TexTESOL III Newsletter

Texas Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Letter from the President

Recently, I was thinking about the start of the new school year. New beginnings are a time of hope and renewal. As I reflected on the new school year, I started to see it in a brand new way. We begin our school year in the Fall, and we end it in the Spring. Fall is the beginning of the end. In some parts of the country, the leaves turn colors and then lose them. That doesn't happen here. Why are we so hopeful at the start of a new school year; it's not Spring, a time for new beginnings?

I remembered when I was in school, my parents would take me shopping for all my new supplies. In high school, I would also have to buy my books. I wore a uniform to school, so I didn't need new stylish clothes. But I can still remember the excitement of the new beginning of starting fresh and seeing my friends that I hadn't seen over the summer.

How was I going to transfer this to my teaching at Austin Community College? I sat down and drank some tea and reflected. I decided that I would celebrate the newness of the new school year by making no judgments of students or colleagues. I would keep an open mind to one and all. I would see opportunity instead of a dead end. I would try to be creative in presenting my lessons and not rely only on what I have done before. I would try to see each of my students as individuals and not as more of the same.

I don't know if I will succeed or not; I'll keep you posted on how I am doing in the next Newsletter. If you would like to let us know what you are doing differently at the start of this New Year, email me at aschlend@austincc.edu.

Anne-Marie Schlender

Call for Newsletter Submissions

Do you have some thoughts on the teaching of English to speakers of other languages? Do you have personal stories to share that are related to TESOL issues? Do you have some helpful tips for other TESOLers? If you do, please consider submitting an article to TexTESOL III Newsletter. Submission deadlines:

Submission	1/1	4/1	7/1	10/1
Publication	2/15	5/15	8/15	11/15

Visit http://www.textesol.org/region3/ for submission types and guidelines.

Contents

Basic Phonics
By Dr. Stephen Krashen

There are several possible positions about the role of phonics in reading, although they do not exhaust all the possibilities.

Intensive, Systematic Phonics: Ehri (2004) defines this position as follows: "Phonics instruction is systematic when all of the major letter-sound correspondences are taught and covered in a clearly defined sequence." (p. 180).

This position claims that we learn to read by first learning the rules of phonics, that is, we learn to read by sounding out or reading out loud ("decoding to sound"). It also asserts that our entire knowledge of phonics must be deliberately taught and consciously learned: Intensive instruction is "essential" (Ehri, 2004). Proponents of Intensive Systematic Phonics tell us that learning to read is hard work (Ehri, 2004).

Ehri gives us some idea of what the "major" rules are: They include "long and short vowels and vowel and consonant digraphs consisting of two letters representing one phoneme, such as oi, ea, sh, and th. Also, phonics instruction may include blends of letter sounds that represent larger subunits in words such as consonant pairs (e.g. st, bl), onsets, and rimes" (p. 180). (It is unclear what happens to the "minor" rules, whether they are also taught or whether they acquired incidentally. One must ask: if the minor rules can be acquired, without direct instruction, why can't all phonics rules be acquired?)

Basic Phonics: According to this position, it is helpful to teach some rules of phonics, but just the basics, just the straight-forward rules. (I introduce the term Basic Phonics here, attempting to provide a label for a position that already exists, but has not, in my view, been made explicit.)

According to Basic Phonics, we learn to read by actually reading, by understanding what is on the page. Most of our knowledge of phonics is the result of reading; the more complex rules of phonics are subconsciously acquired through reading (Smith, 1994).

A conscious knowledge of some basic rules can help children learn to read by making texts more comprehensible. Smith (1994) demonstrates how this can happen: The child is reading the sentence "The man was riding on the h____." and cannot read the final word. Given the context and knowledge of 'h' the child can make a good guess as to what the final word is. This won't work every time (some readers might think the missing word was "Harley"), but some knowledge of phonics can restrict the possibilities of what the unknown words are. (One could subdivide Basic Phonics into sub-positions, into those who claim that learning the basics is essential and those who claim it is helpful.)

Basic Phonics appears to be the position of authors of <u>Becoming a Nation of Readers</u>, a book widely considered to provide strong support for phonics instruction:

"…phonics instruction should aim to teach only the most important and regular of letter-to-sound relationships … once the basic relationships have been taught, the best way to get children to refine and extend their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences is through repeated opportunities to read. If this position is correct, then much phonics instruction is overly subtle and probably unproductive" (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.38).

<u>Zero Phonics:</u> This view claims that all phonics rules can be acquired by reading, and that direct teaching is not necessary or even helpful.

The Evidence
An argument against intensive, systematic phonics is the claim that many rules are very complex and many don't work very well. As Smith (2003) notes, they are "unreliable … there are too many alternatives and exceptions … 300 ways in which letters and sounds can be related" (p. 41). In fact, Smith points out, most of the words of the English language are "spelled irregularly" and it is a real challenge to write "decodable text." (Some have claimed that the rules of phonics that appear not to

work very well can be repaired and should be taught. In Krashen (2002), I argue that some recent attempts to state better sound-spelling generalizations have resulted only in more complex rules that are only slightly more efficient.)

The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) concluded that the experimental research supports intensive systematic phonics. Garan (2001), in an examination of this report, noted that the impact of intensive phonics is strong on tests in which children read lists of words in isolation. But it is less evident for tests of reading comprehension, and what is most important, it is miniscule for tests of reading comprehension given after grade 1, tests which include more complex texts with more irregular words. Thus, intensive phonics instruction may only help children develop the ability to read words in isolation, an ability that will emerge anyway with more reading.

If the Basic Phonics position is correct, which rules are teachable and useful? Most likely, experienced professionals will agree that most initial consonants can be taught and learned and applied to text by small children, but some rules will be impossible for six year olds (and most adults), rules such as this one, recommended by Johnson (2001): "the a-e combination is pronounced with the long vowel and the final e silent (except when the final syllable is unaccented - then the vowel is pronounced with a short-i sound, as in "palace," or the combination is "are," with words such as "have" and "dance" as exceptions).

The Great Misunderstanding
There is certainly strong support among the public and the media for "phonics" instruction. What is not clear is whether the support is for Intensive Systematic Phonics, or Basic Phonics. Whole language advocates are regularly accused of supporting the Zero Phonics position, but most actually support Basic Phonics, maintaining that basic phonics is one way to help make texts more comprehensible. Public opinion might be much closer to the whole language view than to the

extreme position taken by the National Reading Panel.

References

Anderson, R., Hiebert, E., Scott, J., & Wilkinson, I. (1985). *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.

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Dr. Stephen Krashen is Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. He is best known for his work in establishing a general theory of second language acquisition, as the co-founder of the Natural Approach, and as the inventor of sheltered subject matter teaching. He is the author of numerous books, including Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use (2003), Foreign Language Education: The Easy Way (1998), and Under Attack: The Case against Bilingual Education (1997). Download free articles and subscribe to his mailing list at http://www.sdkrashen.com.

The Chicken or the Egg: Eyes Versus Ears to Teach Sounds
By Ted Klein

Do you remember the old 'unanswerable' question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" When we talk about language, on both the historical and the individual level the answer seems simpler. It is apparent that sounds precede writing, every time. The first axiom must be that all languages were spoken before they were written. The second axiom is that all fully functional humans first hear and later speak their native languages, before they learn to read and write them.

I'm not a scientific linguist, obliged to prove to my academic peers statistically and through empirical investigation that what I say is true. Instead, I'm a right-hemisphere-dominant teacher, who has spent many years in adult ESL classrooms, figuring out, through trial and error, what seems to work quickly and effectively. One conclusion that seems to have been held for decades by some teachers, despite some "scientific" arguments to the contrary, is that adults seem to acquire new languages most quickly and effectively, the same way that they acquired their native languages.

1. LISTENING
2. SPEAKING   later
3. READING
4. WRITING.

The problem is that few classroom teachers disciplined themselves to the point that this is how they really taught, even when the LS/RW sequence

was fashionable. There is a certain convenience in popping books open on every occasion.

Adult second language learners have disadvantages and advantages over native speaking youngsters in the language acquisition process.

1. DISADVANTAGE: Adult second language learners always have another language in the way, which tends to interfere with the new language, often predictably.

2. ADVANTAGE: Adults are able to process informational input and use deductive and inductive logical processes more quickly than children, simply because they (theoretically) know more.

Last year I attended a workshop in which the presenter went over the processes that she used to teach pronunciation **from** the written language. She had numerous examples from phonics, which gave all of the rules to convert written English to spoken English. She felt that she was getting excellent results from her students who were learning to use the numerous formulas to come up with auditory results. There seemed to be potentially hundreds of letter combinations to work from. I was uncomfortable with this approach.

I checked around and found that quite a few other teachers were using this same system in ESL, and it made me uneasy, particularly because we are talking about English, which is, to my knowledge, graphically farther from the spoken language than any language I have dealt with. Written English expresses its history, much more clearly than its phonology.

Following is a reminder of what we are up against, when we learn to read our own language. The good news is that we bring an enormous amount of language skills, non-conscious and conscious phonological skills, and information at the time we learn to read our native language. We learn to recognize certain words from experience. Are we to believe that ESL learners could under any circumstances figure this one out, even with all of the phonic rules available?

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION POEM

When the English tongue we speak,
Why is "break" not rhymed with "freak"?
And the maker of a verse
Cannot cap his "horse" with "worse"
"Beard" sounds not the same as "heard",
"Cord" is different from "word",
"Cow" is cow, but "low" is low,
"Shoe" is never rhymed with "foe".
Think of "hose" and "dose" and "lose",
And of "goose," and yet of "choose".
Think of "comb" and "tomb" and "bomb",
"Doll" and "roll" and "home" and "some",
And since "pay" is rhymed with "say",
Why not "paid" with "said", I pray?
We have "blood" and "food" and "good",
"Mould" is not pronounced like "could".
Wherefore "done" but "gone" and "lone"?
Is there any reason known?
And, in short, it seems to me
Sounds and letters disagree.
                                        (author unknown)

Here is what I know. Under the phonological system that I find most useful in teaching American English, we have eleven vowel phonemes, three diphthong phonemes and, 24 consonant phonemes. This makes a total of 38 distinct sounds in the average American's phonological inventory. I am not a mathematician, and my wife won't even let me touch our checkbook; however, I have managed to figure that there are many fewer phonemes in American English than there are phonic letters-to-sounds conversions. I believe that this is obvious, ergo, why not start with the smaller numbers of things to "get" and move on later into the more complex, if that is necessary.

In an adult ESL classroom, I always start with vowel sounds and concentrate entirely on listening and identification skills, before students try to actually make the sounds. This is with the goal of achieving "phonemic awareness" which is one of the stated goals of programs which put the written language first. However, it is my opinion that one of the major problems is that adults in particular

strongly favor visual input and often do not hear what they conceptualize from this visual input. If their ears are properly trained first, they can bring some of the assets to the reading process that native speakers bring. The word "clotheys," which I have heard from many non-native speakers of English, when they say "clothes," certainly doesn't come from the spoken language! "Who's that kuhnocking" on my door?" Ought/ rough/ plough/ dough? Rules??

With beginning students, I use <u>vowel hatches</u>, simple schematic tic-tac-toe types of designs that roughly represent the interior or the human mouth. Each vowel is assigned a **permanent** number, which is used for all future references to vowel sounds. Diphthongs, which are gliding mixtures of two known vowel sounds, are given double number designators.

Whenever new words are introduced in the context of vocabulary lessons, realia identification or picture flashcards, the students are challenged to identify the central vowel sounds numerically. This gives them the opportunity to hear and see new words in a less contrived environment, associate the words with well-programmed numerical insights, and receive constant reinforcement. They also begin to acquire familiarity with the various anomalies in

English spelling and begin to acquire reading ability through <u>recognition</u>, rather than attempting to "decode" written English.

We don't have space and time here to go through all of the methodologies and techniques that I suggest. These are all covered in my workshops. Descriptions can be found at http://grooveoriented.com/ESL/TAKESL.html

My conclusion is to give students ear training first, oral production training next, and actual emphasis on reading and writing last. I'm not suggesting that the written language shouldn't be at least a part of aural and oral familiarity throughout their training. However I'm convinced that a delay in serious reading is helpful and that the written language shouldn't be the <u>source</u> of pronunciation training. It works. This egg will hatch!

Ted Klein started teaching English to speakers of other languages before the acronym ESL came about. He taught, trained teachers and wrote ESL training books working for International Office of the University of Texas and the Defense Language Institute English Language Center. He has taught ESL in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China and Turkey as well as Austin, TX. He is an independent consultant and trainer. <u>taklein@ev1.net</u>

Learning and Teaching English in Korea and America
By Given Lee

Teaching and learning a language is a challenge to both students and teachers regardless of the contextual differences, that is, English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), because it requires a great deal of arduous and persistent effort. In spite of the absence of unanimous opinions concerning the differences and similarities of these two settings, I believe that each context has advantages and disadvantages based on my own experience in learning and teaching English in both Korea and the United States.

The most beneficial and crucial factor in the ESL situation is that the target language, English, is dominantly taught and spoken both inside and outside the classroom in everyday life. This environment is more optimal than an EFL one for motivating learners. Furthermore, ESL students can intake authentic input with less effort than EFL learners and acquire contextual aspects of knowledge in a natural environment on a daily basis. Another significant element in the ESL environment from my own language learning and teaching experience in the United States is that many

teachers seem to enjoy challenging their students and being challenged by them with intellectual curiosity. In this process, teachers demand that students think of and view every academic issue as critical and sometimes allow students to raise questions even in the middle of teaching.

However, it has been found that teaching English in the ESL condition has its own disadvantages. For instance, the majority of teachers in the ESL classroom do not speak their students' mother tongue. As a result, it may be difficult for them to detect students' needs and problems that originate from the language differences between L1 and L2 and to effectively facilitate learning (Tarnopolsky, 2000). The classroom where only English is spoken can cause more anxiety for language learners than that of EFL, especially for newcomers. In this case, they have to spend a large amount of time in darkness without learning much. In addition, most ESL teachers have not gone through the same language learning experience as their students have. Therefore, ESL teachers may not understand exactly their students' feelings and the difficulties involved in the language learning process.

For example, ESL teachers are probably unaware of the fact that their students have some difficulty in comprehending the meaning of the sentences with socio-culturally embedded idioms, chunk knowledge, or advertisements they encounter in their everyday communication. For instance, one day, I went to COSTCO with my neighbor to get gas for my car. She has lived in the United States for more than two years and attended ESL classes all the way. While we were at the gas station, she told me that she understood the first sentence of the sign at the gas station, "Avoid spills and protect the environment," but she could not exactly grasp the meaning of the next part, "please don't top off,". She asked me to explain it in Korean. Many times, I myself had the same or similar experience while learning English. To these ESL learners, teaching English being used in real life situation might be as critical as textbook knowledge. There might be some limitations and difficulties in teaching this knowledge due to individual learners' different interests or lack of systematically organized

textbooks, ESL teachers' constant attention to this is necessary.

Unlike the ESL context, in the EFL environment, English is not used as one of the primary means of communication in the society (Oxford & Shearin, 1994, p. 14) but is taught simply as a school subject. Even though English education in schools, especially in Korea, appears to focus on raising learners' communicative competence, it actually concentrates more on preparing students for college entrance examinations. Therefore, instruction focuses on grammar and reading instead of the more realistic use of language. Additionally, students in EFL situations often have very little contact with native English speakers in everyday lives. This setting results in a scarcity of authentic input, which then makes it difficult to motivate students and encourage them to pursue their study. Some of my students used to ask me why they had to learn such a difficult language, English. For those students, English is nothing more than a school subject.

In addition, although EFL teachers teach the contextual knowledge in the textbook, EFL students do not perform them well in real-life situations because there is a disparity between the knowledge acquired in the EFL classroom and the language used in the real communication. Moreover, the EFL teachers themselves are sometimes not aware of this difference. One Sunday, I went to church and saw an Asian couple behind me. When an American woman greeted the man by saying, "How are you today, sir?" the Asian man, shaking hands with the woman without looking at her, quickly replied to her, "I am fine, thanks. And you?" When I observed his language use and his behavior, I wondered whether he was a recent arrival because his language use reminded me of the formulaic dialogues in the English textbook I taught in my country. EFL students' lack of encounter with real-life situations combined with the inexperienced EFL teachers' instructions seem to result in this kind of awkward moment.

The disadvantages for ESL teachers can be advantages for EFL teachers. For example, EFL teachers' ability to speak the same language as their

students can be the most critical point for fostering a comfortable classroom environment and facilitating language learning. The learning experiences that the EFL teachers went through took a similar pattern as their students'. This made EFL teachers empathize with their students who have difficulties involved in the language learning process. Moreover, these factors can also contribute to lowering students' anxiety.

Given the differences between ESL and EFL learning contexts, it seems that ESL teachers should not only teach their students textual knowledge, but also need to understand students' feelings, to identify the needs and problems involved in the language learning process, and to provide them with an amicable learning environment. On the other hand, EFL teachers should make efforts to develop authentic materials that deal with more realistic situations and offer students opportunities to practice them as frequently as possible.

References

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Given Lee completed her M. A. study from the University of Texas at Austin in May, 2004, and will continue her PhD study in Fall 2004. She taught English to secondary students in Korea for more than ten years.

Calendar of Events

November, 2004
18-21. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2004), "Celebrating our International Spirit" Chicago, IL . Web site http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3284#Travel

January, 2005
28-29. Alabama-Mississipi TESOL Conference, "Today's ESL: It's Not Your Granddaddy's ESL Anymore," Gulliot University Center, University of North Alabama, Florence, Alabama, USA. Contact: E-mail jmbrown@una.edu. Web site http://www2.una.edu/amtesol/.

March, 2005
10-13. Georgetown University Round Table 2005, Washington, DC. "Educating for Advanced Foreign Language Capacities: Constructs, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment" Web site http://www.georgetown.edu/events/gurt/2005/index.html Submission deadline: October 1, 2004.

30-April 4. The 39th Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas USA (TESOL 2005) "Teaching Learning, Learning Teaching: A Nexus in Texas" Web site http://www.tesol.org

November, 2005
4-5. 2005 TexTESOL State Conference. "No Teacher Left Behind." Renaissance Dallas-Richardson Hotel. Web site http://home.flash.net/~presv/Frames/Frames.htm

October, 2006
2006 TexTESOL State Conference Austin, TX (more details coming soon)

Bring a fork!
& Join us
6 p.m., Wednesday, December 1, 2004
Dexter Hall, 1103 West 24th Street

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