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Happy birthday KLH

Kristiansand College of Education celebrates its 150th jubilee. In life as in cricket 150 is a significant score. As the batsman doffs his cap, the crowd spends enough time in appreciative applause to give opportunity for the player to muse on appraisal. What have been the experiences of the past to give hope for the innings of the future?

English, as a curriculum subject, cannot boast of traditions back to the vicarage at Holt, but it can be justly proud of the two stalwart philologists, Wilhelm **Aarek** and Hagbard **Line** who made an indelible impression on language teaching at this college of education. Despite institutional reforms in organisation of courses and the acceleration of changes in the language learning situations, later members of staff were able to adhere to the firm principles the pioneers had established.

In the 1960s educationalists in the UK were most concerned about trying to solve the language learning problems of young immigrants. New ventures followed in the wake of the Plowden Report and new ideas infiltrated the traditional patterns of teaching English as a foreign language. Repercussions were felt on this side of the North Sea. The main English course, integrated into basic teacher training, had become a corner-stone of the college and attracted students with the highest possible Matriculation Examination marks. The course was stable enough to accept current innovations. The works of C.P.Snow and William Golding replaced the Victorian novels of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy on the syllabus. More important than minor changes in the field of literature was the fact that far more time was to be devoted to language teaching and phonetics. Methodology was to be given a prominent place in the training of English teachers.

Structural changes

The introduction of three-year teacher training provided the opportunity for structural changes in organisation of English

courses. The transitional years of the early seventies saw the brief appearance of an English Option course, but the main feature during this period was the emergence of a special one year English course, which later was to be awarded first year university equivalence. Applications for places on this course were received from student teachers already in training, experienced teachers wishing to add English qualification to their two year basic course and Matriculation students. Different student backgrounds gave stimulating educational challenges.

By the 1980s a standard course scheme had been established at college; the one year special course, a half year course, where English could be combined with other subjects and an English Language Teaching course offered to first and second year students in basic training. However, changes in the organisation of courses have been minor tremors in comparison to the earthquake of changes in the language situation of the learner in Norway during the last few decades.

Once upon a time there was an English teaching world where Dick Whittington and his cat strutted across the scene. Enthusiastic learners were introduced to the language of Shakespeare by cutting an apple in two. During the reign of Haakon VIIth, the world was dominated by noblemen and blind beggars, faithful dogs, silver spoons and city gateways. The 1960s brought "A Farmer who liked Marmalade" and "Birds Falling out of Nests". Learning texts are still considered a prime source of language and the contents of text books tend to reflect current attitudes. We can trace a development from Dick Whittington, not to mention his cat, to the authentic texts of newspaper adverts and travel brochures. What are the changes the English language teacher has had to experience and challenge?

Children start learning English at a far earlier age nowadays, even for the conservatives who maintain that genuine learning takes place in the classroom and the classroom alone. Are there any advantages of learning a foreign language at a tender age? We all turn green with envy on hearing the linguistic feats of a four-year old child of Norwegian/German parents, born in Madagascar, cared for by a Swahili speaking nanny, a regular day-child at a multi-national nursery school where English is the prevalent tongue if the other fourteen attendant languages cannot be deciphered. The parents maintain with a certain amount of justified pride that their young hopeful can cope with an x number of languages.

All the same, I suppose, one is allowed to pose silent questions: "How much language do children need to enjoy mutual play?" "Will the child face extra problems in coping with the written languages?" "Has the child a true mother language to express the subtle thoughts of a wakening mind?" What does one associate with each language? Demis Roussos sings about the Greek side of his mind and Victor Hugo had the French and the German sides of his personality. Our late, revered colleague, John **Lind** cites the example of a Canadian child growing up in a dual-language home; mother spoke French, father English. Until the age of sixteen the young person consistently spoke French with

females and English with males. Do we really know and understand ourselves in each language?

A rhetorical question. We are aware, however, that early foreign language learning occurs before hard, fast phoneme habits are formed and so pronunciation becomes a delight rather than a nightmare. So prominence of oral activity in the formative years is considered to be of paramount importance.

English language acquisition is no longer a privilege of the intelligent elite but a common right. A parallel is often drawn between an English lesson and a summer picnic. After the social stage is set, the participants are concerned with their own entertainment. Some climb trees, others study butterflies, some sit and think, others just sit. The teacher's pedagogical acumen maintains the social thread through the lesson by means of choral speech work, text treatment or general listening tasks while a station teaching plan copes with individual challenges. The teacher is the master-mind, the organiser.

Two languages: Oral and written

How can the English teacher attempt to appreciate the effects of extra-mural language influences? Young children are exposed to English through media thrusts. A child in the first year of English can well ask the meaning of "Drop me a line, please" and a bamboozled teacher has to find a translation and wonder at the source. Sky-channel and Bergerac, Tinata and Ronald himself have not poured out their English on deaf ears. The learner becomes highly motivated, practises the listening skill, sets higher demands on the communicative competence of the teacher and realises that English is a language that works and is not just a bookish jumble of words.

Language is a skill and so is playing golf. The avid golf novice can well spend the long Norwegian winter evenings, toasting toes in front of a roaring fire and reading how to play golf with the masters by kind permission of Jack Nicklaus. Come the summer, the ball still disappears into a bush five yards away instead of scorching down the fairway. Immediate language production is necessary for encouraging the two basic active skills of speaking and writing. A realistic language situation has to be created for the practice of the skill and if the desired situation cannot be produced, then what is the whole point of teaching the particular language element? Are we to produce experts at catalyzing the changing of active to passive sentences? "The boys played football" - two seconds break - "Football was played by the boys" or are the pupils going to appreciate the use of the passive? It is also a case of using a certain amount of common sense in the transition between the practice and the production stages. Imagine the impression the world would gain of Norwegian young people if they purely based their social conversations on "I am standing on the floor" and "This is a lamp".

Of course, the English teacher is not alone in considering the change of attitude to schools, which have become places where children learn and not where teachers teach. Teachers create the safe, informal atmosphere for individual learning and since there

seems to be a personal commitment for language expression, the pupil needs to know that every utterance is made in confidence, completely free of personal tension.

Changes in language learning situations have produced ripple effects to induce English teachers to reconsider the time-honoured attitude to the four basic skills. The introduction of the concept of communicative competence has caused raised eyebrows of disagreement. The fear is that lots of badly spoken English will replace little correct. The fear is accompanied by the usual murmurs of the lowering of standards. On one point, however, there seems to be little faction. The language learner has to cope with two languages - the oral and the written. The fields where they differ are well defined. The oral language is simple in selection of words, phrases and structures, whereas the written is more complicated. The unit of the spoken language is the breath group, the written form has the sentence. All in all it is a question of semantics - what is explicit or implicit. The written sentence leaves the reader open to personal interpretation, on the other hand the meaning of the speaker of the utterance can vary with the selection of the main stress of the tone group.

RP or Received Pronunciation has long been the model for the teacher aiming at improved pronunciation. Phoneme perfection is the goal and often the impersonal single cells of the language laboratory have been the means. In language as in life the learner must be able to differ between "No" and "Now". It is satisfying to know if one is to have "peas" or "peace" for dinner. Language laboratory work often comes into conflict with activities promoting communicative competence through information gap exercises or role-playing exercises. The oral language is coloured by non-linguistic features - the smile or the frown, the gallic shrug of the shoulders or the raised eyebrows. It can hardly be considered that the non-Norwegian speaker can be drilled in the usage of "uff-da" or "oi-oi- oi-oi", which every Norwegian uses to express surprise. The movement away from phoneme perfection has probably been prompted by two factors; the popularity of dialect usage in the English speaking world and the recognition that pronunciation is more than correct sounds.

The dialect factor was emphasised in the UK in the 1960s. Until then a north country dialect belonged to the world of the music hall. Harold Wilson and four young men from Liverpool, the Beatles, changed all that. The establishment slowly recognised the fact that received pronunciation did not hold a monopoly on the way to express sentiments. The BBC followed suit. Accompanying the dialect/accent movement was the discovery that pronunciation was just more than a series of sounds.

The problem of syllable stress is probably just as great as phoneme selection for the advanced learner. What is the main syllable stress on "photograph", "photography" and "photographical"? In the statement "In the history of the cinema, the contribution of Charlie Chaplin has been most important." - great care must be paid to the syllable stress of the final word.

The second, not the initial syllable must be stressed. Incorrect intonation patterns can also lead to gross misunderstanding.

The social setting is of utmost importance in practising the oral language and here the introduction of the idea of the notional approach has meant changes in teaching patterns. Formerly the correct answer to the question, "Do you like milk", was "Yes, I like milk". A complete sentence had to be given as an answer. Today such a reply would seem ludicrous. The next stage at answering the question would be, "Yes, I do.", which from a notional approach point of view would be inadequate, or in any case most impolite. A notional approach is concerned with the secondary skills of the language - politeness, concern, criticism, doubt. So a satisfactory answer would now be "Yes, I do! Do you?" or "No, I don't, but I love tea" - the ping-pong effects of a normal conversation. Then the question should be couched in other terms as well - "Excuse me asking, but do you like milk?" The secondary skills can be demanding on the more advanced learner - spelling one's name in English, politely asking someone to pass the salt at the dinner table, refusing a pressing invitation in a polite way need a command of the notional skills.

"The wise old owl sat in an oak.
The more he saw, the less he spoke.
The less he spoke, the more he heard.
Why cannot we be like that wise, old bird"

Hardly a rhyme to promote productive oral activity, but some lines to remind us of the importance of the listening skill. More significance has been placed on this passive facility during the last few years. The national school leaving English examination should reflect the content of language teaching in comprehensive schools. The recent innovation of an integrated pure-skill listening test in the examination paper seems to indicate the surge of interest in the art of listening to a foreign language and the pure-skill nature of the test gives the learner who struggles with communicative competence a rewarding opportunity to achieve a standard in a language skill. It is vital that the language learner is posed with the challenge of interpreting authentic language and not staged presentations.

It is most encouraging that new ideas have penetrated the teaching of reading and writing. Reading aloud in the class situation has long been the scourge of many a hopeful learner of the language. This activity certainly places the teacher in an authoritative position and to some extent pronunciation and comprehension can be checked, but reading aloud round the class is time absorbing. One pupil is kept in activity and the remainder thank their lucky stars that they have not been chosen to read. It is a nerve-racking experience for the majority of adolescents and it can be discussed whether it improves communicative competence. There are alternative activities - choral speech work, reading in pairs. In any case a suitable text must be chosen if reading aloud is going to be the order of the day.

A structural approach leads to the encouragement of teaching the writing skills. The retention of attractive English structural patterns is a basic need for later exploration of imaginative writing. Suitable written exercises can motivate the eager pupil - a pupil who is not interested in acting the role of an old horse in order to tell his life story. Practical exercises bring out the notional approach through writing. "Your father was driving out of a car park when he accidentally bumped into an English registered car. Write a note of apology and explanation to be stuck on the windscreen of the damaged vehicle". Unfortunately writing has been used as a form of punishment in the past. However, the teacher can help to bring enthusiasm and joy into writing as an individual activity or as pair/group work.

So much for the tangible changes. They have been regarded in the 1974 and 1987 National Curriculum Plans - in moments of bewilderment called the "monster" plans. In the unknown lurk the uncharted changes which give fascination to language teaching and learning. How can a well-established English department help and advise the teachers of tomorrow?

Key to a culture

Language provides the key to opening the door to new rooms of culture. Despite the bickering about acid rain and the memory of 90 minutes of football at Ullevaal one September evening some years ago, the people of Norway and the UK enjoy mutual cultural interests. The North Sea links - it doesn't divide. In many ways the cultural door is already ajar even before the first steps in English acquisition are taken. Possibly an Urdu or a Swahili key would be a more suitable implement in current society. On the other hand English is a world language and study in depth diminishes the reliance on a village-pump attitude. The Norwegian press might take one stand point - The Times or the New York Herald another.

On the surface it would seem that the learner of the 1980s merely gains a superficial command of the language - concord mistakes occur and adverbs of frequency appear in wrong places in subsidiary clauses. But a critical outlook faces the media. Monday morning brings a chorus of protests that Norwegian Television couldn't spell "Bournemouth" or "Leicester" in the football results service. Observant teenagers notice that "a pregnant pause" is translated as "en gravid pause" and in the Eastenders, "The Isle of Dogs" is called "hundelort".

The inquisitive mind of the modern learner demands special fields of vocabulary to cope with particular language needs. We are moving into the fields of language specialisation where few people know everything about nothing instead of lots of people knowing nothing about everything. Even native speakers have problems of conducting an intelligent conversation with a subject expert - the computer fiend, the dietician, the avid genealogist or even the philatelist. More and more students are studying foreign language for some specific purpose and the well stocked bookshops have shelves bulging with tomes on English for special purposes.

Can the computer replace the language teacher? The programme used for writing this article checks the wayward spelling of the author. The Japanese are working on computer programmes that respond to the human voice, by giving a simultaneous translation. The mini-computers will fit into the handbag making the phrase book expendable. Our friendly computer programme will solve all our language problems - or will it?

Hopefully we will still need English language tutors to advise and encourage the teachers of tomorrow so that once the first one hundred and fifty years have been negotiated and the applause dies down, then the future will offer challenges and rewards as fascinating as provided in the first part of the innings.