

TOWARDS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMME IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

HARIPERSAD SEWLALL, *Springfield College of Education*

Confronted with the practical demands of the language syllabus, the English teacher at both the primary and secondary level often experiences difficulty in determining the nature of the content he ought to dispense to his pupils. His problem is in no way alleviated if he cannot reconcile the demands of the syllabus with his own notions of language derived from some recent theory such as the following:

I contend that no attempt should be made to teach children knowledge about the grammar of their own language until they reach the age of at least fifteen and preferably sixteen.⁽¹⁾

Neither the traditional view, which insists on the holiness of teaching 'parts of speech' to the young child, nor the radical view, valid as it may be, resolves the dilemma of the teacher. That language teaching should be distinguished from the teaching of grammar has to be recognized by the teacher and those who supervise his work. Further, that some time should be spent on the study of language, as determined by the needs of the pupil, is a generally accepted principle, endorsed by the Bullock Commission, which recommended the need for a checklist of problem areas in language.⁽²⁾

The purpose of this article is to go a step beyond the checklist in suggesting that the head of the language department monitors closely the actual content taught by the teacher in his team. It is felt that experienced teachers be delegated the task of compiling programmes on each aspect of the language syllabus or checklist, for the entire course. In effect, therefore, the teacher compiling a programme in 'punctuation', for example, would have a bird's eye view of not only what the pupil is expected to cover in the present standard, but what he is expected to know by the end of a course of study. The teacher's task would entail prescribing exercises for pupils and providing guidelines for teachers. While such an approach may seem narrow and prescriptive, it need not threaten the autonomy of the class teacher, if implemented with discretion. The scheme would ensure that no blind-spots occur in the development of the subject when teachers change from year to year. A typical programme that a senior secondary teacher might compile for the study of CONCORD could be as follows:

STANDARD 8

Consolidation of the following:

1. Concord between subject and verb, using concrete nouns:
The boys were playing.

2. Concord when the subject consists of two or more nouns:
The boy and the girl . . .
3. Concord between the subject(s) and pronouns:
Take out your pencils and leave them . . .
4. Concord when the subject is separated from the predicate by the parenthetical 'as well as':
He, as well as his brother, is ill.
5. Concord when nouns such as the following are involved:
mathematics, one-third, two-thirds, majority, number, etc.

(Here one needs to be consistent, not dogmatic. An authoritative source, such as Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, would be useful. Refer to 'Plural anomalies'.⁽³⁾ It would be unfair to test pupils on aspects that experts quibble over!)

STANDARD 9/10

Consolidation of standard 8 work.

1. Concord in sequential writing:
Having learnt the rules, one should apply them to the best of one's ability. When they cannot be applied . . .
2. Concord when correlatives are used:
Neither he nor his wife is here.
But,
Neither the Taj Mahal nor the pyramids of Egypt impress me.
3. Concord when distributives are used:
Each person is responsible for his kit.
4. Concord when abstract nouns are used. Pupils' essays abound with such examples:
His motive and his conduct condemn him utterly.
5. Other exceptions, as the need arises:
Bread and butter is . . .

He is one of the greatest scientists who have lived. ('Have' governed by the closest antecedent "scientists", not 'one'.)

For the success of such a scheme, the work has to be distributed, with experienced teachers taking on the greater responsibility of editing and providing guidelines. It might be necessary for the high school teachers to liaise with the primary teachers in the feeder schools. The benefits to be derived from such co-operation would be significant.

The standardization of subject matter advocated in this paper may give direction to the study of language. To give the teacher *carte blanche* in the implementation of the syllabus creates room for anomalies and the practice of what may be pedagogically unsound. A developmental programme would give the pro-

bationer added confidence and ensure that growth takes place on a pre-determined course.

NOTES

1. Whitehead, F., *The Disappearing Dais*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1971, p. 219.
2. Bullock, Sir Alan, *A Language for Life*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975, p. 172.
3. Fowler, H.G., *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 349 and 456.