The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL

ELS ROBERTS AUERBACH
University of Massachusetts/Boston
DENISE BURGESS
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

This article discusses a new genre in ESL materials—the increasingly popular survival texts designed for newly arrived adults. A wide range of selections from these texts is examined in light of the stated goals of curriculum writers, as well as the less obvious social implications of these materials. In view of the explicit concern with realistic context, texts are evaluated in terms of both how accurately they reflect the immigrants' reality and the extent to which they may shape that reality. Examination of excerpts reveals that frequently, neither the situational content nor the communicative structure of materials reflects authentic interaction. Furthermore, the texts often prepare students for subservient social roles and reinforce hierarchical relations within the classroom by precluding the creation of meaning and the development of critical thinking skills. Finally, Freire's (1981) distinction between problem-solving and problem-posing pedagogies is suggested as a framework for interpreting the shortcomings of the survival genre and for moving toward a more empowering mode of curriculum.

The post-Vietnam-era wave of refugees and immigrants to the United States has triggered increased attention to the teaching of adult ESL students. In response to the pressing needs of these students, a new literature of survival English has begun to proliferate. Reflecting the "communicative" trend in language teaching, these materials focus on language use rather than grammatical form. Their goal is to teach "those skills that provide the students with the practical abilities that enable them to function in the new society" (Vaut 1982:1). They have gained widespread acceptance based on their practical, reality-based, student-centered orientation.

While the survival approach is widely acclaimed as "state of the art" ESL by practitioners and publishers alike, there has been little critical analysis of its theoretical assumptions and implications. This
separation between theory and practice is what Raimes refers to when she says, "All too often scholars look at classroom methodology rather than the underlying intellectual assumptions which generate methods" (1983:538). Moreover, survival ESL exemplifies the type of curriculum which Raimes (1983) claims must be re-evaluated in terms of "communicative" character: She argues that many new materials in fact focus on the forms rather than the content of language interaction, continuing to divorce language from thought and language teaching from the creation of meaning.

In addition, sociologists of curriculum (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Apple 1979, Anyon 1980, Giroux 1983a, 1983b) call for a critical analysis of adult education curricula in terms of their sociopolitical implications. They argue that no curriculum is neutral: Each reflects a particular view of the social order, whether implicitly or explicitly. This "hidden curriculum" generates social meanings, restraints, and cultural values which shape students' roles outside the classroom. The choices that educators make reflect their views of the learning process, the social context for learning, and the students' place in society. These choices have a very real impact on students: Giroux (1983a) argues that the failure to examine assumptions about how particular materials mediate meanings between students, teachers, and society very often leaves little room for students to generate their own meanings and develop critical thinking.

Such calls for re-examination are particularly applicable to the survival literature genre because of its increasing popularity, its place in the communicative teaching trend, and its inherent sociocultural nature. While particular texts cannot be equated with curriculum, they often shape practice and reflect curricular orientation. As such, the examination of text materials is a necessary step toward the analysis of goals and directions for adult ESL curricula. Thus, the purpose of this article is not to review or rank individual texts in relation to each other, but rather to lay the foundation for debate about the theoretical assumptions and social implications of survival models by looking at a range of currently available text materials (see the Appendix for a list of textbooks discussed).

THE ROOTS OF THE SURVIVAL TREND

Although survival skills have been defined as those necessary for "minimum functioning in the specific community in which the student is settled" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:162), in practice, the term has been widely used to refer to literacy and prevocational and basic skills for students with zero to intermediate language proficiency.
The single unifying characteristic of this type of text seems to be that it is situationally oriented around daily living tasks (shopping, banking, housing, health care, and so on). Most authors explicitly reject a grammatical framework and focus not on "what students know about the language but what they can do with it" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:11). A basic tenet of the survival trend is that language learning for adults should be experience-centered and reality-based. "Adults begin by learning for and from the situations in which they find themselves" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:7). The success of learning depends on the degree to which content is useful to students. Thus, "curricula, teaching methods and techniques, test materials, and assessment instruments have been developed to bring both the students and the classroom closer to the language needs of the real world" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:1).

This concern with reality derives from theoretical developments in both adult education and second language teaching. From adult learning theory comes the view that adults must be treated as people with complex individual histories, responsibilities, needs, and goals (Knowles 1973). The tasks that an adult learner must perform in everyday life have increasingly become the focus of curriculum development (Grognat and Crandall 1982:3). The Texas Adult Performance Level Study (Northrup 1977) made the notion of experience-centered learning concrete by identifying 65 competencies "necessary for an adult to perform successfully in today's society" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:9). Out of this study, the competency-based adult education (CBAE) model for adult basic education was developed.

This movement in adult education has occurred more or less simultaneously with the growth of the functional-notional and communicative trends in ESL. The latter can be characterized by concern with real language use, a student-centered classroom, humanistic approaches to instruction, and an orientation to language acquisition rather than language learning (Raimes 1983:543). Out of the parallel trends in CBAE and ESL has arisen the notion of competency-based ESL (CBE/ESL), which has gained increasing popularity in teaching survival English. CBE/ESL curricula teach to "task-oriented goals written in terms of behavioral objectives which include language behavior" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:9). Often these competencies are defined in terms of those identified by the Texas Adult Performance Level Study (e.g., Keltner and Bitterlin 1981, Keltner, Howard, and Lee 1981). Language learning is broken down into "manageable and immediately meaningful chunks" (Grognat and Crandall 1982:3). The goal is demonstrated mastery of the language associated with specific skills; performance indicators are associated
with competencies so that students can be pre- and post-tested for mastery.

In view of this explicit concern with real-life tasks and their linguistic demands, survival curricula must be examined in terms of how well they live up to the goals of being situationally and communicatively realistic. As Taylor (1982) points out, what is labeled “reality” in the language classroom may not in fact be reality. Thus, we must ask to what degree the content—the “real world” presented in survival texts—reflects what adult ESL students actually encounter outside the classroom and to what degree language forms—the types of language interaction which take place in the classroom—replicate those of the outside world. Furthermore, we must examine how the selection and presentation of reality contribute to shaping social roles for students.

SITUATIONAL REALITY

One of the inherent limitations of presenting situationally realistic content at a low level is the need to maintain structural simplicity. As a result of linguistic constraints, model dialogues in survival texts are often oversimplified to the point of being misleading, as Examples 1 and 2 illustrate:

1. A. How can I get a loan?
   B. Why do you want the money?
   A. To buy a car.
   B. How much money do you need?
   A. $2,000.00.
   B. Please fill out this application.
   A. When do I get the money?
   B. In a week.
   (Freeman 1982:101)

2. A. How much is the house?
   B. It’s $460 a month.
   A. How much is the cleaning deposit?
   B. $200.
   A. When can I move in?
   B. Next week.
   (Mosteller and Paul 1985:188)

A more serious limitation of many texts results from not taking into account the socioeconomic conditions of newcomers’ lives. Middle
class values, culture, and financial status are often reflected in lesson content; for example, a dialogue describing a student spending his one day off work playing golf fails to acknowledge that golf is a culture- and class-specific sport (Delta Systems 1975/1976:21–23). A passage which argues that the advantages of having a telephone include the fact that it facilitates buying by credit card, ordering meals for delivery, and finding out snow conditions for skiing (Cathcart and Strong 1983:214) is not likely to be relevant to survival ESL students.

Beyond these rather obvious examples of a reality alien to newcomers, more subtle distortions are pervasive in survival texts, as can be seen from an examination of health, housing, and work units. Typical health units focus on the use of the medical system: describing symptoms; making appointments; understanding simple diagnoses, instructions, and prescriptions.

3. A. Hello, Dr. Green's office.
   B. This is Mary Thompson. I'm calling about my daughter, Sarah. She has a fever and a rash.
   A. When can you bring her in?
   B. Right away.
   A. All right. We'll see you in a few minutes.
   (Keltner, Howard, and Lee 1981:55)

4. Eat good food.
   Stay in bed.
   Sleep a lot.
   Don't smoke.
      drink.
      work.
      worry.
      stay up late.
   go to bed late.
   (The Experiment in International Living 1983:52)

Example 3 is misleading for several reasons: A newcomer is more likely to go to a community health clinic or emergency room than to a private physician; it is highly unusual for a doctor to see a patient on a moment's notice; and a phone call of this sort would probably require giving more information about symptoms (onset of fever and rash, and so on).

Economic problems associated with health care are ignored in most texts. For example, in one lesson, a nurse asks a first-time
patient if he would like to be billed, and he responds that he thinks insurance will cover the visit (Keltner and Bitterlin 1981:61). Frequently, new patients are asked to prepay; newcomers are unlikely to have insurance, and if they do, it may not cover routine office visits. The advice in Example 4 may be impossible to carry out for someone who must work to survive. As Wallerstein points out (1983a:40), this kind of lesson neither acknowledges possible problems in following doctor’s instructions (because the patient cannot afford leisure time) nor recognizes unhealthy conditions which may be contributing to the illness. Not exploring the economic or social context of health problems may reinforce students’ sense of helplessness.

Thus, what is excluded from curricula is as important in shaping students’ perceptions of reality as what is included. Failure to address such factors as crowded clinics, long waits, unhealthy living or working conditions, high costs, and communication problems neither prepares students for what they might encounter nor legitimates these experiences when students encounter them. Instead, it may promote the view that these problems are somehow aberrations or, worse, the result of the students’ own inadequacies.

English Spoken Here: Health and Safety (Messec and Kranich 1982b) is noteworthy for presenting a broader view of health care. It elicits discussion about fears of going to the doctor and problems of long waits, expenses, and treatment (Example 5); compares private and public health facilities; and discusses preventive medicine, home remedies, and stress reduction. The student is presented with options rather than formulaic prescriptions for behavior.

5. Talk to your friends about their doctors. Ask them questions about their doctors:
   1. What do you like about the doctor?
   2. What don’t you like about the doctor?
   3. Is the doctor easy to see?
   4. Do you have to wait a long time for him or her?
   5. Does the doctor charge a lot?
   6. How does the doctor treat you?
      (Messec and Kranich 1982b:65)

Housing units typically include information about looking for an apartment, negotiating rental agreements, communicating with the landlord, and describing repair problems; competencies include reading ads, taking care of sanitation problems, and filling out
rental application forms. As is the case with health units, lessons on housing often reflect a middle class perspective. The gap between this perspective and the actual survival issues faced by newcomers can be seen by comparing Examples 6 and 7 with the excerpt from the *Boston Globe* story (Example 8) about the housing problems of Indochinese refugees in Boston.

6. A. The kitchen has a new sink and stove... The bedroom has a beautiful river view.
   B. Yes, it does. How many closets are there?
   A. Three closets and a linen closet. The bathroom is very modern.
   B. Does it have a shower and a bathtub?
   A. Yes, it does.
   B. I like it. I'll take it.
   (Freeman 1982:53)

7. You have to be quiet in an apartment. You have to clean it and take care of it. Talk to the landlord if you have problems... If you don't like your apartment, or if it's expensive, you can move.
   (Walsh 1984a:53)

8. “We buy the diapers, the Huggies,” Le Suong was saying. “In the cold, they are good to stuff in the cracks by the window.”
   “But it’s not the cold that is the biggest problem,” Nguyen Van Sau said. “It is getting somebody to come when things get broke, when the ceiling cracks or when people get scared of a fire like there was at number 4.
   “We call, 10, 15 times and nobody comes. All I want is them to clean and make the rats go so children will not be near them,” he said.
   “I tell them once about a rat and the man, he say to eat it,” Sing Ha, 9, said. “He laugh and say we eat dogs so we can eat rats too.”
   (Barnicle 1984)

The situation of tenants who are forced either to accept poor conditions or fight to have them changed is usually not mentioned in survival texts. While tenants' responsibilities in the areas of sanitation and upkeep are discussed at length, landlords' obligations are largely omitted. Where housing problems are discussed, there is seldom follow-up discussion on how to resolve them. For example, although *English Spoken Here: Consumer Information* (Messec and Kranich 1982a) includes dialogues about complaining to an unresponsive landlord, the absence of discussion about alternative courses of action...
may reinforce the sense that the goal of the lesson is language practice rather than communication for survival.

Examples 9 and 10 illustrate the kind of lesson material which could serve as a stimulus for discussion about strategies for addressing housing problems.

9. A. We've just moved out of our apartment. They won't give us our deposit back.
   B. Did you leave it clean?
   A. Yes, we did. It was spotless.
   B. Why don't you see a lawyer?
   A. We don't know one. Lawyers are expensive and we're broke.
   B. Try the legal aid society. Someone there can help you.
   (Keltner, Howard, and Lee 1981:167)

10. When you are having a problem with your apartment, notify the landlord as soon as possible...If he doesn't make the necessary repairs in a reasonable amount of time, write a letter to him explaining the problem again...Keep a record of the dates when you spoke to him and keep copies of the letters that you have sent. If the landlord still doesn't make the repairs, you can often get help from a local government agency.
   (Foley and Pomann 1982:41)

In each of these cases, the authors leave it up to teachers to structure discussion which relates lesson content to students' own experience.

Units on work often promote the view that finding a job depends on how well you fill out applications, dress for interviews, make appointments, and so on. While these skills may be helpful, they are not sufficient. Weinstein (1984:481) suggests that focusing on paperwork tasks (which in fact are often handled by family members) only adds to “feelings of powerlessness in a bewildering new culture” and gets in the way of developing talents which the newcomers may already have. This mechanical, decontextualized view of job finding is exemplified by Examples 11 and 12.

11. Women wear dresses or skirts and blouses; men wear jackets and ties.
    Listen carefully to the questions and answer questions carefully.
    Ask questions about the job...
    Have your résumé with you.
    Be confident.
    (Freeman 1982:92)
12. Miss Nakamura is looking for a job. In her country she was a waitress. Every day she looked in the newspaper. Last week she went to an employment service and they helped her. They sent her for an interview. First she called the personnel department and made an appointment. She also sent in an application. She looked very nice on the day of the interview... [The interviewer] asked if Miss Nakamura wanted to work full-time or part-time. She said she would like to work full-time. Now she has a job. She makes $3.50 an hour plus tips... She is very happy.

(Keltner, Howard, and Lee 1981:136)

The suggestions in Example 11 are too vague to be useful; in addition, they are presented as universal guidelines when, in fact, they may be inappropriate for many jobs. The hidden message of passages like Example 12 seems to be that if you, like Miss Nakamura, follow the appropriate steps, you will find a job. Conversely, if you have problems, it may be because you did not communicate properly. This idealized version of job finding contrasts sharply with another, more realistic view from the same text series:

13. A. You look tired. What have you been doing?
   B. I've been looking for a job for 2 weeks now, but I can't find anything.
      A. Did you check the want ads?
      B. Yes, but they all say they need someone with experience.
      A. What about the state employment office? Have you gone there yet?
      B. Yes, I went there and left an application. They told me to come back in a week.

(Keltner and Bitterlin 1981:132)

Example 13 is exceptional in its portrayal of the frustrations faced by job seekers. Most texts do not prepare students for long lines, for situations where they are treated less than respectfully, or for rejections. They rarely discuss nonpersonal factors like competition with Americans, economic recessions, and discrimination.

Beyond describing an oversimplified reality, texts often prescribe particular roles for students. As sociologists of curriculum have pointed out, education is an "important social and political force in the process of class reproduction" (Giroux 1983a:267). The classroom often serves to "parallel and reproduce the values and norms embodied in the 'accepted' social relationships of the workplace" (Giroux 1983b:9). In
survival materials, this hidden curriculum often takes the form of preparing students for menial positions and teaching them the corresponding language of subservience. *Opening Lines* (The Experiment in International Living 1983:178) makes explicit what other texts imply by outlining only the lowest-paying jobs as options for refugees (busboy, busgirl, waiter, waitress, cook, maid, janitor, factory worker, dishwasher, and so on).

The humorous dialogue in Example 14 captures the essence of the employment conflict for many newcomers.

14. A. What did you do in Laos?
   B. I taught college for 15 years. I was Deputy Minister of Education for ten years and then...
   A. I see. Can you cook Chinese food?
   (The Experiment in International Living 1983:177)

Rather than being used as the basis for a meaningful discussion of the contradictions facing refugees who were professionals, this dialogue trivializes their dilemma by not encouraging students to explore the problem (or even to discuss options like becoming bilingual paraprofessionals). Instead, teachers are instructed to ask students, “Why do refugees have to start their jobs at the bottom?” (1983:387). The presupposition of the question (that newcomers must start at the bottom) in itself precludes consideration of less than menial jobs. The reason given in answer to the question is that refugees lack language skills, contacts, and credentials. Again the broader social context is ignored: The implication of the answer is that refugees start at the bottom because they are somehow inadequate, rather than that structural demands of the economy (for example, the need for cheap labor, which foreign-born workers have traditionally filled) restrict their options (Auerbach 1984).

Survival on the job is often equated with being submissive; students are taught the language associated with being on the bottom of the power hierarchy. This can be seen in the often expressed position that prevocational ESL students be taught to *understand* the imperative but not to *produce* it because they must obey orders but not give them. Language functions in most survival texts include asking for approval, clarification, reassurance, permission, and so on, but not praising, criticizing, complaining, refusing, or disagreeing. The Hopewell *Work Series* (Husak, Pahre, and Stewart 1976), which is promoted by the Center for Applied Linguistics as “matter of fact with a minimum of moralizing” (1983:154), provides students
with a list of rules for job success in Examples 15 and 16. Example 17, from Part II of Basic Adult Survival English (Walsh 1984b), illustrates that this kind of prescriptivism is by no means a thing of the past.

15. I should be clean and neat.
I should be friendly and polite.
I should help other people.
I should not complain.
I should not be silly at work.
I should not lose my temper at work.
If my boss tells me I made a mistake, I should not get mad.
(Husak, Pahre, and Stewart 1976:2)

16. Sarah was a shampoo girl...sometimes her supervisor told her she made a mistake. Sarah did not get mad or yell. She told her supervisor she would try harder to do better work. She worked harder than the other employees...Sarah was a good worker. Why?
(Husak, Pahre, and Stewart 1976:34–35)

17. To be a good worker, you should:
Go to work on time.
Don’t be absent a lot.
Work hard. Don’t be lazy.
Be friendly. Get along with everybody.
Be nice to other workers.
Say hello to them.
Talk to them. Smile at them.
Be clean and neat.
If you have a problem, tell your boss.
If you are a bad worker, the company can fire you.
Then it might be hard for you to get another job.
(Walsh 1984b:66)

In each of these cases, workers are told to be obedient and to do whatever the boss asks; at the same time they are told to get along with co-workers. In reality, these two goals may be contradictory: A worker who naively tries to curry favor, works harder than others, and indiscriminately follows orders may be resented or ostracized by co-workers. There is a delicate balance of power in every American work place, and the new arrival who enters the work force unaware of these dynamics may encounter problems. Moreover, texts which suggest that workers immediately go to their bosses with problems...
overlook the possibility that the source of many problems may be the supervisors themselves (some of whom may ask workers to do unsafe work, work outside their job classifications, and so on). While claiming to teach students how to get and keep a job, prevocational units rarely address conflict on the job. They focus on the duties and obligations of workers without mentioning their rights or options.

The power relations of the outside society may also be reproduced in the classroom when the tone of materials is patronizing. Despite the persistent claim that the learner must be treated with respect because "his intellectual capacity is that of an adult" (Freeman 1982:v), students are often portrayed as incompetent and addressed like children. Every chapter of Opening Lines includes a "humorous" cartoon depicting student errors, for example, a student trying to mail a letter at the drugstore (The Experiment in International Living 1983:89). Students are taught to use polite forms, although teachers are not required to do so in addressing students (e.g., The Experiment in International Living 1983:19); instructions are given in the imperative; and some authors use the we form, commonly used with children.

A more subtle form of disrespect to students is the way in which cultural information is presented. It is commonly agreed that "an adult education program shouldn't require the adult to integrate with the second culture to acquire the language" (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:55). The introductions to survival texts often stress the need to accept the students' culture (see Delta Systems 1975/1976). At the same time, the stated goal of most survival texts is to teach American cultural norms: "skills which the community requires and the students lack" (Vaut 1982:1). Many curriculum writers have difficulty reconciling these goals of accepting the students' own culture and teaching about the new culture. In practice, the norms of American culture are often presented without reference to students' experience or exploration of cultural differences. Readings and cultural notes suggest rules for behavior, and lessons chunk these behaviors into skills which students are taught to perform. In many cases, guidelines are presented as invariable standards. For example, under the subtitle "Orientation Notes: Transportation," Basic Adult Survival English states that "In America you need a car. Almost everybody has a car. Some families have two or three cars" (Walsh 1984a:85).

18. Brush your teeth after every meal. If you can't brush, rinse with mouthwash or plain water. If you have food between your teeth, use a toothpick. Use dental floss every day...You should see your dentist twice a year for a check-up.
(Freeman 1982:43)
In Example 18, from a text which claims to “treat the adult learner with dignity,” the author takes on the role of prescribing personal hygiene (in the imperative), a topic which may be inappropriate for discussion in some cultures. Other texts tell students to tie their garbage in plastic bags, to defrost their refrigerators once a week, to make shopping lists, and to use deodorant and insect spray (see Walsh 1984a).

In addition to presenting cultural information as “standards,” many survival texts view cultural adaptation as a one-way process. Texts often violate a basic principle of adult education by concentrating on what students do not know rather than using prior knowledge and experience as a bridge for learning. Very few survival texts incorporate cultural comparisons and contributions from students about their own experience in a systematic way. Information about differences in such areas as housing, family structure, and job finding is rarely elicited (presumably because the goal is to teach American ways). This approach contradicts the findings of schema theory research which shows the importance of activating background knowledge for reading comprehension (see Carrell and Eisterhold 1983). Some texts do elicit explicit cultural comparisons. The reading in Example 19 is followed by questions about cultural differences.

19. American customs are different from Laotian customs. There are many things here that I find strange and confusing. In America, men and women often walk hand in hand. Sometimes they even kiss in public! We don’t do this in Laos.

People also dress quite differently here. Very often I see women wearing shorts and sleeveless blouses.

(Kuntz 1982:6)

Carver and Fotinos (1977) consistently encourage students to examine cultural differences. For example, even in a simple lesson about vegetable names (1977:21), they ask, “Which of these vegetables grow in your native country?” A reading about American dressing customs is followed by the questions in Example 20.

20. How do people dress in your native country to go to school? To go to church? To go to parties? To go to work? Are people in your native country allowed to wear their hair any length they want to? If not, why not? What do you think about the people’s clothing in this picture?

(Carver and Fotinos 1977:11)
Texts which exclude cultural comparisons and conflicts from curricula define acculturation as a one-way process rather than as an interactive one. They implicitly promote a view of learning about a new culture as a mechanical process of superimposing one set of norms on another. This view does not allow for meaningful cultural transformation, the creation of culture through a process of critical and selective integration of the old and the new. To the degree that survival texts focus on changing behaviors rather than critically examining cultural differences, they may contribute to what Freire calls adaptation. Freire (1981:4) characterizes the difference between adaptation and integration as follows:

Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he is adapted.

COMMUNICATIVE REALITY

Because teaching communication, rather than teaching language per se, is a stated goal of survival curriculum developers (Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:6), it is particularly important to examine the degree to which these materials are communicatively realistic. To what extent is realistic discourse modeled in the texts, and to what extent do materials stimulate authentic communication between students?

Raimes's (1983) criticism—that much of the so-called communicative approach is little more than the traditional, form-centered method in disguise—applies to many survival texts. The organizing principle for some books continues to be structure (e.g., Delta Systems 1975/1976, Cathcart and Strong 1983). Using structural criteria in sequencing lessons may result in a lack of semantic cohesion between units; for example, a lesson called “Where did you work in your country?” is followed by “We went to the circus” (Delta Systems 1975/1976). While both lessons focus on the past-tense structure, the juxtaposition of these two topics seems incongruous. Concern with grammatical control rather than discourse constraints can lead to anomalous dialogues, for example, portraying a newly arrived refugee talking to her children in English. The attempt to teach specific forms often leads to communicatively unrealistic passages such as those in Examples 21 and 22.
21. Are you a man?
   a woman?
   (The Experiment in International Living 1983:37)

22. Hi, Ben. How are you?
   Fine, thank you.
   What day is it?
   It's Tuesday.

Beyond examining whether the model dialogues mirror reality, we must ask if texts create a setting where authentic communication can take place in the classroom. What are the interactive tasks and demands made on students? In most cases, students are provided with grammatical, functional, or cultural information in the form of model dialogues and a series of follow-up exercises designed to help them “master” or reproduce the information. The text provides both the content and the form of language/behavior to be used. Students contribute neither experiences nor ideas new to the teacher or other students. Display questioning, a technique designed to elicit specific information already known to the teacher (Gaies 1983:208), is used frequently. For example, almost every chapter of Everyday English begins with a variation of “Is this a tomato? No. It's an apple” (Shurer 1980:[Food]1). Although this type of questioning occurs rarely in natural conversation outside the classroom (Long and Sato 1983), it appears frequently in survival texts. An information gap usually appears only after a long series of “communicative drills” (Raimes 1983:544). From a language acquisition point of view, the rehearsal of rituals may be inefficient if, as Warshawsky claims (1978:472), forms are best acquired when they assume a critical role in transmitting information.

The concern with assessability may partially account for this lack of attention to the creation of meaning. With the new emphasis on accountability in education, ESL curriculum developers have focused on behavioral objectives and performance indicators as a way to quantify progress (Tumposky 1984). Since knowledge of the world and thinking skills do not lend themselves to easy measurement, they are not compatible with the expressed goals of creating a curriculum which is “a performance-based outline of language tasks that leads to demonstrated mastery of the language associated with specific skills” (Grognet and Crandall 1982:3). As Tumposky warns, this behavioral orientation may well result in teaching which concentrates primarily on “the lower order skills which are easiest to measure (1984:305).” Raimes argues that the concern with quantification contradicts a truly
communicative definition of language: "We have divided language into discrete units, we have stressed assembling, not creating" (1983:539). Not until language teaching engages the thought and mind of the learners can it be called communicative.

**PROBLEM SOLVING VERSUS PROBLEM POSING**

Survival ESL materials have been created in response to very real and pressing social problems and have attempted to be situationally realistic, to treat adult learners with dignity, and to assist their transition into the new culture. However, as this article has tried to show, there is a great deal of unevenness among texts and within texts regarding these goals. In many cases, survival texts unwittingly present an idealized view of reality, a patronizing attitude toward students, a one-sided approach toward culture, and a model of language acquisition which is only superficially communicative. While attempting to help newcomers to fit into American society, some texts may have the impact of socializing students into roles of subservience. Why is it that despite well-meaning and commendable intentions, survival texts often fall short of stated goals?

The distinction made by Freire (1981) between problem solving and problem posing offers insight into this question. Freire suggests that very often in situations of profound social change and upheaval, educators see their role as one of assistencialism; that is, they believe they must intercede on behalf of their students with educational welfare to help them solve their problems. Curriculum developers thus assess students' needs and prescribe solutions. As Goulet (see Freire 1981:ix) puts it, "An expert takes some distance from reality, analyzes it into component parts, devises means for resolving difficulties in the most efficient way, and then dictates a strategy or policy." The teacher's job is to transmit predetermined knowledge or skills which the students need to meet the demands of society. The teacher is the "provider," and the students are the "clients," or "consumers," of the curriculum. Freire calls this view the banking model of education: The teacher makes deposits which accumulate interest and value (Berthoff 1984:3). The transfer of wealth/information/knowledge is one-way, from the teacher to the students. Solutions are found for the students and imposed on them. While claiming to be student-centered, "such an approach in fact places all the responsibility for learning on the teacher" (Tumposky 1984:306). According to Freire (1981), the greatest danger of this approach is that it reinforces the silence and passivity of powerless people, rather than creating conditions which allow them to identify and think critically about problems.
In survival materials, problem solving often takes the form of chunking reality into competencies corresponding to specific skills judged necessary for successful functioning in American society. The complex reality of the newcomers' world is presented in simplified, reduced form, with almost recipe-like instructions for what to say and how to act. Where problematic aspects of reality are introduced, they are sometimes treated as sources of humor, language practice, or supplemental activities. Only rarely are students asked to develop their own strategies for addressing problems, as in Examples 23 and 24.

23. Who would you call? Where would you go?
   1. If I wanted to find out about care for my children, I would ________.
   2. If I wanted to learn a trade to get a job, ________.
   3. If I wanted to locate the nearest playground for my children, ________.
   (Keltner and Bitterlin 1981:185)

24. What would you do in the situations below:
   Your new washable shirt shrinks the first time you wash it.
   The milk you just bought at the store is sour.
   (Carver and Fotinos 1977:36)

However, even in these selections, the problems are quite straightforward, and there seem to be expected correct answers. For more complex problems, like job-finding difficulties or landlord problems, students are often presented with solutions (like job retraining or legal remedies), rather than encouraged to discuss a range of options and devise strategies together.

By contrast, a problem-posing view of education sees the identification and analysis of problematic aspects of reality as central to the curriculum. The teacher’s role is not to transmit knowledge, but to engage students in their own education by inviting them to enter into the process of thinking critically about their reality. The purpose of the endeavor is not to find solutions for students but to involve them in searching for and creating their own alternatives. “Instead of education as extension—a reaching out to students with valuable ideas we want to share—there must be dialogue” (Berthoff 1984:3).

The only currently available book which defines problem posing as the starting point for adult ESL curricula is Wallerstein's (1983a) *Language and Culture in Conflict: Problem-Posing in the ESL Classroom*. This book, intended as a teacher resource rather than a student
text, adapts Freire’s outlook to survival issues in the United States. It is based on the premise that education should start with problematic issues in people’s lives and, through dialogue, encourage students not only to develop a critical view of their reality but to act on it to improve their lives. Each of the sample lessons codifies in picture or dialogue form an affectively loaded theme which reflects a contradiction in students’ lives. The teacher’s role is to facilitate the dialogue between students with a series of inductive questions aimed at eliciting students’ ideas, assisting them in making generalizations, relating the theme to their own lives, and helping them to take action to effect change where applicable. Unlike many other survival materials, the vocabulary, grammar, and function exercises are subordinated to the process of exchanging and creating meaning. What is remarkable is that even at beginning levels of language learning, Wallerstein (1983b) has found that a problem-posing environment can be created through the use of simple codes, small-group work, the physical acting out of dialogues, and support from bilingual participants.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that newcomers need to know the language associated with finding jobs, housing, health care, and so on. Refugees and immigrants are immersed in a process of profound transformation, and they need the tools to be able to confront changes. The question is not whether they should be taught the language of survival, but how and to what ends. The problem-posing view of education challenges the notion that survival skills should be taught as a body of knowledge (linguistic and cultural) to be transmitted from teachers to students. It suggests that the language of housing and jobs, for example, be taught as a function of the single most important skill needed for survival: the ability to think critically. As London (see Collins 1983:181) has said, “Increasingly a premium must be placed not so much on what to think, but on how to think critically. Preparation for living in a rapidly changing world requires that people learn how to learn.”

The transition from a problem-solving orientation to a new, more empowering mode must start with teachers’ examining materials already in use and asking simple questions about how reality is portrayed, to what degree student contributions are encouraged, what kinds of social roles are implicit, and how much opportunity for creative and critical thinking is allowed. Only by asking these questions and making explicit the values inherent in the materials we use can we begin to move toward a new mode of curriculum. As Giroux (1983b:11) puts it,
To acknowledge that the choices we make concerning all facets of curriculum and pedagogy are value laden is to liberate ourselves from imposing our own values on others. To admit as much means that we can begin with the notion that reality should never be taken as a given, but, instead has to be questioned and analyzed. In other words, knowledge has to be made problematic and has to be situated in classroom social relationships that allow for debate and communication.

By problematizing our knowledge about teaching, we do exactly what is proposed here for students; our own critical self-examination becomes a model of the process we are inviting our students to engage in.

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THE AUTHORS

Elsa Roberts Auerbach teaches in the ESL and Bilingual Education Programs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. After receiving her Ph.D. in Linguistics at Northwestern University, she worked for many years as an assembler with foreign-born workers in the electronics and auto industries. She has taught ESL in union-sponsored, work-place programs, as well as at the community college and university levels.

Denise Burgess is a resource teacher for the Department of Migrant Education in Watsonville, California. She has an M.Ed. in Bilingual/ESL Studies from the University of Massachusetts at Boston and has taught adult and community college ESL in Boston and California.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Currently Available Textbooks Discussed


