Reviews
Comptes rendus

METHODS THAT WORK: A SMORGASBORD OF IDEAS FOR THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

John W. Oller, Jr. and Patricia A. Richard-Amato (Eds.), Rowley, Mass: Newbury House, 1983

It seems odd to observe that the field of second language teaching is in something of a crisis in methodology when we consider the numbers of new methods texts that appear each year. Having, for the most part, left audiolingualism and a purely structure-based cognitive code methodology behind to embrace a communicative approach, we are still searching for systematic ways to describe and embody communicative language teaching. The stress in the seventies laid on notions and functions has not left us much further ahead, for many programmes simply adopted a synthetic list of functions that replaced earlier lists of structures; this development did not necessarily entail a change in methodology. Consequently, the publication of a text called *Methods That Work* could well be the answer to our prayers, whether or not it intended to address a perceived crisis in methodology.

Oller and Richard-Amato have presented, in *Methods That Work,* a valuable, stimulating and intentionally controversial collection of over 30 papers that delivers what its subtitle promises: "a smorgasbord of ideas for the language teacher." This text displays an extraordinary breadth of programmes, methods, "orientations," and techniques that, in the editors' estimation, "work." The discussions range from methods like Curran's Counseling-Learning and Lozanov's suggestopedia, to orientations that stress an authoritarian role for the teacher or one focusing on social change (Freire) to techniques like Graham's jazz chants or Condon's treasure hunts.

The value of this collection, for the practising teacher or the teacher-in-training, lies not only in the "smorgasbord" of readily adaptable ideas presented, but also in the garnering together of some important original sources. If, on first contact with the field or after a number of years of "mainstream" teaching, you find you have only a vague idea of Asher's Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, script theory, the "Natural Approach" or sociodrama, dipping into this text will be an enjoyable way to catch up on these developments—and you will probably be distracted by several other interesting papers. Of course, what is valuable will

depend on your point of view; some readers will find the most interesting the few articles, like Stevick's, which analyze the effect of contact with these innovative methods on one's own theories of language and language learning. The collection is also made relevant for the Canadian context through the inclusion of Swain's important article contrasting the Canadian experience in French immersion with other models of immersion, bilingual education or "submersion" programmes.

The collection is, as well, stimulating by virtue of the concrete challenges it presents. "Valium valley," is the term used by Rassius, the Dartmouth language professor more famous in the media than in the field of second language learning, to criticize the soporific atmosphere in many language classrooms. Wallerstein's thoughtful and thorough article on the adaptation of Freire's methods to classes of immigrants and refugees in North America challenges teachers to involve themselves co-operatively with their learners in solving painful social problems like unemployment or discrimination in education. Strange parallels emerge, ones that might not satisfy the authors grouped together. Curran, Lozanov and Wallerstein on Freire, for example, are yoked together in one chapter addressing "Social/Therapeutic Orientations." The concerns of each of these about "the forces that keep us passive" raise fruitful questions about the language learning and problem-solving potential that routinely lies untapped in our classes.

Finally, the collection in *Methods That Work* is a controversial one, for a number of reasons. It is immediately apparent, for example, that few proponents of what has come to be known as the communicative approach have been included. The methods that Oller and Richard-Amato have selected are ones frequently considered flashy, or, in their terms, "gimmicky," or at least examples of a successfully marketed "quick fix" approach to reaching goals so temptingly attractive to North Americans. Oller and Richard-Amato outline their criteria for inclusion—and, by extension, their definition of what "works" —as methods and techniques that are applicable, that have been tested, and which require attention to *meaning* on the part of the learner.

It is not, however, certain that the methods in *Methods That Work* actually fulfill each of these criteria. Some methods which are strongly meditative or therapeutic may not be as applicable in some EFL settings as in an ESL setting. The enormously thorny question of testing methods is not comprehensively addressed; researchers in the field of classroom-centred research have begun to issue warnings about how difficult it is to design a research model that will control for exposure to a single method, and how tentative our claims must be on the basis of the little research that has been done. Finally, the requirement that the learner attend to mean-

ing may not be as complete and satisfactory a criterion as it first appears to be. In Oller's own programme, for example, a methodology designed two decades ago for the teaching of Spanish, learners are indeed guided to attend to the meaning of the input presented them. Oller's attention to pragmatics and text-level linguistics, as well as the four hypotheses he invokes (Krashen's input hypothesis and three others, relating to textuality, expectancy and the episodic nature of human experience) are more thoroughly applied to the input learners are required to analyze and internalize than to the ways in which it is possible for them to *produce* language. The dimension of task design, which could guarantee some measure of attention to meaning in the learner's *output,* is left largely, and disappointingly, undiscussed in Oller's own schema.

The editors, in their preface, observe that second language theorists have been "failure-oriented"; they have been perversely wedded to the notion that language learning "can't be done" in the classroom. Although this text is a valuable, stimulating and controversial one, it does not do justice to the caution which some theorists recommend, a caution that is based on the knowledge that the reliable and valid testing of methods is an enormously complex affair. However, this text may actually help us clarify what we mean when we say that a method "works."

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VOWEL DIMENSIONS: LENGTH, STRESS AND UNSTRESS

Howard B. Woods, Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983.

Vowel Dimensions is the latest in a set of phonological materials produced by the Language Training Program Branch, Linguistic Services Directorate, of the Public Service Commission of Canada. Earlier publicatrions have included *Syllable Stress and Unstress* (1979), *Rhythm and Unstress* (1979), and *Intonation* (1977). These booklets, part of the *Contact Canada* series, are a valuable collection of phonetic facts and exercises about English, specifically Canadian English, which ESL teachers will find useful to review in planning activities for their students.

Vowel Dimensions is an articulatory, contrastive description of 12 Canadian vowels including schwa and schwa-r, three semi-vowels, three diphthongs, types of /l/, /l/ and /r/ contrast, and denasalization. Six sections focus on pronunciation distinctions often troublesome for ESL students. The author is careful to explain that the text is basically a reference book for teachers to follow in organizing exercises and guiding students through contrastive distinctions relevant to their own situations. Many teachers will be justifiably reluctant to present an articulatory model directly as a class activity (except where using phonetics as a topic in itself with advanced students) but may prefer to use the text as a source of words, rhymes, and expressions, built into activities where students can clearly identify the meaning of each item or contrast. Advanced students could use the booklet as an individual resource in this same way.

For teaching purposes, I find the listening discrimination exercises most useful. These are nicely laid out in handy sets of boxes for rapid run through. The contrastive sentences (made up to include *leave* and *live* in the same sentence) are less immediately applicable, and I would caution against focusing on correct pronunciation unless the sentence or expression is something which the students have produced themselves or which means something to them. The sentences are quite original, however, and provide an imaginative basis for action sequences or story plots. The contrasting items could also be used to construct exercises such as the minimal sentences ("Hang the *cap/cup* on the hook") found in Nilsen & Nilsen, *Pronunciation Contrasts in English* (New York: Regents, 1973), which are also performance/action oriented to provide a context and a way to check comprehension.

Lists of the most frequently used words containing each vowel, and the alphabetized lists of minimal contrasts in each comparison section give *Vowel Dimensions* a handy cross-referenced format for making up new exercises. A good example of an imaginative way to cover the ground on vowel sounds, while concentrating on comprehension of meaning rather than on accuracy of articulatory production, is the riddle on p. 37: "First you hoe, then you sow, then it grows, then you mow. What is it? Grass." More of these would be most welcome.

Vocal tract diagrams throughout the text remind us of the articulatory differences between vowels. This is handy for reference, although the palatograms (of lingual contact on the palate), for example, are of questionable usefulness in actual ESL teaching situations. The illustration of labial rounding vs. spreading to distinguish /r/ from /l/ (p. 69), however, is well worth bringing to our attention graphically, even in a book focusing on vowels. In teaching these distinctions, emphasis should be placed on input (the range of models/speakers presented) rather than on correction. As Woods states, perhaps not strongly enough, observation and

discrimination are the goal, not the belaboring of learners' pronunciations. The exercises where students check the sound they hear the teacher say, or where teachers do the same thing for what they hear students say, reinforce this. As a brief note, although the graphic vowel symbols are clear, some of the printed phonetic symbols (viz. Table of Contents) could be improved.

The Spelling Table (pp. 76-77), a welcome addition, provides a convenient source for phonemic-orthographic correspondences. This will save on preparation time, leaving teachers free to plan more elaborate classroom tasks, based on these words or spellings. The Consonantal Dial inside the back cover seems like a productive concept for observing phonological possibilities. It prompts me to think of a C-V-C dial with consonants in the centre and vowels and consonants again in two concentric, revolving rings. Advanced students can then dial their own combinations to find out whether the word exists in English or to elicit native speaker pronunciations. Here again, recognition should be more important than student production of nonsense syllables.

In order to represent a wider opinion on practical application, I asked two instructors in our English Language Program to comment on their use of the *Contact Canada* series of pronunciation texts. Daphne McDonald-Gunn considers *Vowel Dimensions* a helpful guide for organizing intermediate/advanced lessons in the language lab, focusing on a "same-different" response format. She finds the lists and sentences sufficiently interesting and plentiful to keep aural presentation lively in class and lab group work. Students inevitably focus on meanings, and the sentences for practice make more sense than those in many other pronunciation texts. Daphne finds the treatment of /r/ vs. /l/ useful for many of her students, as are the sections relating specifically to francophone pronunciation problems. Woods' attention to schwa (pp. 48-51) is particularly valuable, especially the Vowel Frequency chart which presents a good perspective on the vowels that learners actually hear in the real-life speech we collect and expose them to.

Although there is no room for extensive review here, three other books in this series deserve mention. *Syllable Stress and Unstress* has been used with good results by Barry King, who finds it an especially good explanation of word accent in English contrasted with French. The booklet offers reasons for the development of variable stress in English and provides well-organized, extensive lists of words according to stress-predicting suffix. It is a convenient reference to the regular word stress patterns of English with lots of examples. There are drills which Barry uses in class and in the lab, and which lead into the area of phrase stress—the topic of *Rhythm and Unstress.* This booklet takes a subject which at first appears complex and difficult to teach, and provides simple explanations with

myriad examples. The section on vowel reduction in unstressed words is particularly relevant to Barry's francophone students. The drills, especially the metronome drills, lend themselves well to the lab or the classroom. Teachers should again be cautioned to use sentences that are meaningful to the specific group of students.

Intonation, the third volume on prosodics in the series, presents easily understood diagrams and useful examples of typical pitch contours in English, again contrasted with French. It is simple enough to be assimilated by almost any ESL level and handy to use as a class set. These texts have given Barry a greater insight into English stress and intonation, and he recommends them highly to others. This series of useful and inexpensive booklets is also used for teacher preparation in our Applied Linguistics programs.

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SIMULATIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Ken Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

In the Introduction and first chapter of *Simulations in Language Teaching,* Ken Jones takes great care to dissociate simulation from pretence, role-play, or dramatization. Simulation, he argues, involves "reality of function, not pretence. The chairman in a simulation really is a chairman, with the full power and responsibilities of Chairmanship" (p. 2). He is not, of course, really a chairman any more than an actor portraying Lear is really Lear. The only important difference is the fact that the actor has a script which gives him little freedom in what to say while the student has only the situation and role dictated by the simulation activity. Without a script and with a situation and role defined, the student is essentially role-playing. Granted, the situation is more fully developed than it is in most role-play activities and it continues to develop throughout the simulation. Nevertheless, dramatization, role-play and simulation all involve pretence for the student or actor involved. While the student may be the chairman of the board of Gorgeous Gateaux Ltd. or Dart Aviation Ltd. (p. 27) during the simulation, no matter how

realistically structured the environment, it is highly unlikely that he ever loses contact with his own reality, i.e., that he is X pretending to be Y. The distinction which Jones attempts to draw between simulation and pretence is, then, a tenuous one a best and one which may exist for the author and the teacher but probably not for the learner—not that it matters greatly. The utility of simulations in language teaching does not depend upon their being free of pretence so long as the teacher is able to establish an environment which discourages "play-acting, or playing games, or playing about, or playing the fool" (p. 4) which the author wishes, understandably, to eliminate from simulation activities.

Having established what simulation is not, the author goes on, in 88 pages of text and two appendices, to discuss the use of simulations in language teaching. At least, as the title of the book indicates, that is what he intends. In fact, the title *Simulations in Language Teaching,* is slightly misleading. Although the book is undoubtedly about simulations, it has to do with language teaching only in a rather narrow sense. The main uses of simulations are to provide opportunity for practice and for language assessment and, as any teacher knows, these comprise only a small part of the teaching task. Simulations, then, should not be considered a method of language teaching so much as technique for practice and assessment, and it is on this latter basis that the book must be judged.

The book is intended as a "practical guide to language teachers who are thinking of using simulations for the first time, or who are seeking ways of improving their use of the method" (p. 2). Unfortunately there is, throughout most of the book, a lack of both concrete detail and awareness of the realities of the teaching situation, at least as we know it in North America, which together diminish the utility of the text.

A good example of lack of detail comes in Chapter 2 in the section entitled "Matching the Language Level." Here we would expect to find guidelines, if not a formula, for determining in advance whether a particular simulation is appropriate for a particular level of language learner—beginner, intermediate or advanced. What we find, instead, is the author's observation that teachers tend to underestimate the ability of the participants, probably true, but of little help in evaluating a simulation activity. In the following section "Simulation in the Syllabus," we are told that "simulations should be allocated whatever share of the syllabus is appropriate to their educational importance in the particular situation" (p. 21), but are given almost no information about what should be taken into account in weighing the importance of either general simulation techniques or specific simulation activities in any particular curriculum or for any particular group of students. Later in the same chapter is what should be a "consumer's guide" to simulations when the author raises the ques-

tion of "value for money." But here again the reader is disappointed as the most help he receives is the admonition to avoid "buying a simulation because it is cheap" (p. 25), obviously good advice but hardly specific enough for the teacher inexperienced in the use and purchase of simulations.

In Chapter 3, "Preparing for the Simulation," we find the same lack of detail (especially in the sections on adapting and on language briefing where we are told, principally, that experience will guide us in both), but coupled with a degree of naïveté about the teaching situation. For example, the author advises, very sensibly, that before introducing a simulation to students, a teacher should participate in it. In order to participate, however, the teacher must enlist the assistance of colleagues in what amounts to a simulation of a simulation. Unless such rehearsals comprise a special professional development day (though the author does not suggest that they do so), it is unlikely that many ESL teachers in Canada, faced as they are with growing numbers of classes and increasing class sizes, will have the time to devote to rehearsing activities which have only limited applicability, i.e., language practice and assessment for intermediate and advanced learners. Nor will they have time to do the extensive analysis of simulation discourse described in Chapter 5, and most will have to tailor the author's advice on "debriefing...conducted in the students' native language, or in the foreign language they are studying, or in bits of both" (p. 49) since few ESL classes are linguistically homogeneous.

Problems of the type just described seriously impair the utility of Jones' book for teachers inexperienced with simulation activities. Nevertheless, parts of it should be of interest to ESL teachers. The transcript reproduced in Chapter 5, of learners participating in a simulation presents perhaps the clearest view of what a simulation is and how it operates. The author also provides a complete simulation, with permission to photocopy, in Appendix A. This simulation, entitled "We're not going to use simulations," will be of special interest to teacher-trainers.

Also of interest is the background information on simulations provided in Chapter 7. Here Jones describes the use of simulations by the Prussian Army at the turn of the century, by the British Army, and by Americans training spies during the Second World War. Had he begun the book with this informative and somewhat intriguing section and followed it with greater detail on the use of simulations in language teaching, Jones might have produced a text of greater value to language teachers.

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DRAWING OUT

Sharon Bassano & Mary Ann Christison, San Francisco: The Alemany Press, 1982.

Drawing Out, a handbook for English as a second language instructors, will be valuable to many as a new source of classroom activities. It has however, some weaknesses in design and thoroughness of presentation.

The second collaborative book by Sharron Bassano and Mary Ann Christison, *Drawing Out* is based on the idea that student drawings can be used as a vehicle to draw out any level of student language be it written or spoken. Drawings created by students often represent more than students can express in words. These "art experiences in a language classroom" become the vehicle for verbal and written student *interlanguage* ("...the speech of second language learners at any point in the learning process").

The book is divided into the introduction plus four sections which are illustrated by student drawings and writings. The sections, entitled "Drawing Out Grammar," "Drawing Out Situations," "Drawing Out Creativity" and "Drawing Out Vocabulary" are each preceded by a list of subjects and activities for the student to depict interpretively. Activities range from:

> Where will you be 3 years from now? Make a picture and tell us about it. (If you don't know—guess!) Variations: 5 years from now, 20 years from now...I hope I will be... (Drawing Out Grammar)

to

> Make a picture of the place where you work. Draw yourself working. What are you doing? What are you thinking? (Drawing Out Situations)

A great deal of the value of the book lies in the Introduction. After pointing out for whom the book is intended (individual to group, single to multilevel, children to adults), Bassano/Christison briefly explain the "Drawing Out" concept. The authors also outline five different ways drawing may be approached. These approaches range from individual drawings to group projects. The concise instructions are useful to the experienced instructor, but may present some difficulty to the inexperienced. Perhaps some further detail on how to structure the activity, how to deal with anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, how one carries out corrections and how one can relate these drawing activities to a lesson as a whole would have been helpful.

The four major sections of the book are composed almost totally of student drawings and writing. Student drawing and writing represent, in

fact, ninety-five per cent of the book. Hence the design problem. Examples of some of the interlanguage from the written descriptions and dialogues found in these pages are:

> Many things expensive. Do you want buy here says man? No thank you. Maybe after 100 years. I can buy 1 pound these things. No money now. Sorry. (Drawing Out Grammar)
>
> I don't like you because you are Mexican and you don't have yours papers. Get back to Mexico. I don't like you ider but I want to lorned English, so I am living here for while. (Drawing Out Situations)

The most productive drawings and writing appear to come from the first two sections, "Drawing Out Grammar" and "Drawing Out Situations" although the distinctions between the two become somewhat blurred.

The value of the third section, "Drawing Out Creativity," is debatable as all language output is, in a sense, creative. The last section, "Drawing Out Vocabulary," with several games not unlike those found in J. Winn-Bell Olsen's *Communication Starters,* could easily have been incorporated into the first two sections.

The authors downplay the role of corrections and such a diminished role for corrections leaves one looking for direction. They point out that they do not correct the students' interlanguage as it is written on their work: "...'red-pencilling' or crossing out errors on someone's 'work of art' serves only to invalidate." The instructor cannot, of course, overcorrect as one can completely stifle creativity and natural output but, nevertheless, there is a role for correcting through paraphrasing, hand-signals and the like while the student is drawing and writing. After the writing is complete, error analysis and, indeed, contrastive analysis of the interlanguage can provide a basis for remedial action. Unfortunately, this is not demonstrated. The authors "simply make mental notes of where the problems lie and work on these with the whole class at a later time in a separate exercise." There is a danger, of course, in displaying or using (thus demonstrating approval) drawing with incorrect writing examples as repeated incorrect language may then be often imprinted on the student as correct. It is harder to "unteach" imprinted errors than it is to recognize and discretely remedy them when they appear. Making certain that the drawing is always separate from the writing (not always clear in the book) would avoid any unecessary imprinting.

ESL instructors are always looking for ways to both motivate and draw out student language and so a new idea is welcome. It is what one does with the "errors" in the interlanguage that is a problem. The Foreword states: "As language teachers, it is our job to eradicate interlanguage

because it represents imperfect knowledge of the target language. But there is nothing to prevent us from enjoying it while it is around." There is perhaps too much "enjoying" of the interlanguage as well as an overabundance of pictures and imperfect student interlanguage, far more than is needed to illustrate the point. Such language reveals a lot about the students, their thoughts, emotions, wants and needs, and is an interesting part of the process to extract these thoughts, etc., but its presence in such large quantity inadvertently makes it look like the end product. How to deal with the interlanguage, unfortunately, is left to the discretion of the teacher.

The final question: Will it work? The authors present ample evidence of admirably drawn out interlanguage and are prudent enough to note that not everyone joins in first time round. The teacher must be judicious, then, in adopting these activities as some students have fixed ideas about how they should learn a foreign language which may not include drawing. In spite of potential student reluctance to participate and the book's shortcomings, *Drawing Out* gives us useful activities for the ESL classroom. It is worth investigating.

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