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Most students attempted a project book made up of material from their workbooks and from pamphlets, maps etc. they had picked up en route. A couple of these were excellent. The students were able to make up a whole display of their work, associated with the tour, for Open Night held at the High School towards the end of the year.

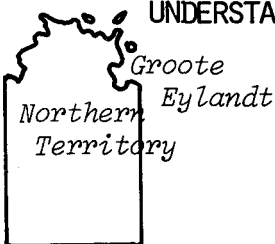
At times, carting around the bulky folders was a nuisance. One or two were lost. Late at night after a big day, having to sit down and write was a trial, but it was an important aspect of the educational nature of the trip. Although at times some were irritated by my insistence, none questioned the importance of doing it. For one particular boy, it was the first time he saw any reason to use writing as a means of keeping a record of something interesting. Perhaps some other teacher could devise some more efficient way of achieving these results.

Probably the most important educational result is the widening of real vocabulary and their stock of references. More generally still, they broadened their impression of themselves as members of a widely-based Australian society and as people with something to offer, as well as being able to learn from others. Some returned critical of their own education, although they could not articulate these new feelings and ideas very well. Above all, many teachers commented on an increase in self-confidence and contribution in class, although a new restlessness had more negative effects on some individuals.

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SPEAKING ENGLISH -

UNDERSTANDING THE ABORIGINAL LEARNER'S PROBLEMS



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In areas where children's first language is an Aboriginal language, the very nature of the Aboriginal language itself poses complex problems, not only for the child learning English but also for the teacher whose basic first step in solving these problems is

to understand what the problems are. Except for a few fortunate teachers who were given some linguistics in college, (a rather recent innovation) and a few conscientious people who have taken courses later, most of us who teach in Aboriginal schools know far too little about linguistics. We therefore don't know how to approach some language problems in the classroom or, even worse, we don't recognize that the problems exist. Some teachers who have tried to do something about their lack of knowledge have been put off by technical linguistic terminology, phonetic script and so on.

This small article is an attempt by a teacher who is *NOT* a linguist, to show his fellow teachers who are *NOT* linguists, that we can still understand the linguistic problems in our classrooms, and have therefore a reasonable chance of coming to grips with them.

Let's take an analogy first. My first language is English. I learnt some French at school. I am not bi-lingual in English and French. I am about 1.01 lingual. When I try to speak French (which I did the other day), I do three things:-

- a) I pronounce French words in an English way.
- b) I use French words with their English shades of meaning.
- c) I arrange French words in English patterns.

We must realize that this is *exactly* what children whose first language is an Aboriginal language do when they try to speak English. Their English is modified by Aboriginal *pronunciation*, *meanings* and *word patterns*.

PRONUNCIATION

In teaching English speech, it is helpful to recognize that if we compare all the sounds in English with all the sounds in an Aboriginal language, there are some sounds which are easy for the learner to master, and some which are not. The sounds can be put roughly into three groups in order of teaching difficulty:

similar sounds —→ very dissimilar sounds —→ confusable sounds.

Now, if you can contact a linguist who knows the language of your area, you may be able to tabulate these, or alternatively, if you listen carefully to your pupils you will soon detect the problem sounds. However, at the risk of over-generalizing, here are a few pointers:

a) *Similar sounds*: English 'm' and 'ng' are virtually identical with Aboriginal sounds. English 'n', 'l' and 'r' can usually be included because although Aboriginal languages often have several distinct ways of making these sounds, a sound very similar to the English is usually present. I would add 'w', 'y', and some vowels such as 'u' (put) and 'a' (father), even though there may be minor differences. Teachers and pupils cannot be expected to grapple with subtle differences which only the linguist's trained ear can detect.

b) *Very dissimilar sounds*: It is noticeable that English sounds which appear, to Aboriginal speakers, to be very different from sounds in their own languages, are easier to master than those which are similar enough to be easily confused. A good example is the English 's'. Although very unschooled people may use the nearest Aboriginal equivalent - a *j*-like sound - children seem to hear 's' well and learn to pronounce it quite rapidly, (which is more than can be said for the next set of sounds!).

c) *Confusable sounds*: There are large numbers of these, and teachers must be aware of them and need to be both creative and painstaking in devising ways of teaching them. It is vital to realize that Aboriginal children *may not hear* any difference between sounds English speakers clearly differentiate. The reverse, of course, is equally true. Aboriginal languages may have, for example, three ways of making 'n' - with the tongue on the roof of the mouth, or between the teeth or behind the teeth. Most of us have great difficulty *hearing* the difference. So it is with Aboriginal speakers who have only one sound resembling a set of several English sounds.

Here are a few of the most troublesome groups:

- i) *p, b, f, v*. Most Aboriginal languages have only one sound resembling this group (a sound like *p* in *span*). So, not only will Aboriginal children have difficulty in saying *pat, bat, fat, vat*, they may also have difficulty *hearing* any difference. Most of us will be aware that the difference between *bat* and *pat* is that when we say 'b' we use our voices, and when we say 'p' we don't. Aboriginal languages rarely have pairs of sounds one of which uses the voice and one doesn't, so children have immense difficulty distinguishing them.
- ii) *t, d, th (thin) th (that)*. Exactly the same comments apply to this series. There can again be confusion between sounds for which the voice is used and sounds for which

it is not used. Most Aboriginal languages only have one sound in this group (a sound like *t* in *stay*). Children may have learned to say some of the English sounds more or less correctly, or they may confuse them or substitute the sounds they can say for the ones they can't say (or can't hear). That's why we get *ladder* for 'letter' and *de* for 'the'.

- iii) *ch, j, sh, s* (pleasure). Again, most Aboriginal languages have only one sound in this series - a *j*-like sound - and children will have difficulty in distinguishing, and therefore saying, *cheap, jeep, sheep*.
- iv) *k, g*. Again, Aboriginal languages do not distinguish a sound which uses the voice (*g*) and one that doesn't (*k*) but have an intermediate sound, rather like the *k* in *skin*. So, *gap* and *cap, bag* and *back* are difficult to distinguish.
- v) *s, z*. Although, as already mentioned, *s* may be mastered relatively easily, distinguishing *s* (*no voice*) from *z* (*voice*) is not. Children typically say *hiss* for 'his'.
- vi) *h*. Many Aboriginal speakers have trouble with 'h'. They may leave it out (most children here call me "Janaris"), put it in where it is not required (Anna, our clerical assistant is usually called "Hanna"), or replace it with *y* ("my youse" for "my house").
- vii) *Vowels*. Aboriginal languages tend to have fewer vowels than English, and also sometimes allow more individual variation in pronunciation. Thus, here on Groote Eylandt, for example, the Anindilyakwa language has one vowel which has some of the qualities of short 'a' (*pat*) and short 'e' (*pet*). English speakers have, over the years, written it as 'a' or 'e', depending on how *they* heard it, which illustrates well the problem Aboriginal children face in learning to cope with what English speakers regard as two different sounds. *Man* and *men* are very difficult to distinguish. Other pairs of vowels which are made with little change in the mouth are always confusing. Often, neither sound is in the local language, e.g. *pot* and *port*. But the same child who hears no difference between *pot* and *port* because of the vowel, *also* hears no difference between 'port' and 'bought' because of the p/b. Perhaps we begin to see the size of the *problem*.

viii) *Word shapes*. Not only the sounds themselves are difficult, but also the way in which the sounds are arranged in words. A child who can say 'th' and 'p' in isolation may have great difficulty in saying 'th' in *twelfths* or 'p' in *tempts*. Compared to Aboriginal languages, English allows many more consonants to be grouped together, in various positions in words. e.g. :

3 consonants at the beginning: *split, string*.

4 consonants in the middle: *extra (x=ks)*

thanksgiving.

4 consonants at the end: *twelfths, glimps(e)d*.

In contrast, some Aboriginal languages never end words with a consonant, while most others never allow more than one consonant to end a word. Similarly, no more than one consonant may be allowed to commence a word and no more than two consonants may come together in the middle. Children who have difficulty with consonant groups will leave out a consonant or insert a vowel between them, or at the end of a word if their own language demands it.

Not only do children need a great deal of practice in discriminating between English sounds and in making sounds and combinations of sounds, they also need positive instruction and guidance in how to recognize and make English sounds correctly.

MEANING

In learning a second language, it is almost inevitable that the learner will use words in the second language with variations of meaning which apply only to his first language. Here are some examples from this week's conversations:

- i) "Is the watermelon cooked?" (In Anindilyakwa, the word for 'cooked' can also mean 'ripe'.)
- ii) "Good fish, that wallaby". (Anindilyakwa uses the word for 'fish' to mean 'meat').
- iii) "She's not really his mother but she's --(pause)-- well, she's his *mother*, like his tribal mother." (Kinship terms are a very obvious example of words which are not directly translatable into English).

- iv) "He's a big man - very long, eh?" (English has two opposites to 'short' - 'tall' for vertical things, 'long' for horizontal things. Anindilyakwa does not make this distinction).
- v) "When the storm came, I hoped to die". (The story-teller meant that he thought he would die - that he *expected* to die - not that he wished for it. However, the concepts of wishing, hoping, expecting, anticipating and so on are not expressed in Anindilyakwa in the same way as they are in English).

It is obviously extremely important to use a *situational* approach to teaching English. The meanings of words must be learnt in contexts where that meaning applies. Teachers must listen for wrong usages, understand the probable reasons and devise ways of practising correct usage.

WORD PATTERNS

Aboriginal children frequently arrange English words in Aboriginal patterns. Here are some examples:

- i) "He sitting down on the floor". (Aboriginal languages have no verb "to be". The child feels no meaning is attached to *is, are, am* etc. What is more to the point, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit we slip over those words so quickly that it's no wonder the child hardly hears them and does not grasp their importance. How much difference, even to *our* ears is there between "He's sitting" and "He sitting", or "We're running" and "We running"?)
- ii) "We play now?" (Aboriginal languages usually frame questions by using the same word order as the statement and raising the pitch of the voice in a questioning manner at the end of the sentence. English places an auxiliary verb (*may, can, are, have* etc.) at the beginning of the sentence.)
- iii) "Who broke it?"
"One boy was breaking it." (Aboriginal languages do not have an indefinite article (*a* boy) but where something like it is demanded, as in the case of an unidentified person, the word for *one* is used. As well, *one* is used

in contexts where an article may not be required at all in English, so children often compose sentences like "He got that big one fish").

- iv) "I and Rebecca we play ball." (It is correct in Anindilyakwa to put "I" first, and then to use the pronoun "we" after the names.)
- v) "We went beach". (The Anindilyakwa word order is "beach to" rather than "to the beach". Children often forget to use the preposition before the noun, but sense that it's wrong in English to put it after the noun, so leave it out altogether.)

English patterns can only become second nature after a great deal of concentration on practising correct patterns.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal parents and leaders are virtually unanimous in saying that they want schools to teach English. Yet it seems that a majority of those who pass through school do not become confident speakers of English. It is easy to blame all the traditionally quoted reasons - malnutrition, poor attendance, lack of home encouragement and facilities, not enough opportunity to use English out of school, problems of shyness in oral lessons and so on. Now of course these *are* problems, and the solutions to them may be beyond the school. However, we surely cannot claim that lack of achievement on the part of children is not in any way due to inadequate or inappropriate teaching. The greater the problems outside the school's jurisdiction, the greater the responsibility of the school to devise programs which endeavour to compensate for deficiencies beyond the school's control.

A successful program should emphasize *effective instruction, plenty of practice, and the opportunity to use English in real situations.*

On the one hand, many very traditional types of programs fail because although good instruction and classroom practice are given, there is insufficient provision for relaxed situations in which the learner uses English to communicate real things. On the other hand, some of the more recent experiential methods also fail because although there is an excellent emphasis on relaxed uninhibited contexts in which to communicate in English, there is often

insufficient attention to the careful instruction and classroom drill which gives the child the means to communicate and ensures *progress*.

1. EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

As one who had "gone off" formal systems for a while, I have come to realize that however cunningly disguised, there must be a system which progressively introduces *sounds*, *words* and *patterns*.

Sounds:

Certainly in infant years, and often well beyond, children need to be taught how to make sounds and need their wrong sounds corrected by a teacher who knows what to do and how to do it.

Words:

Words need to be introduced according to some system which ensures vocabulary building and acceptable usage. Having a system is more important than what kind of system, whether it be standard lists, the teacher's careful list, the words in the reading scheme, local, environmental words or whatever.

Patterns:

It is a rare child indeed who will acquire enough English patterns just by listening to stories, reading books, etc. English patterns must be *taught*. Using a good Oral English syllabus is one good way of ensuring progressive introduction of new patterns.

2. PLENTY OF PRACTICE

Speaking is a skill and requires practice. Drilling of sounds, words and patterns is vital. Class chorusing of sounds, words and sentences is immensely valuable because it allows the child to respond as one of a group and not feel singled out. Practising rehearsed responses as answers to questions and so on, is a necessary prerequisite to real communication.

3. REAL SITUATIONS

The opportunities to use English in real situations are so limited in most Aboriginal communities that the teacher *must* create

situations which are as relaxed as possible and yet require the child to communicate in English. Much of the good instruction and classroom drill is wasted if the learner does not have the opportunity for real practice. Furthermore, the learner must have daily practice speaking to an English speaker - the only one usually being the teacher. If we subtract from the school day the amount of time spent at lunch, at play, at sport, at writing and calculating and reading, at listening, watching, painting, singing and so on, there is very little time available *per child* for that child to actually *generate English language*. If, in some schools, we add the demands of a bilingual program, the opportunities are very limited indeed - probably not more than a few minutes per child.

The teacher must, even at the expense of many other daily activities, incorporate into the school day, not only instruction and drills which are vital but relatively easy to arrange, but also maximum opportunities for each individual child to generate English language himself.

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Mornington Is.

STEREOTYPES - THEIR FORMATION AND FUTURE



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Stereotypes "can be defined as the attribution of general psychological characteristics to large human groups." (I. Tajfel, p.150). Often stereotypes have their origin in historical and cultural traditions though the prevailing social climate may also be an influence. Bettelheim and Janowitz (I. p.48) distinguished between two types of stereotyping:

- 1) the superego variety with traits such as over-ambition, craftiness, shrewdness and slyness;
- 2) the id variety with derogatory traits such as lack of ambition, stupidity, laziness, lack of inhibition, dirtiness, smelliness and over-sexiness.