

## SOME IDEAS ABOUT RESOURCE CENTERS

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The constant advancement of technology and science is a worldwide fact. Teachers who work at various educational levels cannot ignore this reality. Linguistics is not an exception to this rule. For instance, during the 50's and early 60's, Psycholinguistic theory was influenced basically by behavioristic theory from such psychologists as Skinner and by Structural Linguistics of taxonomic structuralists such as Bloomfield.

In the 60's and early 70's, cognitivist-mentalistic slogans of such transformationalists as Chomsky made up the main support of Psycholinguistic theory. In the 70's, there was also a shift of emphasis towards the communicative and pragmatic aspects of language. Among the authors that have touched on these areas we can mention such names as Hymes, Labov, Widdowson, etc. It is worth pointing out that these linguists still developed their research studies within the limits of Transformationalist Linguistics. Later, the pragmatic or sociolinguistic approach was at its highest point with its advocates like Halliday, Ervin-Tripp, Leontyev and others.

It is also worth mentioning the contribution of Humanistic Psychology of Carl Rogers to linguistic theory. He suggested a profound change in terms of viewing education. He claims that its goal is the facilitation of change and

learning. In this concept learning how to learn is more important than being taught by a superior (teacher) who decides unilaterally what to teach and how to teach it. Likewise, Rogers holds that for teachers to be facilitators of knowledge, they must be real and genuine, leaving aside their masks of superiority. They must also have genuine confidence, acceptance and appraisal of the other person (student) as a worthy individual. This theory shows clearly some different principles from those proposed by Skinnerian Psychology and from those rationalist theories such as Ausubel's.

In recent years, such trends as the Holodynamic Approach and Self-Instruction theories have gained considerable importance. The former combines rationalist and behaviorist elements and amalgamates them with the human aspect of the student discussed by Rogers. The latter enhances the students' potential for learning, their autonomy, their sense of responsibility, etc. In terms of English learning, a Resource Center is the best place where students can develop their own study skills and learning strategies as well as a feeling for autonomy, self-instruction, decision-making and research.

In fact a good number of Colombian Universities have a Resource Center, where students sometimes attend classes or where they can go by themselves to

pursue the study of English at their own pace. This means that Resource Centers (created by the COFE project) are an important support, if we as English teachers wish to take advantage of Self-Instruction theories in order to give our students the opportunity of developing their own learning skills and strategies. As Dickinson puts it, "the label 'self-instruction' is used to refer to situations in which a learner, with others, or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher" (1992:5). Indeed, when students visit the Resource Center on their own, they do such things as listen to songs in English or recordings in English, watch videos, read magazines, books, etc. either to do their homework or to gain as much information and understanding as possible about the topics dealt with in class or issues which really appeal to them. Thus they begin to develop a sense of responsibility, freedom and satisfaction about their own learning which will undoubtedly pave the way for their future professional background. Of course, at first sight this may worry some English teachers who have always been used to controlling practically everything students do inside and outside the classroom. Nonetheless, this should be regarded as one of the first steps in the process of delegating responsibility to students to help them develop little by little such concepts as autonomy, seriousness, personal commitment, decision-making, etc.

When discussing Self-Instruction theories there are at least two views that ought to be considered. One view is that in which "the teacher seeks to include learners increasingly in the decision-making

process about their learning and the management of it; the teacher seeks to transfer to the learners an increasing degree of responsibility for their own learning. An opposing view is one in which the materials and resources for learning are written and organized in such a way that the decision-making and much of the management of the learning are built into the materials. In this view the learners' responsibility may be limited to matters concerning when the work takes place, and perhaps which parts of the programme to work on at particular times" (1992:9).

Resource Centers cope with the first view of Self-Instruction as most of the materials that are available at these Centers are designed in such a way that the students themselves can make their own decisions as to what materials to choose and which areas to concentrate and work on. That is to say, they can select the type of material that suits their needs and that lets them work at their own pace, making allowance for their time availability and cognitive skills. In other words, Resource Centers lend themselves exceptionally well in giving students the opportunity of using their particular learning styles, be them analytical or holistic, thus acknowledging that it is natural to find individual differences among learners. In the following, readers will find some suggestions as to how teachers can make an active use of Resource Centers, according to the subjects taught. Naturally, as stated above, students can always use these Centers by themselves following their teachers' advice and suggestions, or they can simply drop by to satisfy their own

interests or to explore the depth and breadth of English and related areas.

**Definition:** Based on the features outlined above, a Resource Center becomes a special place where English teachers and students and, in general, people who are really interested in this target language carry out a wide range of activities, whether to learn, improve or maintain the command of English they have gained through long years of study and practice.

### **Objectives:**

A well structured Resource Center should help students:

- Develop solid skills of listening and understanding, speaking, reading with understanding and writing the foreign language with confidence and security.
  - Gain acceptable abilities of English pronunciation with a high degree of correctness and easiness.
  - Internalize a considerable amount of vocabulary so that they can operate adequately and fluently in real situations which require a functional command of the target language.
  - Assimilate the English grammar system so as to enable them to put it to good use both orally and in writing.
  - Develop a positive attitude towards the British and American cultures as a means of facilitating their learning of English and the basic patterns of these cultures.
- Develop a critical attitude towards reading which in turn will help them get started in the endless and challenging path of research.

**Security Policy:** To avoid the loss of bibliographical resources and other elements, the R. Centers should operate on the basis of loans made by libraries. That is to say, students and teachers should have an updated membership card. Those who are not university students are to identify themselves with their ID. cards and should leave a deposit twice as much as the cost of the book. Normally, loans should be made for two or three-day periods. Reference books, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. ought not to be taken out of the R. Centers. Naturally each R. Center is to work up its own regulations concerning loan policies. Nonetheless, the following general suggestions may be incorporated into such regulations, according to its staff judgment.

- Under no circumstances should users be allowed to borrow more than one book at a time. Through this practice more readers can benefit from the service of R. Centers.
- Sanctions ought to be instated for those who do not return books in due time. When the same person is recurrent in returning the books with delay, his membership card may be cancelled.
- The loss of books under users' responsibility is also to be considered.

- Careless handling and partial or total destruction of books must be a primary concern.

**How to incorporate the R. Center into the Curriculum:** All English courses should schedule at least one or two weekly hours to be held at the R. Center. The following list is not exhaustive but includes some of the activities that could be implemented in an English class conducted at the R. Center:

- ❖ Listening to songs. Obviously, this activity should not be listening per se, but ought to encompass various exercises and – or stages, such as discussion of author's background and other works, cloze exercises, vocabulary building, comprehension questions, etc. Also, the teacher has to make allowance for the students' level and comprehensibility of songs when dealing with this sort of contrivance.
- ❖ Listening to talks, dialogues, lectures. These could also be followed by listening comprehension exercises of the multiple-choice type or cloze exercises.

In the Phonetics class, tapes could also be listened to, with the aim of doing the following exercises:

- ❖ Listening to words and sentences to be later transcribed phonetically.
- ❖ Listening to words and sentences for marking stress.
- ❖ Identifying which words should be stressed in a sentence.
- ❖ Marking thought groups and blending in paragraphs.
- ❖ Listening to sentences for marking intonation patterns: rising-falling intonation, rising intonation and other types of intonation.
- ❖ Listening to the pronunciation of the ed morpheme of the past tense of regular verbs. Identifying the various cases of its pronunciation and transcribing them.
- ❖ Listening to the pronunciation of the s morpheme for the plural of regular nouns. Identifying its allomorphs and transcribing them.
- ❖ Listening to the pronunciation of the s morpheme, third person singular, present tense for both regular and irregular verbs. Identifying its allomorphs and transcribing them.
- ❖ Establishing the relationship between spelling and sound.
- ❖ Listening to the pronunciation of several words, phrases and short sentences with the purpose of helping students deduce and even formulate some phonological rules.

In the Methods class, videos could be profitably used to observe classes conducted by experienced teachers. By means of this practice, students have the opportunity to identify and discuss the method being used, the approach(es) underlying the method(s), the nature of language and learning advocated by the method(s), the role of instructional materials, the teacher's role, the student's role, the type of activities, type of syllabus, etc. Videos can also be adequately exploited to watch classes taught by student-teachers. The observation should be followed by group discussion, in such a manner that the students can contribute with constructive

criticism to help the future teacher shape his methodology consistently so that he can later do an efficient and effective job as a professional.

In the Culture class, students should be assisted in examining the culture of the people who speak the language they are studying. Thus, they will develop a positive attitude towards English, the target culture, and the teacher himself. This naturally improves their learning enormously. The following are some of the activities that the teacher could do to enhance the foreign culture.

-Discussion of :

Culture.

The cultural nature of language.

Folklore: An ideal compromise?

Is speaking the language the same as thinking like a native?

Cross-cultural communication.

Cross-cultural understanding.

The motive behind human behaviour.

Cultural postulates.

Goals of cultural instruction-Identifying goals.

The sense, or functionality of culturally conditioned behaviour, interaction of language and social variables, conventional behaviour in common situations, cultural connotations of words and phrases, evaluation statements about a society, researching another culture, attitudes towards other cultures.

- ❖ Culture Assimilators
- ❖ Culture Capsules
- ❖ Culture Clusters

Another important source of benefiting from the R. Center is through literature. R. Centers have good collections of short stories and novels written by outstanding British authors. Students should be encouraged to read these works critically and thoughtfully with the purpose of identifying main ideas, secondary thoughts, characters, plot, background information from the era in which they were written, author's background, implications, namely psychological, social, cultural, political, religious, etc. Also, they should be provided with a short history of English literature. By doing this, they can better understand the literary works to be examined and can get their real essence.

This brief history ought to include an analysis and study of the topics listed below:

- ❖ From Saxon Times to the Renaissance.
- ❖ The Renaissance and the Elizabethan Age.
- ❖ The Seventeenth Century-Poetry and Drama.
- ❖ Seventeenth -Century Prose.
- ❖ The Eighteenth Century-Poetry, Prose and Drama.
- ❖ The Romantic Revival in English Poetry.
- ❖ The Nineteenth Century.
- ❖ The Novel, 1485-1830.
- ❖ The Nineteenth-Century Novel.
- ❖ The Twentieth-Century Novel.
- ❖ Poetry in the Twentieth Century.
- ❖ Drama in the Twentieth Century.

The following ideas present some general ways on how to use videos, magazines, etc.

Videos can be exploited meaningfully at the R. Center. After observing a video, the participants may be organized in small groups. Each team has to discuss the main points presented in the video. A representative of each group is to report to the class as a whole their findings and-or comments. Obviously this strategy works very well with advanced students. With beginners, the teacher may implement such techniques as backward build-up repetition, choral repetition, sound contrasts, identifying cue words and-or expressions.

Magazines, brochures and other materials available at the R. Center may be another important source to promote conversation. The students can be divided into small groups so as to allow them to report to the whole class their points of view about a given article or issue.

### **Financing the R. Center:**

Each university should allocate a certain amount of money to be spent annually on books and other elements, i.e., tape recorders, videos, etc. Only through this plan will R. Centers be able to survive and to keep up with the latest developments in Linguistic Science, Foreign Language Methodology and Educational Technology. Indeed, this is easier said than done, as public universities always face serious budgetary predicaments. Therefore, the following are some ideas that could perhaps help R. Centers raise some funds:

- ❖ A retrieval system could be implemented, particularly for the recording of cassettes and for the membership card for those who are neither university teachers nor students.
- ❖ The staff of R. Centers should design a special action plan with the help of students. This might include the following possibilities.
  - a) Organization of an annual raffle.
  - b) Social gatherings (parties) can also be planned. Again, as previously stated, these activities are to be executed with the students' active collaboration under the supervision of a university authority.
  - c) Another important source of income is to be encountered in the Inset courses that R. Centers are to promote in close cooperation with the "CEPs" and "Secretarías de Educación"

The ideas presented in this paper are intended to contribute somehow to the betterment of R. Centers located in universities. Of course, each institution is to implement them, adapt them, or ignore them depending on its specific situation.

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