



FROM AROUND THE WORLD SOUTH AFRICA

CHANGING STEP IN TIME TO A NEW DRUM

Content teaching in English as an INSET programme for Afrikaans speaking teachers in Gauteng

Rinelle Evans

INTRODUCTION

Whether it was the Great Trek (1836) as a reaction to British rule or the Soweto riots (1976) as a protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Black secondary schools, language issues, especially with regard to education, have always been highly politicised in the South African context. This is apparent in the current striving of various groups for the recognition and preservation of their mother tongue while the provisions made in the Interim Constitution (Act no. 200 of 1993) for the languages of the people of South Africa are a legislated recognition of this country's multilingual reality.

The dawn of South Africa's free and non-racial education dispensation has resulted in many changes. On 1 April 1995, one year after the first fully democratic elections introduced a national government representative of South Africa's population, 19 racially based departments of education were legally integrated and this change ushered in a single national Department of Education with 9 provincial departments. The integration of education departments and the opening of exclusively White schools to all races, has introduced an uncharted territory of multicultural teaching. This has also

meant that in many schools where Afrikaans has been the sole medium of instruction, the governing bodies have decided to introduce dual-medium classes and have included English as a medium of instruction, thereby increasing their school's accessibility to Black pupils in particular. Although rumours of government subsidies being withdrawn from those schools reluctant to display some evidence of "furthering access to equal opportunities" (Business Day, 95/04/05) abound in the media, this change has, as yet, not resulted in power coercive moves by Government since local Management Councils (parental representation) are **choosing** to opt for this particular change within their individual schools.

An INSET focus for change

One of the most influential teachers' associations, the Transvaalse Onderwysersvereniging (TO) has advocated that Afrikaans speaking teachers change step by step by agreeing to teach their subject through the medium of English. This means having to equip them with the necessary language skills and strategies to convey content in their second language and will affect some 14,000 teachers in Gauteng (the former Transvaal), the most densely populated area of South Africa. As a change agent, the TO could be instrumental in initiating such an opportunity for its members by drawing on the expertise of training colleges and ESL teachers to design a tailor-made in-service language development programme with an ESP slant. As an authoritative organisation they would also be able to ensure that management councils and staff (principals in particular) supported and encouraged individuals participating in the programme.

In this context, any proposed language development programme would need in the first instance to be a short term (intensive) and voluntary initiative hosted by the TO in conjunction with local ESL expertise. The primary aim of such a language course would be to help teachers improve their spoken English proficiency to such a level that they would have the confidence to effectively communicate their subject knowledge in a multicultural school environment. Afrikaans teachers generally do not lack linguistic skills so much as the confidence to use their second language. (see Greenbaum,1985:224). They may, however, also need to acquire more appropriate discourse strategies.

Some possible barriers to change

Adapting to the political changes in society and the demands of the multicultural classroom have met with various reactions and it could be expected that some resistance to a language development programme may be encountered from the teachers themselves. Historically the Afrikaners have waged their own battle attempting to gain recognition for Afrikaans as an established language. Furthermore, English has traditionally been viewed with suspicion for historic reasons related to Imperial rule between 1795-1910 and currently there is great concern about their language being marginalized by the new order after enjoying premier official status since 1925.

The circumstances under which any INSET programme of language improvement such as is being recommended here, could be launched are favourable since no specific medium of instruction has been enforced by legislation (as at the time of writing). Thus Afrikaans medium schools still have the opportunity of taking a pro-active stance on this issue. However, change agents need to bear in mind that “innovation involves behavioural change and underlying any behaviour are deep-seated attitudes and beliefs, so that to produce any significant change it is not enough for people to act differently, which is a surface phenomenon they must also be required to change the way they think about certain issues, which is a surface phenomenon, they must also be required to change the way they think about certain issues, which is a deeper more complex change” (Kennedy, 1990:329). If participation in an INSET development programme were to be voluntary, it is less likely that radical opposition would be encountered even though the underlying change of teaching multicultural classes in English may be difficult to reconcile with conservative Afrikaner ideology. The best type of change is incremental but under the given circumstances of absorbing as many pupils as possible into the education system, it will be necessary to pay the attention to the necessary sensitivity in this regard and if evidence is forthcoming that the change will benefit those who adopt it this information will be sufficient to effect change. Thus information about a particular INSET development programme could be diffused by way of articles in teaching journals, newsletters, departmental circulars, seminar and if necessary the mass media.

Encouraging acceptance

Teachers themselves ought to be involved by way of questionnaires and consultation in order to establish their needs and expectations of such a course. This opportunity to express their needs and even make suggestions would not only appeal to their sense of professionalism and democracy but also facilitate ownership of the product i.e. the degree to which participants feel they have had an influence on the innovation being established.

The cost benefit calculation as explained by Kennedy (1990:338), implies that teachers would be willing to participate if the gains accrued as a result of their participation outweigh their losses of time/money/effort etc. In the case of the proposed INSET language development programme, the gains are manifold:

- Afrikaans speaking teachers would be empowered with marketable skills which would make keeping/finding a job easier at a time when affirmative action is the norm,
- being fully bilingual could be advantageous when seeking promotion,
- increased self-confidence and self- esteem,
- increased social advantages,
- a tangible reward of a certificate/grading.

Stringent budgets put financial compensation out of reach, but the prospective participants would be more inclined to accept this innovation if they knew that the various educational players were supportive of it. Other long term benefits to the community and education in general include a greater number of pupils who will have access to education of an acceptable standard sooner, a professional body with broadened expertise, and a future workforce that is able to communicate in English as well as their mother tongue.

There are also certain losses to be balanced against the benefits. Learning a new skill is time-consuming and in this particular case, ideological resistance may also cloud

commitment. Attending even a short INSET course may mean sacrificing personal (holiday) time or cause personal domestic problems if the classes extended over a long time or great distances have to be travelled to reach them. Colleagues may be resentful of those attending the course since they may have to bear more of a burden with regard to extra mural or administrative matters in school hours, and no financial recompense may be forthcoming.

A suggested course structure

As mentioned before, such a course as is being suggested could be considered a type of ESP or English for Occupational Purposes in that teachers are being helped to use their existing knowledge of English more productively in their professional job of subject teaching. Teachers will not necessarily need to improve their own English to gain access to knowledge but rather to make that knowledge accessible to their pupils. Judging from personal communication with colleagues, the problematic areas are likely to be subject-specific vocabulary and forms and functions related to management strategies or explanation. The three aspects of classroom interaction suggested by Johnson (in Richards and Nunan 1990:273-277) could be usefully included. That is the physiological aspect of interaction whereby teachers are helped to improve voice control and projection; the interpersonal aspect which relates to the ways in which teachers use appropriate language to control, organise and motivate their pupils; and the pedagogical aspect which includes the interactive and informative modes of discourse by which teachers actually convey knowledge to their learners.

These are general points relating to the course structure; a more detailed syllabus would of course depend to a large extent on the needs of the participants determined by precourse activities such as questionnaires. Equally the methodology of the course would have to be one that both exemplified the styles of teaching we would wish to encourage in language classrooms but was also one with which participants felt comfortable. Materials for the course would be problematic initially and one solution might be to involve the first group of participants in developing materials for later use. Since the main aim of any such course would be to improve the participants' confidence and proficiency in their second language, English ought to be the operating language for the course which means that ideally the tutors should be fluent

themselves, with good presentation skills and supportive personalities as well as experience in ESL teaching - in any context not easy people to find!

SUMMARY

The concept of innovation not only carries the inherent meaning of change but also of improvement or adaptation. The emergence of new social and cultural patterns in South Africa makes it vital that language development programmes be incorporated into initial training for non-native speakers of English training to be specialist subject teachers. It may even be advisable for bilingualism to be made a prerequisite for a permanent appointment. This change could then be purposefully planned and relate to Dalin's definition of change being "... a deliberate attempt at improving practice in relation to certain desired objectives" (Slater 1987:447). The importance of being proficient in English continues to increase and until a definite decision is made on the medium of instruction at secondary level, offering dual medium classes would only benefit non-native pupils by giving them extensive exposure to English across the curriculum. Change brings uncertainty but also the opportunity to experiment with creative ideas and now that the euphoria of the elections has passed, teachers have to face the inevitable changes taking place in their classrooms owing to the merging of historically diverse systems into a unified democracy. Ultimately the challenge is to create "a system which cultivates and liberates the talents of all our people without exception ---- such a system must be founded on equity and non-discrimination; it must respect diversity; it must honour learning and strive for excellence; it must be owned and cared for by the communities and stakeholders it serves and it must use all the resources available to it in the most effective manner possible." (from the preface to the first policy document on education and training in South Africa by Professor S.M.E. Bengu, Minister of Education, published in February 1995).

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