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## We Suggest

Eleanor Buelke

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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

John Dixon

*Growth through English*

Reading, England: National Association for the Teaching of English, 1967. Pp. x + 121.

. . . to look beyond the minimum possibilities of literacy to the profounder possibilities of a considered and extended exploration of experience, permitting slower realization and more individual, personal growth. . . .

A view such as this confronts teachers of the arts and skills of language in *Growth through English*. Some teachers may react passively, according respect; others may turn away fearfully, feeling insecurity; still others may respond actively, experiencing inner excitement, as the author points out the wider vistas of live language in optimum operation. Insignificant in size and appearance, this small book encompasses and generates ideas of wide and deep significance. In it Mr. Dixon has undertaken the task of reporting and interpreting main points of agreement reached by participants in the Dartmouth Seminar during the summer of 1966. He has brought concepts from the seminar into realistic relevance for professionals engaged in planning, developing, and teaching programs concerned with our English language.

The writer begins by defining dimensions of English teaching. He proceeds from the historical images of *skill-centered* and *cultural heritage* models to a current model which focuses on *personal growth*. In a program where personal growth occurs, teaching of our language is built on language in operation from day to day. Language and its meaning originate with the pupil. They serve human purposes when they are his own, not handed to him by the teacher. "Language is learnt in operation, not by dummy runs." Pupils internalize and share encounters with life as they participate in both dialogue and monologue; as they express themselves in speech, drama, and writing; and as they multiply their experiences vicariously through literature.

If language is truly to "operate" in the classroom, teachers must understand the processes involved in developing its mastery. They must be aware of their pupils' potentialities, problems, and limitations. From this vantage point, and with respect for the pupils, wherever they are in their language development, teachers should build on the method of language learning by which the children have already accomplished so much. As they move together freely from spoken to written forms, from dialect to standard English, from dialogue to

monologue, language is adapted to new roles, new situations, and new levels of experience faced in the classroom.

In an analysis of class activities, Dixon makes a plea for organizing them with the purpose of effecting insight into experience, using them as means to a worthy end. When they become ends in themselves, he suggests, they evolve into mere "parlour games." Talk, reading, and writing that bespeak personal reaction and effort, focusing on the pupil's internalized experience, can combine to bring new learnings into living relationships with the old.

When the author states that the body of knowledge in a language curriculum is not a "package to be handed over" to pupils, but, rather, it is a representation of what teachers hope pupils will discover and build for themselves, he poses difficult choices for teachers. For guidance in making these decisions, he proposes familiarity with modern linguistics as a frame of reference to judge when, and in what direction, discussion of language in class may be developed.

Demands for programs and systems of knowledge reflect a need by teachers for order and sequence in their daily work. Classroom method "that nudges and encourages pupils" to take the initiative in organizing learning experiences can be compatible with underlying patterns of development. It is noted that linguistic patterns of development are not simple, linear progressions. Growth in one area of language, or typical of one domain, does not *replace* another; it *occurs simultaneously* with other areas, in both cognitive and affective domains. While detailed knowledge and analysis of psycholinguistic patterns of growth are in short supply, such information as is available can help teachers to develop their insights into continuity in language instruction.

In both the *skills* and *cultural heritage* approaches to English instruction, examination and testing practices greatly influence the curriculum. These philosophies of education also affect the school structure in which the curriculum is taught. Changes from traditional approaches to the modern, developmental approach mean more than changes in the central activities of the classroom. Changes in the relationships of teachers to pupils, of pupils to pupils, and of individual and group learnings to class learnings may also be inferred. These lead to changes in the classroom itself, perhaps even the school as a whole. Further, careful study of these implications concerning changes for schools, for teachers, and for institutions of higher education which train these teachers, is demanded and deserved.

Artful and skillful teachers of language who dare to fix their gaze and their sights beyond the "minimum of literacy" to the "extended

exploration of experience” are cutting across a range of disciplines to make both knowledge and expertise available to their classes. Their curriculum is organized with prime considerations for the subject: experience; the medium: language; and the goal: a new and satisfying, personal order to life, as it really is for the individual learner.