

# English and operacy\* for teachers

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The close relationship between the Stellenbosch Institute for Language Teaching (INTUS) and the Interuniversity Committee for Language Teaching has brought into being several projects aimed at upgrading the quality of language communication in Southern Africa.

As well as controlled experiments with innovative approaches in language teaching, needs analyses have been conducted with a view to improving language proficiency in industry and in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Readers of this journal are also well aware of the fact that both the Institute and the Interuniversity Committee are strongly represented on the Editorial Committee of PER LINGUAM.

It is therefore appropriate for PER LINGUAM to announce an important pilot project which is another significant milestone on the road of co-operation between the Institute and the Interuniversity Committee.

More than a year ago, this Committee, with the Director of INTUS as Chairman, made proposals for –

**Upgrading the English language skills, as well as the cognitive, teaching and administrative skills of South African Primary School Teachers (Working title: *English and Operacy for Teachers*).**

This led to a Round-table meeting which took place on 27 March 1987 at the Old Mutual Head Office in Pinelands. This meeting was attended by members of the Interuniversity Committee, prominent educationists and senior business executives. As a result, an educational trust (the UPTTRAIL† Trust) was launched to fund the pilot project.

## Rationale

Whatever the present or future socio-political

conditions may be, improved teaching and learning conditions will remain important. Poor English language skills have been recognized by the Human Sciences Research Council and other institutions as a crucial problem area in Black education and as one of the main reasons for the undesirable failure and drop-out rates amongst Black pupils.

It is well-known that

- a high number of Black teachers in the RSA do not possess a Matriculation Certificate;
- all Black children, when entering Standard 3, have as medium of instruction a language (mostly English) that is foreign to most of them;
- many Black teachers find it difficult to teach through the medium of English.

As a result of these conditions (and others, such as a far from satisfactory pupil-teacher ratio), the low standards of teaching through the medium of English are being perpetuated.

Many different attempts have been made to improve the quality of education for Blacks and to accelerate the tempo of learning and teacher training (e.g. TELIP, the Molteno Project, PEUP, ELTIC, SERLP). However, the complexity and urgency of the present situation necessitates a comprehensive and concerted effort to address the problem throughout Southern Africa.

For the last few years the Institute for Language Teaching, with the support of the Interuniversity Committee, has seriously concerned itself with investigating **innovative means and methods** to improve the quality of education as well as accelerating the tempo of learning and training. A thorough investigation of the English language needs of Black primary school teachers in Kwa-Zulu was completed (Odendaal:1985) and a

\* **Operacy**, a term coined by Edward de Bono, refers to creative (or lateral) thinking skills. According to de Bono, operacy is in these times as important as numeracy and literacy.

† **UPTTRAIL** is an acronym for **U**pgrading of Teaching, **T**raining and Learning.

syllabus was designed which could serve as the basis for a more effective training or in-service training programme for primary school teachers throughout the country (PER LINGUAM Special Issue No. 1 1985). Moreover, projects were initiated in which computer-assisted instruction was used (Botha, J.J.:1984 and Odenaal, M.:1984) as well as Suggestopedia, the teaching and learning method developed in Bulgaria and enriched and tested internationally.

It is especially with regard to Suggestopedia that encouraging results have been demonstrated under scientifically controlled conditions, internationally as well as locally. There is convincing evidence that Suggestopedia holds great possibilities for creating a favourable learning environment in which a rich and stimulating input is possible. Three examples should suffice:

A short beginners' course in German (of about 50 contact hours) was presented by the Institute for Language Teaching for South African Airways in Johannesburg from 9 – 20 December 1985. The results were evaluated by a team of six, representing the Institute **and** the airline company. It had been agreed earlier that if **75%** of the participants passed the final test with a figure of **60%**, the course would be regarded as better than any previous one presented by either SAA itself or for the company. **All the participants passed with an average figure of 78%.**

A short (**43 hours**) suggestopedic course in Afrikaans was prepared for a group of the **weakest** English-speaking first-year students at a teacher-training college. After one semester their written and oral skills, as well as their attitudes towards Afrikaans and Afrikaners, showed a statistically significant improvement over those of second year students after **three** semesters of conventional (albeit very good) instruction in Afrikaans. **All the students in the experimental group were promoted to the second year, one with distinction.**

In another controlled experiment, **a statistically highly significant average increase in the verbal IQ** of the students in the experimental group was found after 35 contact hours.

It is important to note that in these and numerous other experiments, **a significant improvement with regard to selfimage, motivation and attitudes could be observed.**

It can be confidently stated therefore that Suggestopedia and other methods aimed at creating a rich and stimulating teaching and learning environment and at **utilizing the full capacity of the human brain**, hold great promise for a significant improvement of conditions in education in general and specifically for the Black people of South Africa.

Recent investigations strongly suggest that the achievement, attitudes, etc. of school children might even show further improvement if attention could **deliberately** be focussed on **improving the cognitive skills** of teachers and learners and on **improving the teaching and administrative skills** of teachers.

If the results of the pilot project, which will be of a strong interdisciplinary nature, are up to expectations, this could have far-reaching implications for the whole educational scene in the sub-continent.

### The pilot project

The **modus operandi** of the pilot project, which is expected to start within the next 6 months, is –

- to develop, on the basis of research already done and results already achieved with innovative approaches, an integrated package of suitable materials, didactical strategies and technological aids aimed specifically at upgrading the English language skills, as well as the cognitive, teaching and administrative skills of South African primary school teachers;
- to provide short in-service training programmes for a limited number of primary school teachers, representing a statistically representative number of **Black** primary school children and involving them in the planning of teaching materials for the schools;
- to send the teachers back to their schools where their improved skills, backed up by supportive materials and activities should show effective results within a short period;
- to evaluate and document the results on an ongoing basis. (Pre- and post-tests will be used.)

The courses for the practising teachers are at this stage designed to consist of –

- an initial motivational programme, **supported by video materials;**

- a session of about 3 hours per day for the improvement of English;
- a session of about 1 hour per day for cognitive development;
- a session of about 1 hour per day for the improvement of teaching skills, and
- a session of about 1 hour per day for improvement of administrative skills/techniques.

To achieve the objectives outlined above, close co-operation has been sought with leading specialists in the field of innovative teaching. The UPTTRAIL Trust has, for example, already established in principle an agreement for co-operation with senior representatives of the Venezuelan Project Intelligence. It is encouraging indeed that the pioneer behind this imaginative undertaking in South America, the former Venezuelan Minister of State for the Development of Human Intelligence (the first such minister to be appointed in the world), Dr Luis Alberto Machado, declared his personal interest in the pilot project and his intention to assist.

### Evaluation

To evaluate scientifically the innovative approach to language teaching, a team of researchers will –

(1) determine within 12 months (after the start of the pilot project) whether there are any statistically significant improvements in:

- English language skills,
- cognitive skills,
- teaching skills,
- administrative skills,
- motivation, and
- attitudes towards English, pupils and teaching of primary school teachers in experimental schools, compared with control groups.

(2) determine within 18 months (after the start of the pilot project) whether there are any statistically significant improvements in:

- scholastic achievement,
- cognitive ability,
- self-image,

- attitudes towards schoolwork, peers, teachers and other people, and
- communicative efficiency in English of primary school children in experimental schools, compared with control groups.

### In this issue

The Editorial Committee of PER LINGUAM welcomes all the contributions in this edition. In line with the objectives of the journal (Vide p. 55), light is thrown on the problems regarding language teaching, specifically for Blacks, in this polarized country; they also indicate new possibilities and didactical approaches for addressing these problems. The authors' preparedness to assist in tackling some of the thorny issues on the South African educational scene is gratefully acknowledged.

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