

# TESL

Teaching English as a Second Language

## REPORTER

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## TESL In The Total School Curriculum

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Often a foreign student's discouragement and failure, or near failure, in college classes is attributed to "cultural shock." How much of this "shock" is due to his previous inadequate English preparation is difficult to evaluate; however, early concentrated English training should provide the student with additional communication skills which might alleviate the shock and help make the necessary adjustments to life in a new land somewhat easier.

Many students feel that almost native proficiency in a second language can be attained by attending a daily one hour high school or college class--simply by memorizing the dialogues and vocabulary presented and dutifully writing out the required exercises.

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After completing a few courses, these students often feel confident that they have mastered the language and can converse fluently in it because they can communicate with each other and an instructor (who may also have limited language proficiency).

Despite the number of years of study, the foreign student's oral English experience in his native land has usually been carefully structured and carefully articulated, with limited experience in idiomatic usage. This is true even when instructors have been native English speakers.

Common complaints of many of our new students are, "I can't understand because everyone

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speaks too fast," and "I can't understand even when I know what the words mean." One new student who had been in school a few weeks even told me that no one on our campus spoke English. I asked him what they did speak, and he replied "slang." When asked to elucidate he said that no one pronounced his words understandably or made complete statements in asking or answering questions. Then I spoke to him with exaggerated articulation and juncture, in typical textbook sentences, "Do you think that I am now speaking English correctly?" His relief was manifest in his smile as he realized that I could speak "correct English" when occasion required it.

## Dialectical Differences

Dialectical difference between British and American English may account for some discrepancies in English pronunciation and usage, but this was not the basic problem here. This student had encountered real native language proficiency for the first time--and he experienced an often unrecognized form of cultural shock. His reaction was the natural one--he thought that what he had previously experienced was right, his new experience, which he did not understand, was wrong.

## Language Proficiency

Most colleges do not accept students whose English proficiency is below the standard required for Freshman English and thus do not face the English Problem we share with the elementary and high schools of this state--the problem of helping foreign students master enough English to succeed in the regular classroom. Many teachers and administrators mistakenly feel that students will pick up the language on their own or that they can simply enroll in a daily remedial English class and language difficulties will automatically solve themselves. Too often

the student who is left to learn for himself picks up his classmate's pidgin (then we have the additional task of convincing him that he needs to learn an academic or "school" dialect of English). Too often the remedial English teacher has a heterogeneous classroom of English problems--in addition to the English second language students, there are many other students with English problems of pathological and psychosomatic origin.

## Importance of Motivation

Almost any student can learn an acceptable dialect of English if he is convinced he needs to, but until he feels this need, it can be an almost impossible task. How to motivate the student to learn a socially acceptable English dialect is not the subject of this paper, but the necessity of acceptance is such an important factor in English Second Language teaching that some mention of it should be made. Bilingual teaching in American public schools under the ERIC program is one way many schools are providing this acceptance.

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# TESL In The

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We do not participate in the government subsidy of classes of this kind, but we have had a little experience with the principle involved.

Let me briefly tell you about a comparable project at our college this semester:

## Tahitian Students

We have approximately twenty French-speaking Tahitians in our English Language Institute. Equated Michigan English comprehension scores of ten of these who entered school last September and were placed in our beginning ELI class ranged from 35 to 59. Most colleges (including Michigan) do not take any student with scores below 85 and any accepted below 90 must take intensive non-credit English courses--students with scores below 65 do not have the English proficiency to succeed in academic work on the college level.

As most of you are aware, ours is a religious institution and our students--Church and non-church affiliated--are required to take, in addition to the usual college academic load, 2 credit hours in religion per semester. None of these Tahitians belonged to our church and so I placed them (where possible) together in one section.

## Anti-Attitudes

Although these students all had below 60 Michigan test scores and were struggling with an unfamiliar text in an unfamiliar language, they were in a regular college classroom. I suppose the teacher, who knew nothing of TESL techniques and less of their language than they knew of English, was as frustrated as the students. This is a similar situation to that found in our elementary and secondary schools.

# Total School Curriculum

The students complained they were failing and wanted to drop the course, so we approached the religion department with a proposal to teach one religion class in French (the academic language of Tahiti).

Although students may receive an X (non-credit) grade in ELI classes when they try and fail, this is not possible in other departments. The students knew their failing grades would put them on probation and, if continued into a second semester, might flunk them out of school. We began to notice some anti-church feeling with this discouragement, and there was a carry over in both attitude and study habits into their English classes. No matter what the topic was at the beginning of a discussion group, it always ended up with the complaint that they could not understand anything at all in their religion class although they attended the bi-weekly sessions regularly.

No doubt some of the drag I felt in our English classes was due to other cultural adjustments, but with this group this should have been minimal because they were part of a large minority group on campus and conversed freely in their native tongue on campus and in the village.

## Class Placement

In January I was able to assign them into a French speaking Religion class (at present there are about 20 Tahitians plus 2 native English Second Language French students in this class). We are fortunate in having a fluent French-speaking teacher on campus who has excellent rapport with the students. I have visited the class a number of times and have seen the enthusiasm with which these

students carry on religious discussions in their native tongue. Again I have noticed the carry-over into our English classes, as students strive to master new sounds and sentence structures.

I don't suppose pidgin as a native dialect would be considered under ERIC, but we might get some remarkable results if we accepted it in designated classes and made a sharp distinction in intonation and grammar in others.

The foreign student needs special instruction in English from a teacher who has had training in this area. He needs to learn the distinctive sounds of the English phonemes, the function words of English, and the difference between sentence structures in English and those of his native tongue.

## Knowing What to Teach

Last spring a teacher on Kauai who attended a workshop in TESL learned why Filipino students speaking English produce a certain non-English sound, and how to help a student recognize and produce the English sound. She tried this technique in class the same evening. As he quickly mastered the new sound, an adult student turned disgustedly to his teacher and asked why she hadn't helped him that way when he first joined the class several months ago. She had to admit that she herself had just learned why this particular English phoneme sounded "foreign" and how to help a student correct his pronunciation.

## Everyone Must Help

But the English teacher, no matter how well trained in English second language techniques, can not succeed without the united help of all school personal. A

student must have the opportunity to communicate in his new language, he must recognize and produce this new language learning in meaningful situations. English class participation is limited and is, to a large extent, artificial--often similar to that which is taught in foreign classrooms. Others who teach the student should be aware of the structures currently being taught and try to incorporate them in their teaching of Math, P.E., Social Studies, etc. They need to be aware, too, of the foreign student's native language basic phonology and structure and to recognize when a student substitutes native sounds for English or uses native structures, substituting English words.

## The Key is Structure

When we conducted a TESL Workshop in Tonga last summer two teachers handed me a bunch of themes and asked me how to correct them. They couldn't decide specifically just what was wrong, but knew they weren't acceptable English. They seemed to need complete revision. It didn't take me very long to pinpoint the problem. The students were using Tongan sentence structure with an English vocabulary. The teachers were right. They couldn't be corrected; they needed to be rewritten, using English sentence structure in addition to English vocabulary.

## Everyone Teaches It

If a foreign student hears a structure, which he has learned previously, outside of the English classroom he will, in addition to recognizing it, impart somewhat more significance to it than he might have done otherwise. Learning reinforcement, through repetition of this structure in a meaningful situation, also occurs.

One of the least understood of our English structures for foreign students is the tag question. (A statement with a short question at the end such as: "He left,

didn't he?" or "She's not going, is she?") Many ESL texts ignore this, as they do some of the other confusing English structures. In their native tongue most students have previously listened to the speaker's original statement and answered with the completely correct Japanese, Tongan, or Samoan structure, "Yes, she's not."

## Automatic Responses

After students have been taught that English agrees with the situation, regardless of the phrasing of the original question, they need lots of practice outside of the English classroom before this way of answering becomes automatic. The Mathematics teacher can help by asking this student, "Two plus two makes four, doesn't it?" and "Two plus three doesn't make four, does it?" The Home Economics teacher can ask, "That hasn't enough salt, has it?" The P.E. teacher can say, "John hasn't the ball, has he?" etc.

Each teacher could adapt many of the structures currently studied in similar ways and use them to give the student immediate reinforcement in his English learning.

## TESL and Typing

One of our business teachers is developing a program for foreign students where the material practiced for speed and accuracy in typing will be structured to give additional practice in basic English structures as well. While linguists do not all agree whether English is a skill (like typing) or an art (like walking) active participation is necessary for both, and so the student's English language acquisition should benefit from such programs. Foreign students could enroll in typing classes with controlled structure and vocabulary earlier than in regular classes and have more meaningful experiences in them.

Counselors (who seem to

inherit most school problems) would normally be responsible for the coordination of these kinds of programs in a school. The counselor assigns the foreign student to classes and can work closely with his teachers, so he is in a position to elicit their cooperation in a united English Second language program.

Learning a second language is not an easy task for either the student or the teacher, and adjusting to life in a new environment can complicate it. However, cooperative effort can lessen the cultural shock for the student and lessen the frustration for both student and teacher if all school personnel will unite in an effort to solve this challenging problem of teaching English communication to the second language student.