

INCIDENTAL LEARNING VIA PEDAGOGIC DIALOGUES

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In addition to a discussion of the pedagogic dialogue and its use with young children, a list of dialogue-related topics appropriate for investigation will be presented.

Most language teachers agree that the dialogue is an effective and established teaching tool. Frederick Veidt reflects these sentiments when he says:

One of the cogent and enduring manifestations of the evolved emphasis on oral activity in foreign language learning in the last decade has been the utilization of the dialogue technique.¹

Although the dialogue is widely utilized and often featured in commercially-prepared materials, many such dialogues are sorely lacking in immediate curricular relevance. This is not to say that material writers are impervious to linguistic, cultural, and pedagogic factors when preparing dialogues; nevertheless, few teaching dialogues realistically reflect the language of the elementary school classroom or its curricular concerns.

To help ameliorate this situation, it is suggested that curriculum writers focus on content areas within the elementary school setting. Drawing from such information, the development of meaningful and relevant teaching dialogues is more likely to transpire.

For example, a chief curricular concern in elementary school is the content area of mathematics, and as such, it merits some emphasis in the E.S.L. program. Mathema-

tical concepts may be subtly featured in short teaching dialogues. Consider the following examples:

A. I bought seven cookies for lunch and I ate three.

B. How many do you have left?

A. Just four.

B. May I have one?

A. Sure.

A. Wilfredo, you don't look happy.

B. I had fifteen cents and I lost a nickel at recess.

A. How much money do you have left?

B. Just a dime.

A. Maybe Maria found your nickel. Let's ask her.

A. You had four pencils, didn't you?

B. Yes, I did.

A. But now you only have three!

B. I gave one to Melanie.

A. So did I! Let's ask her about it!

A. I had five pieces of candy, but now there's only three.

B. Maybe you lost them.

A. Now I remember; I ate two at recess.

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Frederick P. Veidt, "The Dialogue: An Aid to Oral Production in Beginning Language Study," *Modern Language Journal* (January-February, 1973), p. 3.

In the dialogues described, the students are afforded subtraction practice in an "incidental" way as well as exposure to key phrases such as: "How many. . .?" "How much. . .?" furthermore, many young children can identify with the situations depicted which fosters interest and facilitates learning.

Several dialogue-related issues will now be proposed. It is hoped that these queries will promote research in which practical strategies are developed and/or empirical data is compiled to resolve the following questions:

1. Should dialogues be memorized?
2. In the preparation of dialogues, how may conflicts between grammar and context or structure and situation be resolved? Can specific strategies be developed to avoid such conflicts?
3. After appropriately considering variables such as: age, sex, culture, and level of language proficiency; what would constitute the "ideal" dialogue length?
4. After appropriately considering vari-

ables such as: age, sex, culture, and level of language proficiency; would a dialogue approach lose its appeal when consistently used over a long period of time?

5. How much instructional time (variables considered) should be devoted to the teaching dialogue?
6. Can specific points of grammar be learned more readily through a dialogue approach?
7. Can dialogues be developed which focus upon difficult pronunciation problems while still maintaining an appropriateness of language to situation? If so, how? Which pronunciation problems?
8. Can certain teaching steps be deleted in the presentation of the dialogue while still achieving the same level of teaching effectiveness?

The expenditure of effort required to resolve these questions will have been well spent. For there can be little doubt that the pedagogic dialogue is a potent teaching aid whose full potential has yet to be determined.