longer restricted to the confines of a building, and learning material is not limited to textbook chapters. Technology offers many innovative ideas to teachers to experiment with, and may be looked upon as an enabling tool for both teachers and learners through use of which they are able to perform better. However, we cannot ignore the other side of the picture. A reality that is important to consider is that locating or creating such resources can be a time-consuming process but at the same time once created, these resources can be used for a long time - teachers can save them and use them for different purposes even after the task is over. In addition to this, teachers can easily harness the ubiquity of technology to the advantage of the learners wherein the teacher simulates reality with the help of web-based programmes, and the learners are able to experience the real world challenges of life. Facing near-real challenges with the help of a medium they find interesting can bring a positive change in the attitude of learners. Yet another concern is that collective projects have the risk

of having collective biases on an issue, but at the same time it also draws out the collective wisdom of the group as a whole, which is a positive point and also one of the objectives of collaborative tasks. However, teachers are usually mistrustful of using such resources in a pedagogical setting. It may therefore be a good idea that use of such resources becomes integral to the curriculum as it will encourage teachers to be confident about using these resources legitimately, and enable them to meet the ever-increasing expectations and ever-changing needs of the learners.

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Edward Spear said: "When it comes to linguistic form, Plato walks with the Macedonian swineherd, Confucius with the head-hunting savage of Assam". Actually, the people whose linguistic abilities are most badly underestimated are right here in our society. Linguists repeatedly run up against the myth that working-class people and the less educated members of the middle class speak a simpler or coarser language. This is a pernicious illusion arising from the effortlessness of conversation. Ordinary speech, like colour vision or walking, is a paradigm of engineering excellence – a technology that works so well that the user takes its outcome for granted, unaware of the complicated machinery hidden behind the panels. Behind such simple sentences as *Where did he go?* and *The guy I met killed himself,* used automatically by any English speaker, are dozens of subroutines that arrange the words to express the meaning.

(From *The Language Instinct* 1954/ 1995, Harper Collins, New York, p. 28)

Do children learn through imitation?
Child: Want other one spoon, Daddy.
 Father: You mean, you want the other spoon
Child: Yes, I want other one spoon, please Daddy.
 Father: Can you say "the other spoon".
Child: Other ... one ... spoon.
Father: Say "other'.
Child: Other.
Father: spoon
Child: Spoon.
Father: "Other spoon".
Child: Other ... spoon. Now give me other one spoon?

(Braine, 1971)

Developing Speech Skills

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Introduction

Approaches to the teaching and learning of speech skills have been influenced by developments in the fields of language teaching, linguistics and speech technology. Within the broad area of language teaching, teaching and learning of speech skills have passed through three stages. These stages involve comparing the mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2), the analysis of errors in the process of language learning, and the analysis of a text beyond a sentence. In addition to this, there have been several developments under the influence of linguistics, especially in the domain of speech sounds. Technological advances such as recorders, players, CD-ROMS and various software packages have helped analyse speech sounds enormously. In fact, technology has made it possible to teach all varieties of a given language.

Early stages

The first stage of teaching and learning a language and its pronunciation has led to the creation of language teaching materials based on a scientific description of the language to be learnt and the mother tongue of the learner. In these materials the assumption was that a positive transfer would take place if the mother tongue of the speaker's language(s) (X) and the language being learnt (Y) have similar features, and a negative transfer or interference would occur if X and Y have different features. For example, for Punjabi speakers learning English, the consonant sounds 's' and 'š', as in *same* and *shame* is a matter of positive transfer because Punjabi has that distinction between the two sounds. However, learning the English consonant sounds at the beginning of say *thin* and *then*, for the Punjabi learners, is a matter of negative transfer because Punjabi does not have these sounds (the beginning letters are pronounced by the native speaker with the tip of the tongue between the teeth). However, in the years to follow, this assumption was proved wrong because it failed to predict cases of both transfer and interference. It was felt that the failure was natural for language learning, as language learning does not depend on linguistic structure alone but is essentially a psycholinguistic phenomenon. Therefore, errors were necessary stages in the process of learning. However, despite the inadequacies of the transfer theory, practitioners continued to use the tenets of the transfer approach in language teaching and materials production.

Error snalysis

While the linguistic comparison of speech sounds continued to occupy the interest of experts on speech development, the focus gradually shifted to the errors that learners made. **Error Analysis (EA)** involved a more scientific approach to predicting errors and multiple types of error (e.g. errors of sounds, word structure, sentence structure, and spelling, etc.). The shift in focus also involved a change in the psychological view of learning from habit formation (Behaviorist), to the innate ability for learning and drawing generalizations

(Cognitivist), and more recently for a combination of the two. This in turn meant a shift from learning through only practice of drills and memorization to learning through drawing subconscious generalizations, and more recently combining the two methods.

A move to learning from the subconscious processes of generalizations led to the concept of 'Interlanguage', which underscores the idea that language learning is a continuum, gradually moving from L1 to L2, through continuous modifications of linguistic generalizations. Moreover, errors are systematic and natural in language learning.

The field of **Discourse Analysis,** which has come to be developed relatively late in pedagogy, includes the phenomena of intonation and rhythm in general. More generally, it deals with the questions of where to pause and break in speech, what pitch to use in different types of sentences and their parts and for what communicative effects, and where to lay emphasis, etc. Speech in discourse is an area that provides the learner with a scope for improving conversational control in terms of communicative functions such as introducing and ending topics, etc. In addition to this, it also provides competence in establishing social meanings and roles by choosing the tempo of speech, pauses, stresses, tones, etc.

Modern study of language and language teaching

Modern linguistics in its early stages in the 1940s and 50s, laid great emphasis on the primacy of speech, with its slogan 'Speech is primary, writing secondary'. In sum, the main units of speech that have to be recognized are the following:

I. Inventories of significant units of segmental sounds and their contextually sensitive pronunciation must be maintained. English, for instance, has 24 linguistically significant consonantal sounds and 20 vowel sounds. Learners of English should be able to pronounce all these sounds. Thus English has both long and short vowels as in *ship/ sheep, get/gate, book/root*, etc. The short and long vowel distinctions in them must be maintained.

II. Constraints on the occurrence of speech segments, known as phonotactic constraints. For example, English words can sometimes have only 3 consonantal sounds at the beginning of a word and four at the end. Therefore, words such as street, spray, screw, split, etc. have three consonantal sounds at the beginning of a word and words such as 'sixths' has four consonantal sounds at the end. However, in Hindi, Kashmiri or Punjabi, such patterns are rare. Hence, Hindi, Kashmiri and Punjabi learners of English have to be specially trained in the pronunciation of consonant clusters.

III. Features of connected speech such as sentence stress, pauses and intonation, in sentential and discourse contexts. Knowledge of these is also connected with the pronunciation of segments.

The third point can be explained in more detail as follows. It has been shown that Indian languages differ from English in speech rhythm. English is said to have a stress-timed speech rhythm with a patterning of prominent and reduced syllables. For example, in the words *nation*, *national* and *nationality*, the underlined vowels are different depending on when they are stressed or unstressed. This phenomenon is widespread in English, but less

commonly found in the speech of Indian speakers. For example, the word *photo* is often pronounced in the same manner in the words *photo, photograph* and *photographer* in Indian English, but in native English pronunciation it is different. Sometimes the speech of the Indian speakers, when very close to the vernacular sounds, is considerably different from international varieties. Indian languages are said to have a more syllable-based rhythm. What this distinction means in general is that in English, stresses occur at roughly equal durations, and stress units range over words and longer stretches, as for example, shown below:

A	B
Follow	Do it.
Believe	Toweave
Distemper	We told you.
Wonderful	What is it?

In native English, the single words in column A and the multiple words in column B are spoken within the same duration. However, we tend to hear the words in column B separately in the speech of some Indians. This is because in the Indian languages, the arrangement of utterances is more sensitive to the production of syllables, and the pattern of the organization of speech is more dependent on words. It has been found that unstressed syllables do not undergo processes of reduction and weakening with the frequency that is found in a stress-sensitive rhythm.

Trends of tomorrow

For better learning programmes, more in-depth studies of the spoken aspects of different languages are required. Thus, one of the reasons why British English has been used for a long time for learning English, and importance has not been given to the mother tongues of the learners in India, is that so much is known about British English, and so little is known about Indian languages.

The use of speech technology in teaching and learning pronunciation has increased manifold since its beginning. Speech technology was first used in different forms of recorders and record players for listening and production of speech, in both individual segments and continuous speech. It was done with the belief that a given standard form of speech, such as the Received Pronunciation (RP) of British English, had to be learnt. There is a continued support for this practice now with new technology. Roach (2002), for example, discusses the possibility of using advanced speech technology (developed for remediation of speech pathology) for the purpose of second language teaching. However, we can use technology to teach any form of standard English—British, American, Australian or Indian.

Speech skills require exposure to the source language so that there are adequate opportunities for the learner to develop speech perception. In second language contexts, the situation has considerably improved with the wide use of audio-visual mass media. In addition to this, there are electronic dictionaries of pronunciation for learning the pronunciation of words. Thus Daniel Jones' English Pronouncing Dictionary is now available with a CD-ROM in its latest edition (Roach, Hartman, & Setter, 2003). Besides, the availability of CD-ROMs for learning connected speech is also growing (e.g. Cauldwell, 2002). The latter is potentially full of promises, as it gives complete freedom and time to the learner to get exposure to the variety she aims to learn.

Apart from the technological support for learning languages, softwares such as PRAAT have proved to be a rich resource for studying the acoustic properties of speech of various categories of learners, and even more so for teachers. PRAAT is software that can be downloaded freely. Although familiarity with it requires a little training, it can be arranged for by schools. Users of PRAAT can examine the facts of a spoken language on their own. Teachers and learners can use the software to look at the acoustic properties of speech with the help of recorded speech or by recording speech through the software.

Suggestions towards pedagogy for developing speech skills

Having presented an overview of the advances made in the fields soliciting the development of speech skills, some pertinent points need to be taken up by way of suggestions towards curricula for speech development.

One, there is need to give full consideration to the significant contribution of speech in developing communication skills--awareness about grammatical and pragmatic meanings, as well as issues of language identities, attitudes, and sociolinguistic variation. Teacher training is critically important towards this end.

Two, the sagacity of the teacher in using his/her knowledge to suit the needs of individuals and groups of learners, plays an important role in developing speech and communication skills. There are teaching materials available for international varieties of English, such as Standard American English and Standard British English (or British Received Pronunciation). The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad also has teaching materials for General Indian English.

Recent experience in the use of English in the development of indigenous software for educational purposes, however, reveals that users may show a preference for a more regional variety. This was indeed the case for a group of visually challenged learners, using software for learning computers developed by the Government of India. The visually challenged learners from rural Tamil Nadu demanded Tamil English in place of the General Indian English used in the software (Hema Murthy, IIT Madras- personal communication, 2009). This instance clearly shows the need for the teacher to be prepared to adjust his/her speech for the learners at different levels.

Three, the teacher has to take care to develop listening among learners by taking recourse to suitable methods. These methods could be of the following main types:

a. The speech productions of the teacher should be a help to the learner. At the early stages in learning, this means adapting his/her tempo to the learner's competence, willingness to repeat and explain the usage of difficult and technical words, and pausing frequently to help the learner to process utterances.

b. Learners should be encouraged to listen to the speech of the target language in order to get a feel of its features of pronunciation, rhythm and intonation.

Four, learners should be encouraged to produce language in context. The use of dialogues for role play, and spontaneous responses to audio-visual stimuli such as pictures, movies, etc., go a long way in getting the learners to gain fluency in a language and become aware of the need to develop speech skills.

And **finally,** technological advances should be made accessible to the learners to work independently as well as in groups to develop speech skills. The facilities that are available but rarely used in the Indian context are the CD-ROMs of target language spoken material, and software for speech analysis. The software of speech analysis is expected to bring a critical change in the methods of developing speech skills with a scientific and research-oriented temper, which is the need of the hour for education in India.

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Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks. In some countries, such as China, Egypt and Mesopotamia, writing was practiced thousands of years ago, but to most of the languages that are spoken today it has been applied either in relatively recent times or not at all. Moreover, until the days of printing, literacy was confined to a very few people. All languages were spoken through merely all of their history by people who did not read or write; the languages of such peoples are just as stable, regular, and rich as the languages of literate nations. A language is the same no matter what system of writing may be used to record it, just as a person is the same no matter how you take his picture.

(From *Language* by Leonard Bloomfield, 1933, Holt, New York, p. 21)

Contrary to popular misconception, sign languages are not pantomimes and gestures, inventions of educators, or ciphers of the spoken language of the surrounding community. They are found wherever there is a community of deaf people, and each one is a distinct, full language, using the same kinds of grammatical machinery found world-wide in spoken languages.

(From *The Language Instinct* by Steven Pinker, 1954/ 1995, Harper Collins, New York, p. 36)

Interview

Interview of M.L. Tickoo
by Pushpinder Syal

It is a warm October afternoon. At Prof M.L. Tickoo's (MLT) home in Chandigarh, Mrs. Champa Tickoo makes the afternoon tea for us while we settle down to talk about a subject on which Prof Tickoo has written, taught and deliberated for many years – the teaching of English in India. We have reproduced extracts from the interview.

Pushpinder Syal (PS): Professor Tickoo, we are particularly concerned today about the word 'multilingualism'. What does it mean to have multilingualism in our classrooms?

MLT: If you're placed in a situation where there are many languages, you can simply use the languages you have around you – three languages or four –you do not have to specially *create* a multilingual classroom. It's there, to be made use of in the best possible way.

PS: Do you think there is an apprehension that children will lose interest in their mother tongue, or lose competence in their mother tongue once they start learning a second language?

MLT: Such fears do exist but are absolutely unnecessary. Nobody has ever proved that the mother tongue is a roadblock in learning another language. There is truth in the fact that sounds need to be attended to and that some sounds of the mother tongue may intrude on the second language. But what cannot and should not be forgotten is that the mother tongue is a great support, a major and as yet untapped resource in learning the second language, and that a transfer of skills takes place during this learning. This was revealed from the earliest work done in India by Michael West in 1926.

When he did his longitudinal classroom experiments in West Bengal, he concluded that reading is a general power –there are general strategies – whether in the first or second / foreign language. The main thing is to build upon what has already been done in the *first* language – what Fishman called the 'strong' language – and transfer from that 'strong' language to the 'weak' language becomes possible, particularly if the learner has reached the stage that Cummins calls the CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency).[1] And that is what the teacher is supposed to achieve in the classroom. But what we were taught in the 50s was that 'mother tongue, the devil, is waiting' and we must nip the evil in the bud. Errors that enter never come out and in fact fossilize; so we must make sure that errors never occur. This was partly behaviourism at work; the idea came from B.F. Skinner who found the need to make sure that 95 per cent of the children 'learn' 95 per cent of the things. Associated with this was the myth that the performing teacher can best teach any learner, not necessarily the participating, performing learner; in fact the more aggressive the teacher, the greater the belief that the language was being learnt. But the truth was that the *more* aggressive the teacher, the *less* the learner could participate in learning, and very often hardly anything was learnt, although the teacher was happy that she had done her job. Of course, there is a small part of the sound system that needs to be carefully attended to, and there are ways of doing that.

PS: It also depends on *what* the second language it is. If it is English, with all its associations, power and social status…?

MLT: Yes, but in fact, it is the other way round when it comes to English. The English language *can threaten* the existence of the mother tongue, especially where the mother tongue is a minority or a tribal language of India. This is because of the belief sold to us that English should grow independently if it is to grow well. Parents who want the economic welfare of their children fight all the way through to see this done. Moreover, teachers sometimes punish the child for speaking in Hindi or Punjabi or Kashmiri. But it is not only the parents but also the bilingual experts who have said this. For example, in 1984, W.F. Mackey, who had done a lot of work on bilingualism, said that there were unproductive and productive languages and parents should decide whether or not to allow their child to give time to a language that was unproductive, at the cost of a productive language. So if we build a belief system that languages are to be seen as enemies, then there is a problem.

In some cases, the battle for superiority between languages has absurd manifestations. I remember seeing a book for Vietnamese children, written by an American linguist. This book, entitled 'English Names' had a hundred 'English' names, and the children each had to take up an English name, because otherwise it would spoil the 'pure' atmosphere of the classroom. My daughter told me that in China, where she's teaching now, the children had taken up names like 'table', 'chair', even 'yes' and 'no' – anything, as long as they were 'English' words. One of the children said 'My name is Miaow'. The poor things had to hide their identities and their names because the teacher said there are English names and non-English names.

PS: There is a belief that the second language should be introduced at an early age, as children between the ages 5 to 14 will be better able to learn a new language. Is there any evidence to support this?

MLT: Yes, there is this question of an early start. From the 50s to the 80s, it was believed, the earlier the better. The MELT (Madras English Language Teaching) Campaign, for example, which was the outcome of the Madras (now Tamil Nadu) Government's introduction of English in primary schools, necessitated the training of 70,000 primary teachers. The campaign appeared to have taken the belief seriously because of the influence of a team of neurosurgeons led by Wilbur Penfield in Canada (he was invited to give talks on All India Radio), who said that the brain undergoes changes around the age of twelve and becomes stiffened, so learning another language becomes physiologically difficult. Of course, people challenged this, notably Michael West, who argued on the basis of data from a research that a late starter learns faster, uses cognitive abilities and various strategies. Moreover, the earlier you start in school, the less proficient are the teachers who teach English. In the non-native context, the primary teachers had (and even today have) hardly any knowledge of English, so the base, the foundation, was ruined; therefore the later you start, the better it is. Apart from the theoretical argument, there is also a political argument as stated in the 'Jan Adesh'*: The nation is committed to give English for use to every child in school and we teachers must work to make it happen effectively. An early start, unless schools have primary teachers who have adequate English, may not prove to be a sound alternative.*

The recommendations of the NCF 2005 (National Curriculum Framework) for

languages state clearly that English should be part of a bilingual or multilingual classroom. The mother tongue is already in place when a child comes to school, therefore teaching of English can be started straightaway. We cannot really say that we should start late, but if teaching of English is started at age 6 or 7, it should be all right.

PS: Could you suggest how languages of children can be used in teaching a second language such as English, Hindi or Telugu? Would bilingual materials be helpful?

MLT: There has been a lot of work in which two languages have been brought together. One of the earliest instances in India was in the 1920s, when Wyatt (1923) demonstrated, how we could put the *grammar* of two languages together to good use. Wherever he saw that there was a clear comparison, he used that as a basis for teaching. He used, for example, *number and gender* in Urdu and English nouns as a basis for teaching. However, where there were differences, he took a contrastive stance and showed the contrast at work. Where there wasn't either, he kept the mother tongue out and pointed out the absence or the addition of an element from another language. Another successful ELT practitioner – W.M. Ryburn – worked close by in Kharar, Punjab, on the same belief system. He went a little further and made the teachers of the mother tongue and English draw a list of essays at the beginning of the year. These essays were to be written in both languages by the children. They found that while in the mother tongue the children wrote more elaborately, in English, the essays were shorter. With the help of what they had written in the mother tongue, the children could make improvements in their English essays. Thus it has been proven that transfer is possible, and two languages can indeed help each other. This principle of *additive* bilingualism rather than

the subtractive was understood as far back as the 1920s to the 1940s. In any case, if the teaching of mother tongue is strengthened, the base of language becomes sound, and that helps. Even earlier in 1917-19, the Calcutta University Commission comprising academics, had recommended that mother tongue teachers be trained, and that ways be found to improve the theory and practice of its teaching; also, the mother tongue and English should be made to work in harmony. But we do not know what happened during and after the 50s and how all this was forgotten.

PS: Do you think this was because of the three language formula, or other language policies?

MLT: Yes, perhaps. But it is possible that we were *sold* certain policies, and history made us helpless. In 1943, Winston Churchill said the time had come when they didn't need to conquer countries; they could do all that and more by conquering people's minds. The English language was perhaps their most potent weapon and so that was attempted. With India becoming free and the Constitution making education available for many more children, there were very few competent teachers of English. There was great need for a panacea. The British Council stepped in and promoted a monolingual approach, e.g. Mahabaleshwar 1950 and Nagpur 1957. This monolingual approach, termed Structural Approach by the Indians, had very little proven theory. As regards the textbooks, it seemed The British Council was not happy with Indians writing their own books. When there was an initiative to do so at the CIE (later CIEFL) under Prof Gokak, and the thinking was that we should start writing books even if we didn't produce the best, we could still have good books; our otherwise very friendly and greatly cooperative colleagues from the U.K didn't join us, they stayed out. What Phillipson described in his

book (1992), gives us a possible clue as to what could have happened. There were meetings in London, at the ministerial level, and they clearly said that foreigners should not be encouraged to write English textbooks and take their bread away from them. They told us that only *they* could do it, since they wanted to sell us the English language. Prof. Randolph Quirk, like Prof Bruce Pattison earlier, stood for the spreading of the English language as 'both our duty and our capital'. The scenario repeated itself with NELTS (National English Language Testing System) at CIEFL much later – some of us were made to believe that we didn't know what proficiency in language was; we could do achievement tests but not proficiency tests, and only the 'knowers' ought to attempt those.

PS: How are the ways of using the languages of children in learning a second language different from the traditional grammar translation method that had been in vogue till the 70s?

MLT: It's not true that the 'traditional grammar translation' method was there only till the 70s – it carried on even after that. But what teachers need to do is to be sure exactly where and in what way the mother tongue should be used as a support language; interlingual translation should be used wherever the teacher feels the need and sees value in its use. We need to evolve our own a methodology, that is appropriate to our multilingual classrooms. There was a suggestion in Dodson's Bilingual Method which had incorporated the best of *direct method* with support from the mother tongue wherever needed. It was quite successful, though the British Council played it down as it may have been viewed as a threat to the monolingual approach they were advocating. Due to their adherence to the direct method, teachers began to take pride in never using a word of the mother tongue. It

must be understood that the direct method is not a sacred cow. But using the mother tongue means that the *learners* themselves should be doing the work, using the languages themselves. There has been some experimentation in this field, and we need to put in an effort to collect the good work that has been done; and perhaps through some agency, put together the dissertations that have been written over the years. Then there is the larger project, of putting it into practice, and evolving our own methodology.

PS: Should the teacher be familiar with the language or languages of children?

MLT: Harold E. Palmer, the founder of modern ELT methodology in Japan (1922-1936), said that in order to teach English in an EFL context, the teacher need not be a native speaker. Nor does being a native speaker or even teaching the language in the UK qualify him as a good EFL teacher. One needs the experience of the non-native context. That's what he did – he learnt Japanese before going to Japan. West, an ELT pioneer in India, learnt Bengali before joining the Indian Education Service. Both believed that the teacher must learn the language of the learner. This increases the learner's confidence, and makes the learning atmosphere friendlier. If India needs English teachers, it needs those teachers who are proficient in the learners' language(s). Most English teachers are proud of *not* 'knowing the learners' language; they feel that if they speak in that language, they're 'coming down' in their profession as teachers of English. A major attitudinal change is needed to improve our profession's responsiveness to the nation's needs.

PS: While there are clearly defined needs for English, people don't perceive the need for the mother tongue in the same way. And if it is not

needed for specific purposes, wouldn't there be less motivation to learn it?

MLT: We have to accept that English has become an indispensable weapon. But it does not mean we should give up what we have. Children have to be conscious of the mother tongue as their identity; not only to translate, but also as Gurudev Tagore told the teachers long ago, *re-translate*, start learning what needs to be done in the language they're learning. Henry Sweet said by simply saying you should use it, you're not doing anything. You have to use the language. The mother tongue is there, in the mind, why not use it where it is supportive, and keep it out where it's not needed?

PS: During the years when children are focused on English for their career needs, say from high school onwards, they can hardly keep in touch with the mother tongue. Can they get back to it at a later stage?

MLT: 'Need', I believe, is the key word. It provides motivation (the key to learning) for acquiring English that the child is conscious about. But the language learnt in the early childhood does not die. It remains dormant. The script may present some difficulty, though. Then, there are also social needs that continue to be met in the children's languages.

PS: What would you say if there is a curriculum where literature – prose, stories, poems – is taught in the mother tongue (to develop reading skills in the mother tongue as well as to understand culture), and English is taught for functional purposes?

MLT: There is certainly a need for children's literature in our languages, which enriches them, and we also need to encourage the writers of children's books.

PS: What is the impact of the multilingual classroom in the overall linguistic and cognitive growth of children after they have passed out of school?

MLT: Bilingualism, as studies have shown repeatedly, is superior in a number of ways, including the ability to multi-task and give back-up support in essential ways. It also brings social tolerance. For Michael West, bilingualism was a problem and he thought that a speaker who knew no more than a language like Bengali had only half the language, whereas a monolingual English speaker had an all-purpose complete language; in his view therefore, the average bilingual child is at a disadvantage. But in our country, many children come from families where 4-5 languages are spoken with the greatest ease, an example of which is the on-the-spot translation that kids do. We knew child who came from a family where several languages – Marathi, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi and English – were spoken. This child enjoyed teaching us what words in one language meant in another.

PS: What would be your message to teachers?

MLT: Start with belief in learning and always stay as an eager learner; allow opportunities for learning, keep your mind open to learning with children, from children. The children work together and draw on their experiences in learning. The teacher is someone who helps them, is on their side. The teacher *as a listener* is important. I'd say that the languages are a source of delight for both teachers and learners.

PS: Professor Tickoo, thank you very much.

MLT: Thank you, Prof. Pushpinder Syal, for a true learning session.

[1] *CALP should be seen in the context of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which children acquire in natural contexts; CALP is acquire mostly through formal training and is transferable from one language to another.*

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Landmarks

Language Teaching in the Greek and Roman Times

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What do you think language teaching looked like in the Greek and Roman times, say about 2500 years ago? Was it very different from what we do today? What have we learnt from that great tradition we call the Greco-Roman tradition? You may be surprised to note that some of the issues that are debated today were also important during those days. For example, the Greeks and the Romans also wondered whether language teachers should focus on grammar or literature teaching.

Socrates and philosophers before him were more concerned about the nature of language and its use for man, and from their discussions, emerged schools such as the Stoics. Stoicism considered language to be 'a cultural universal', and in that sense natural to human beings. In Plato's *Cratylus*, we find Socrates' views on the 'general questions of language' and in Plato's and Aristotle's writings one sees the beginnings of structural analysis of sentences (Robins, 1993, p. 26). Serious thinking about language thus preceded the programmes of pedagogical practices involved in second or foreign language teaching. It should be obvious that any language teaching programme that is not informed by a conceptual understanding of the nature and structure of language and its acquisition is bound to fail. In fact, Aristotle was the first to talk about the modulation of words and describe them in terms of Case relations (Robins, 1993, p. 26). There was no discussion, however, of language acquisition. Since the Greeks were a more or less homogenous community speaking different dialects of the same language (even when they

lived in the different city-states), it is easy to understand that they did not give much thought to issues of language acquisition or teaching. Hence, it is no surprise that there was no discussion on language-teaching or focused efforts on grammar-writing during the Greek times.

Later, Greek ambition brought together the small city-states of Ancient Greece and many other lands further east. The newly acquired lands and the foreigners, or the 'barbarians' (as the Greeks referred to them) had to be incorporated into the Greek culture and for this it was important that the 'uncivilized' barbarians be taught the Greek language and Greek values. This process is what has been called 'hellenization', and it led to the conscious development of grammar and language-teaching. Before this, the Greeks were largely expected to appreciate their own literature and art, of which Homer was the finest specimen.

With the passage of time, the centre of power and the Greek civilization moved eastward via Rome, finally settling in the city of Byzantium. The people of Rome saw themselves as inheritors of the glorious Greek heritage and it remained the most important city for the Graeco-Roman civilization. The Romans had two goals: a) preserving the old Greco-Roman tradition by teaching people the Greek language and Greek values and b) 'hellenizing' the newly acquired population by teaching them Latin. Since Latin had become the language of the court and administration, it was wiser to teach Latin since that would also help in the running of a peaceful state. Although by the end of the ninth century, there was very little Latin spoken, systematic teaching of Latin continued in places of learning. Here, then, are the first seeds of systematic language teaching and grammar writing; the era of language pedagogy had appeared on the horizon. The

Byzantines wrote several commentaries on the writers and poets of the past. It may not be premature to mention Dionysius Thrax's definition of grammar which summarizes for us the purpose of grammar:

"Grammar is empirical knowledge of the general usage of poets and prose writers. It has six divisions: first, expert reading with due regard to prosodic features; second, explanation of the literary expressions found in the texts; third, the provision of notes on particular words and on subject matter; fourth, the discovery of etymologies; fifth, the working out of grammatical regularities; sixth, the critical appreciation of literature, which is the finest part of all that the science embraces" (Robins, 1993, p. 44).

The subsequent generations have followed the above techniques; in fact, until recently, literary appreciation remained at the centre of language teaching across the world. The grammar also largely followed the same model of grammar writing. Such a view of grammar decides in some sense the role that language-teachers are supposed to play. It also reveals that the pronunciation of texts was an important part of teaching and learning, and the purpose of learning one's language was to enjoy and appreciate one's literature and ultimately one's culture.

For later generations of language-teachers, Dionysius Thrax's *Techne Grammatike*, the complete works of Appollonius Dyscolus', and Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae* served as the three major authoritative texts on Greek and Latin. To this list we may add *Ars Grammatica* by Donatus for he and Priscian became the 'schoolmasters of Europe' (Robins, 1993). These works served as reference points for other grammarians, and all language-teaching and material building adopted the form and style of these texts.

What is noteworthy is that although all future grammar and linguistic studies were guided by these works, the Byzantine scholars didn't stop at the grammar they inherited; instead they went on to write and add to these resources. They made these additions with the awareness that they were first language-teachers, and later grammarians. Such a realization helped them keep their focus on pedagogy and they did not drift into other disciplines, unlike their predecessors.

The grammar writers set the grammar and lesson plans in different form and styles, hence, parts of the lessons could be framed in a 'question and answer format and grouped into pieces'. According to Robins, this was done for 'ease of memorization by pupils and ease of presentation by teachers.' (Robins, 1993, 32). He also added that some grammars were elementary and didactic, with little attempt at explanation and theoretical justification of the information given, whereas others concentrate on correct pronunciation of different forms of words (Robins, 1993, p. 31).

Finally, the task of the teachers was to indicate the flaws in the spoken and written forms of language. These included errors such as non-standard usage, mistakes in sentence form, wrong concords, etc., and 'barbarisms', as well as mistakes in pronunciation and word formation. The grammarians on the other hand were mainly concerned with the correction and prevention of errors. There were parts of grammar containing grammatical and other linguistic information for instructional purposes; the students learnt to identify individual words and assign word classes to them. In other words, these devices ensured that students learnt how to parse words. Some of these rules were set in verse (Robins, 1993, p. 125). As you can see, this has largely been the burden of language teaching till date. Yet, not everybody even at that time was in favour of such parsing exercises as is attested by Anna Comnena, the daughter of Emperor Alexius, who expressed her distaste for such didactic and instructional grammars that carried parsing exercises, in her biography of her father: …now not even a second place is allotted to more exalted studies, studies of our poets and prose writers and of the knowledge that comes from them. This passion for parsing and other improper subjects is like a game of draughts. I say you this because I am distressed by the complete neglect of general elementary education (Robins, 1993).

The seeds of language teaching then are in trying to teach 'aliens' the language of the rulers and maintain 'purity' of language; in many ways we continue to do that even today.

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Book Reviews

Sarah Phillips, 1999, **Drama with Children,** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 152 pages (paperback) Series: Resource Books for Teachers.

Reviewed by Rimli Bhattacharya
& Rita Ronita Sen

*Drama with Children (*hereafter *DwC)* is meant for use at primary and pre-primary levels. The appeal is chiefly to primary teachers, whose needs are largely ignored in India. Sarah Phillips aims to promote teaching-learning of language skills; revising grammatical structures through role play and various other activities.

In this book, there are many innovative ideas, both practical and well explained. Without the stress of putting together large and elaborate drama productions, the book could help teachers with their daily lesson plans, add something unexpected in the classroom to make lessons meaningful. For all these reasons it would be a valuable addition to any school library, although the price might be a deterrent factor for the average school. Also, as we suggest later, it could provide an excellent basis for creating workshops relevant to local conditions.

Imagining the child as a learner

The emphasis is on the 'process' of dramatizing rather than on 'a final product' of performance. Phillips rightly touches on the importance of motivation and how drama can be a great help when dealing with learners who *appear* disinterested, uncooperative or have short attention spans. The different units gradually move the learners from situations to dialogues, and encourage brainstorming to involve students in preparing the dialogues. Phillips understands that for the teacher, the main aim is the process, while the child may only focus on the final performance. What is *not* addressed though, is how the teacher may draw on the children's own repertoire as there is little or no mention of the range of body language, sounds, songs, and miming capabilities that they already possess and bring to the classroom.

The units foreground the element of fun which a bit of role play or dramatization would introduce into the classroom. The 'language aims' are spelt out quite clearly in each unit. These range from overarching aims such as 'revising and recycling language' (as the units progress), to more specific exercises such as the 'use of prepositions, *must* and the past imperfect' (p. 101).

However, it is not clear what linguistic range of children the book has in mind. Does the 'target' include both native speakers of English as well as those learning it as a foreign language? In what different ways might English work as a foreign language? Would it work in multilingual contexts, or where the child may be fluent in another home language, or for a first generation learner? There are only scattered references to this complex but challenging issue, e.g. 'you can do this in your own language' (p. 32) or 'children can't read English yet' (p. 85). For drama to be an effective mode of everyday pedagogic practices, educators would first need to address the heterogeneity of the latter as a group. In seeking to cover all these diverse possibilities, without really spelling out any one of them, how successful is the book in its language aims?

In addition to the extensive section on mime (with visual, aural and kinaesthetic

reinforcement) DwC dwells on rhyme, rhythm, songs and chanting, so critical to a child's understanding and development of language. In Unit 2.6, p. 40, the author describes the rhyme 'Who Stole the Cookies'. Could there be a better way to relate to sound and movement, and enunciate and move with claps and expressive movements, such as the shrugging of shoulders, swaying, and so on?

The directions and planning are detailed even though some scope for improvisation has been left open. The sample short plays might be used as kernel-texts to be enlarged or adapted. All aspects of drama seem to be covered, including the worksheets with stencils (p. 00), which can be photocopied as well as enlarged for props and costumes. With the pressures of globalization through different media impacting most heavily on the visual culture of children, it would be fruitful to raise questions about the culture or class specific attributes of iconography or visual symbols. For example, the line drawings of castles (turrets), etc., in the Cinderella story may prove to be alienating if the book is followed blindly.

In general, Phillips avoids an over-determined schema, but one still notes an oscillation between the guided/controlled/structured mode, and another, nurturing improvisation. For instance, one wonders why mime words should come with a fixed or designated action (p. 19). How would children's subjectivity find expression if these actions are 'fixed'? Similarly, while one appreciates the emphasis on emotions, how effective would it be to think of and work with 'feelings' *in isolation*? (p. 16). There would be a danger of fostering, both in the teacher and the students, a limited repertoire of stereotypical (television-oriented?) gestures and expression.

In contrast to the rich range of pedagogic approaches, the choice of most of the stories and poems themselves is disappointing (e.g. enormous elephant, p. 20; or big blue fish). Perhaps this is a natural consequence of the attempt to address too-general an audience? Our experience within and outside the classroom shows that given a nurturing atmosphere and some contextualizing, little children are perfectly capable of responding to the unfamiliar.

Sections 3 and 4 on 'Making puppets and props' and 'Using puppets' respectively, have some of the most innovative and imaginative ideas. Phillips details the uses of finger, sock, stick and origami puppets. The vibrant line drawings that illustrate the concepts and contexts, add to the attraction.

The real test of the usefulness of the book however, lies in trying out the activities over an extended period of time in an actual classroom situation. A few of the suggestions sound a tad overconfident, e.g. can the 'ten minute role play' really be done in 10 minutes?

The very forte of the book — its comprehensive treatment of the subject — might lend itself to a cut and copy paste 'application'. Given the logistics of large numbers, the constraints of time and syllabi, and the lack of an intellectual support system in the Indian education system, not every teacher (even if he or she may desire it) actually feels empowered to be creative. As part of a series entitled 'Resource Books for Teachers', it would be most helpful if the author had a section (either as a foreword or afterword) directly addressing the teacher. This could indicate how and where to provide the scope for creative language learning and improvisation in order to:

1. Respect and seek the individual qualities of the child;

2. experiment and not be discouraged by the lack of immediate response; and

3. draw on the local rich performative and visual traditions (especially in South Asia, Africa, etc);

As the punning title promises, *Drama with Children* could also be a splendid resource book for workshops on drama and language learning, if we reconfigure in our multilingual contexts, many of its pedagogic and expressive assumptions.

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Rhyner, Paula M. (Ed.), 2009, **Emergent Literacy and Language Development: Promoting Learning in early Childhood.** New York: Guilford Press, 240 pages.

Reviewed by Aditya Raj

There has been a surge of transdisciplinary research on various facets of literacy in recent times. *Emergent Literacy and Language Development* is indeed a good addition to this corpus of research as it forms a bridge which tries to establish bidirectional relationships between emergent literacy and language acquisition. The book is a compilation of six essays by leading scholars in the genre of emergent literacy. Early childhood education is the thread which moors the discourse of this collection. The book is edited by Rhyner, who is known for her work on the effectiveness of various strategies in facilitating language learning in early childhood, especially communicative strategies between adults and children. According to the editor, emergent literacy involves knowledge, skills, and attitudes that develop before literacy, but are related to conventional literacy skills. However, there is disagreement on the exact knowledge that defines emergent literacy. The chapters address the early formative experiences of listening and speaking. However, research, from which the maze of discussion is delineated in this edited book, pertains to clinical or social settings. The case studies illustrated are significant and evocative. They guide parents and practitioners towards instructions and practices that contribute to the development of a strong foundation in school readiness.

The framework for emergent literacy is categorized into three perspectives—developmental, components, and child and environmental influence. The different approaches towards emergent literacy are explained in the first chapter. The focus of the next chapter is the importance of the book sharing experience for the child. In sharing words with the young ones we also bring the world to them. The semantically rich cultural atmosphere contributes to oral language development, as well as development of meaning for emergent literacy. The discourse in chapter three looks at how a child's

phonology develops in tandem with other components of language, specifically the lexical and syntactic components, and how a child maintains an awareness of the connection between the sound and its meaning. The focus of chapter four is on children's early writing and spelling acquisition, and their bidirectional influence on early oral language attainment. The interrelationship of children's early language learning, and their early story and expository discourse is discussed in chapter five. The last chapter is significant, and delineates the connection between emergent literacy and cultural and linguistic diversity with regard to assessment and intervention with young children.

Research at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) and The Institute of Early Childhood Education and Research (IECER) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, also suggest that early environment and experiences contribute significantly to inequalities in child development. In this context, learning assumes centrality because child development happens in cognizance with learning. Learning begins long before a child starts comprehending a language and expressing. Oral communication is pivotal as well. Nevertheless, the process in which learning is initiated, and the warmth with which the process is conducted holds centrality. It is in the same vein that we have come to accept the necessity of giving due importance to emotional quotient (EQ) along with intelligence quotient (IQ) in the educational process.

Literacy is the baseline of the educational process and conventional literacy is significant since it is the formal marker. However, the talk and the text should attempt to map terrains beyond conventional wisdom to include educative processes, and should also attempt to understand the undercurrent that situates the

possibility of all round human development. A holistic development can be expected to negate learning outcomes located specifically in time and space. Although, there are periods of sparks just as there are crests and turfs, the educative process can best be understood as a lifelong learning. Rigorous research should attempt to understand these interrelated facets as well as the complexity of human experiences.

Reading and oral skills are important for emergent literacy but one has to take into consideration the changing nature of society and the ever emergent complexity of the global age. The role of the technologies of information communication in the everyday experiences of parents and their young ones cannot be overlooked. The involvement with media is another issue that needs to be considered. The media has taken over the role of grandparents--at least in a developing society such as that of India. The young ones hear stories, but from record players at home or in the car in which they travel with their parents. The migratory nature of contemporary society is another case in point. Also, I would have loved a serious engagement with the works of Bourdieu and Bernstein, because of the seminal nature of their work around cultural capital and the codes for the socialization of the young respectively.

The book is commendable. Nevertheless, one has to go beyond scratching the tip of the social convolution. The problem lies not in the scholarship of this edited collection but in the hold of the formal process of knowledge construction. The grip of modernity is paramount on the research designs and the assumed outcomes. Research under Newtonian-Baconian-Cartesian epistemology has inherent limitations, for they suggest a linear specific diagnostic developmental outcome. A

fine start is important in order to do well in life, and therefore a co-relation is useful. A good milieu for early human development through emergent language acquisition is important. However, it does not mean that children who may have had a comparatively less advantageous start will not be able to make it up later in life. Therefore, while acknowledging the contributions in this edited collection, it is essential to keep other lines of inquiry around language learning in early human development and related aspects open.

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Alan Devies, 2003, **The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality,** Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, pp 237 Hardbound.
Reviewed by Rajesh Kumar
& Amit Sethi

Davies' book is published in the series 'Bilingual Education and Bilingualism: 38' of Multilingual Matters Ltd. This book explores and examines critical questions pertaining to the concept of a native speaker from different perspectives. The idea of a *native speaker* always appears fresh in linguistics. Researchers in various sub-fields of linguistics define *native speaker* with the traits that are typical of a sub-field. *Knowledge of Language* appears as a common thread in most of the working definitions of native speaker. Chomsky's works (since 1965) also contribute to the idea of the *Knowledge of Language*. In fact, most definitions seem to incorporate the idea that the '*Knowledge of* Language' makes a

speaker native to the language. This book is an attempt to look at the *native* speaker in a more comprehensive manner. It is also an attempt to bring several perspectives on native speakers together in one book. It has ten chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Out of this, eight chapters examine the questions and the concepts of native speakers in linguistics from the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and language acquisition perspectives. The book effectively argues that the concept of a native speaker is in fact a myth, and concludes that a native speaker is a nothing more than a social construct. The book begins with personal anecdotes that are significant for the discussions on the native speaker. It engages the discussion in the context of many previous works namely Chomsky (1965), Paikeday (1985), Ferguson (1983), and Katz and Fodor 1962 among others. Defining the goal of this book, the author aims to make the concept of a native speaker unambiguous.

With regard to examinations, Davies supports the view in Felix (1987). This position argues in favor of the following: (a) language processing is done by two different cognitive systems, (b) where native speakers know two or more languages, both these languages use different cognitive systems (c) the adult learner primarily uses the problem-solving system in addition to the language-specific system. Davies seems to agree with Felix that the use of two systems makes language acquisition harder for an adult learner. Hence, he seems to be giving due recognition to Chomsky for the technical contributions that define *Knowledge of Language*, and Paikeday for the discussion on 'practical significance' of the term native speaker.

In the first few chapters, Davies highlights how difficult it is to define 'first language' or 'mother tongue', especially in multilingual homes and communities as some people are

mobile by circumstance, and therefore become proficient in multiple languages. There are many similar situations which lead individuals or communities to become multilingual where one could have *many first languages*. It is difficult to discount them as non-native speakers of all that they speak. He argues that language and linguistic identity is more a socio-political tool than a reality. The actual membership of a language is very fluid. In fact, people even fall out of this membership if they do not use a language for a long time.

Chapter 1 of the book explains a readily available definition of a native speaker. Chapter 2 discusses the psycholinguistic aspects of a native speaker. It talks about the language development of the native and non-native speakers, and questions the cognitive aspects involved in their development. Chapter 3 deals with the theoretical linguistic aspects of the concept of a native speaker. It elaborates on the significant question of whether native and non native speakers work with two different grammars of the language. In a sense the first three chapters form the prelude to the discussion of native speakers as a social or sociolinguistic construct in chapter 4. The subsequent chapters (5, 6, and 7) examine the idea of a native speaker from the perspective of his knowledge, communicative competence, and other aspects covering the intelligibility of a native speaker in a given speech community respectively. Chapter 8 looks at the e-identity of a native speaker and chapter 9 deals with the construct of the idea of a native speaker in the second language research. Finally, chapter 10 concludes the argument and the idea of a native speaker.

According to Davies, the proficiency-based definitions of native speakers are problematic. Birth-based definitions are akin to ethnic label and are hard to argue with. They do not seem to serve any practical purposes

as far as the study of language is concerned and for which we need to define a native speaker. He thus supports the notion that it is possible to be a native speaker of more than one language if exposed to them at an early stage. He defines competence in multiple ways including recognition of appropriateness of language constructs, the ability to express an idea in multiple ways, the choice of words grounded in socio-cultural context, etc. Davies rejects the views in Kachru (1985), which sees language speakers as concentric circles primarily based on their place of living. For example, in the case of English, the British, the American, and the Australians form the inner core of 'Native' speakers, followed largely by former British colonies such as India and Singapore in expanding circles, and then the rest of the world in the outer circle. He favours the view where this nativity is defined contextually, based not only on the environment at birth, but also proficiency at the time of speaking.

Overall, this is a well written book with a comprehensive treatment of questions such as "Who is a native speaker", "How can we test nativity in a language" and "How does the membership to the native speaker club change functionally and socially." The author does not short shrift any of the traditional argument in favor of the notion of 'nativity', yet he pulls no punches in demolishing them one by one.

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> **A college student in Delhi talks about the patterns of his language use:**
> Since Hindi is my mother tongue and I've learnt it at my home, I feel very comfortable in using it while talking to my parents. In school, I learnt English; therefore while talking to friends and sibling, I prefer English. Hindi is also my language with my friends and sibling. Some of my relatives hardly know any other language but Bhojpuri. I like this language as I've been using this since childhood. With my teachers and strangers, I feel comfortable in English. Also to sound formal I love using English.

Suggested Readings

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Focus on the Language Classroom

By Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey, Cambridge Language Teaching Library

Cambride University Press, UK, First Published: 1991, Tenth Printing: 2004, ISBN 0 521 26909 1 (Paperback)

Allwright and Bailey's *Focus on the Language Classroom* strives to answer the most fundamental question related to language teaching in tutored settings: what works in the classroom and why. In other words, the focus of this book is on *what actually happens* in the classroom rather than on the planning of language teaching. Given that classroom research is a dynamic area of investigation, the main issues addressed in this book have implications for various facets of classroom teaching including teaching, syllabus design, material development, testing and teacher education. Allwright and Bailey note in their Preface that "Being a good classroom teacher means being alive to what goes on in the classroom" (p xvi), and as such classroom research helps in gaining a better understanding of what good teachers and learners *instinctively* do as a matter of course. The book is divided into six major parts, with a total of eleven chapters. The first and second parts deal with the principles and procedures involved in classroom research. The core of the book, however, lies in Parts III-V which documents the findings that researchers have discovered ever since language classroom research began in the late 1960s. Part III of

the book deals with the treatment of 'oral errors' in language classrooms, Part IV considers the complexities of 'classroom interaction', and Part V examines 'receptivity' that summarizes the research on learners in terms of personal matters such as anxiety, competitiveness, motivation and self-esteem. For those who are working on classroom research, Part VI of this book will prove useful as it deals with the position that teachers may adopt to utilize classroom research in their own settings. Each chapter also has a *summary, a discussion starter, suggestions for further reading,* and a *mini project* section. Readers will especially find the section on *discussion starters* to be of great aid in relating the main points with their own experience. In addition, Appendix A-H on pages 202-223 also outlines a few systems and models of analysing classroom research.

A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory

By Penny Ur Cambridge Teacher Training and Development Series Editors: Marion Williams and Tony Wright Published by: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge First Published: 1996 First South Asian Printing: 2005 ISBN: 0-521-67137-X (Paperback)

The best thing about Penny Ur's *A Course in Language Teaching* is its comprehensiveness. Divided into a total of seven parts, the course book comprises 22 modules including practice activities, testing, reading, lesson-planning, teaching regular as well as large heterogeneous classes, and many others, with each module bearing a careful outline of both theoretical and practical aspects. Each module also has separate units outlining the following: i) *input* (background information essentially forming a

summary of ideas that professionals, scholars and researchers have produced) ii) *experiential work* (tasks based on teaching/learning experiences, which may be based on lesson observation, classroom teaching, micro-teaching, peer-teaching and/or experiment) and iii) *tasks* which are aimed to provoke careful thinking about the issues and the formulation of personal theories with regard to language teaching. The different learning modes and defining concepts are lucidly explained in a short 'Rationale' section in the Introduction. The first two parts of the book comprise a total of seven units, which outline the *basics of the teaching process* and the *components of teaching language.* The *basics of the teaching process* in turn comprise *presentation*, *practicing* and *testing*, which correspond to the three strategies used by good learners trying to acquire a foreign language which are a) to perceive and understand new language, b) to learn it thoroughly and c) to check themselves. The *components of teaching language* comprise pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and topics/situations/notions/functions; the 'what'. The rest of the book deals with practical aspects of teaching language, course contents, etc. Teachers trying to teach a language in heterogeneous settings may find Part III ('Teaching the language: The how') and Part VI ('Learner differences') particularly useful. Ur's insights drawn from personal experience, and the citation of practical examples based on the 'reflective model' in teaching language make this book a very handy companion for language teachers and educators. The simple layout of the book with its effective illustration also makes it very user-friendly. This book also has a 'Further Reading/Teachers' Handbook' section at the end of each module which most readers will find extremely useful.

Second Language Learning: Theoretical Foundations

By Michael Sharwood Smith, Applied Studies and Language Study Series General Editor: C.N Candlin, Longman Group, UK Limited, First Published: 1994 ISBN: 0-582-218861 (Paperback)

Second Language Learning in the Applied Studies and Language Study series approaches second language acquisition as a complex psychological process involving human cognitive ability. The book provides a psychological analysis of learner language, and gives an idea of the field right from its inception to the 90s. Of the three parts in the book, the first provides a historical analysis pertaining to issues of second language; the third focuses on recent trends and implications for second language research while the interim section provides a discussion of the theoretical problems arising from various earlier approaches. For readers looking for a quick overview of concepts (second language, interlanguage, input and intake, metalanguage, acquisition, variability, modularity, strategy, transfer, processing, learning and development, LAD, etc.) and debates in modern second language research, the first three chapters in particular will be immensely useful. Chapter 3 in particular, with its useful illustrations of 'creative construction theory' provides solid foothold to the new researcher in issues of L1 and L2. Besides touching upon various research frameworks, the book also discusses, in Smith's own words, "the role of mother tongue influence, the contribution of conscious processes in learning, and the differences and similarities between second or foreign learner language and child language development" (Author's Preface, p. xix). The theoretical

applications and implications drawn out in chapters 7 and 8 would be of interest to scholars stepping into the area of second language learning. In all, this book is more useful now, nearly two decades after its first publication, as a basic introduction to core concepts and as a marker of 'what went before' in the field of applied linguistics as it is today.

Context and Culture in Language Teaching

By Claire Kramsch

Oxford University Press, First Published: 1993, ISBN: 0-19437187 5 (Paperback)

The basic premise of Kramsch's *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* provides a fresh perspective to the issue of language acquisition by taking the philosophy of conflict as its point of departure. It acknowledges the difficulties that *cultural contexts* play in second language teaching, given that culture is not an "expendable fifth skill tacked on" to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Instead, for Kramsch, culture always remains in the background, and manages to "unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least" (p.1). The book is divided into eight major sections dealing with, amongst others, education challenges, contexts, stories and discourses, teaching the literary text, authentic texts and contexts and 'teaching language along the cultural fault line'. Chapter 3 of the book analyses three case studies of teachers trying to get students to talk and interact as a way of acquiring linguistic forms. However, as the detailed description of each of the case studies and the problems that follow reveal, *context plays a very important role in the construction of meaning*. Kramsch's

analysis of the problems investigated in these case studies shows how teachers can unwittingly constrain classroom discourses to superficial, linguistic exchanges. Another major concern of the book–what role literature could play in the development of second language literacy–is addressed in Chapter 5, which apart from summarizing various communicative practices to teach literary text, gives various examples of literary forms that language teachers may find useful for teaching the importance of cultural context. The problems of expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning from one language to another are also addressed in detail by Kramsch, who concludes "literature and culture are inseparable" (p. 175). In giving due recognition to cross-cultural exchanges in the teaching of languages, Kramsch anticipates much of the dilemmas and anxieties of the people who "live with two or more languages"

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Language is at the centre of human life. We use it to express our love or our hatred, to achieve our goals and further our careers, to gain artistic satisfaction or simple pleasure, to pray or to blaspheme. Through language we plan our lives and remember our past; we exchange ideas and experiences; we form our social and individual identities. Language is the most unique thing about human beings.

(From *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* by Vivian Cook, 2008, Hodder Education, London, p. 1)

Classroom Activities

Activity 1

Drawing Pictures

Objectives:

Drawing attention to immediate surroundings. Early literacy; vocabulary review. Drawing attention to the written form of language

Level: Classes 1 and 2

Time: 40 minutes

Procedure:

Ask the class to draw pictures of the things they see in the classroom, outside the classroom, in the school, at home or in the field. For example a fan, chair, tree etc. After 15-20 minutes, ask a few children to say aloud the name of the picture and show it to everybody. The teacher should write the names of all the things on the board, while the child is making the presentation. After the presentations of 2-3 children, the teacher should tell the children that she has written the names of the things that their friends have drawn. She should spell out each word and point out the word either with the help of a pointer or a stick.

Discussion:

The main point here is to draw the attention of children to writing. The picture, along with its name underneath, work as a flash card. Children can see the written name associated with the picture that they have drawn. At this stage, it does not matter which language a child uses. The words she speaks must be respected. If need be, their equivalent in the target language may also be given. Children may also, in some cases, be encouraged to say a few lines about each object. If possible, the teacher may tell a story woven around a set of objects.

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Activity 2

Board Game

Objectives: To enhance the questioning skills of students; to make revision an engaging activity; to enable students to learn while revising.

Level: Can be used in any class (we used it for classes 3, 4 and 5). The game has 3 levels: Basic Level; Intermediate Level and Advanced Level.

Materials for the Board Game:

The board game consists of the following:

(a) A Snakes-&-Ladders type of board; (b) 3 sets of cards (question cards, answer cards and key-word cards); (c) A single dice; (d) 8 counters.

Basic Level:

Objectives: (a) To improve the reading abilities of children by making them read the questions aloud; (b) To get children to answer the questions given at the end of the text book.

Procedure:

Four to eight children can play. The question cards are kept face down near the board. The answer cards are used only if no student in the group is able to answer the question. All students have their text book with them. A player throws the dice, takes the top most question card and reads it aloud.

The player tries to answer the question and moves the counter according to the number on the dice. If the player is not able to read out the question, another player in the group reads out the question and the first player repeats the question. If the player is not able to answer the question, he/she has to search and locate the answer in the text book.

If the player is still unable to locate the answer, other players help by providing hints. If the player is still unable to answer the question, other players provide the answer and the first player repeats it. The counter in such a case is moved for only half the paces that are indicated by the dice. In case no player is able to answer, or the answer is disputed, one student in the group refers to the corresponding answer card and reads aloud the answer. The group then repeats it. The counter is not moved in such a case.

Intermediate Level: This level is played with key-word and question cards.

Objective: To develop questioning skills in children through the use of key words

Procedure:

First, each student is given at random, either a key-word card or a question-word card. Students play a game called, "finding your partner". Each students having a key-word card goes round the class and searches for a partner who has the appropriate question-word card.

The objective is to make children see the link between the key words and the questions. Next, the board game is started. The key-word cards are kept face down near the board. The dice is thrown. The first key-word card is picked up and the words written on it are read aloud; the player has to ask a question using all the key words.

Other players have to judge whether the question using the key words is appropriate. If they have no disagreement, the player moves the counter according to the number on the dice. In case of a dispute, they appeal to the teacher. There is no right or wrong question and the question asked need not be from the text book.

Advanced Level: This level is an extension of level 1. The process of playing this game is the same as level 1. But the question and the answer cards for this level are prepared by the teachers

Objective: To enable the students to answer questions that require critical thinking (e.g. inference, predictions, take perspective, and distinguish between fact and opinion, etc.)

After the students have played all the levels, the cards are shuffled and "finding the partner" game is played again.

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Forthcoming Events

Tenth Asia TEFL International Conference
4 to 6 October 2012
Delhi NCR (Gurgaon), India

Annual Asia TEFL International Conference is an international gathering of professionals regarding teaching of English as a foreign/second language.
Theme: Expanding Horizons of Language and Communication: ELT Issues, Challenges and Implications

Featured Presentation Theme:

Tertiary English Education in Asia

Papers are invited on the following subtopics in ELT:

- Approaches and Methodologies
- Curriculum and syllabus design
- Distance Education
- Education / Language Policy
- International / Intercultural Communication
- Second Language Acquisition
- Materials Writing and Design
- Learners' Variables
- Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles
- Challenges in Asian Classrooms
- Teacher Education
- Teaching Young Learners
- Testing, Assessment, and Evaluation
- The Use of IT in Language Teaching
- English for Specific Purposes: Business
  Communication; scientific writings etc.
- Use of Local Literature in English for
  Translations for Teaching English
- Using English literature for the Teaching of
  English
- Other related areas

The deadline for abstracts/proposals is 30 April 2012.
Enquiries: ravindergargesh@gmail.com
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