Past Controversies of Language

Teaching is considered by many people one of the most difficult and frustrating actions to carry out. The reasoning behind this is not all individuals learn things the same way. Different people have different psychological processes when it comes to learning, whether they are learning a song, definition, or theory. The question of concern is, “How can one teach students who are non-native speakers, or speakers of non-standard dialects of English?” This can be difficult because people have different ways of learning. The teaching of this can cause speculation on what language or dialect is considered acceptable and what is not. When teaching an individual regarding their native language or dialect, one must not shun their native language or dialect, but instruct them when it is and is not acceptable in society and encourage them. Students who are non-native speakers or speakers of non-standard dialects of English should be taught the standard dialect or language using a balance of various teaching methods to satisfy the majority of students.

There are many ways one can be taught Standard English. In Seth Katz’s article, *Standard English Immersion for Native American Speakers,* he suggested, “…native speakers of English who do not speak the Standard Dialect should be taught Standard English using a curriculum based on the model of foreign-language immersion programs (1).” This can be successful because it forces one to try and learn the language or dialect in order to communicate with others in a setting; however, many people do not learn this way due to discouragement, lack of patience, and some students will simply give up when presented this challenge. Katz also introduced another way to look at immersion, “Immersion would succeed as a method for teaching native English speakers the Standard Dialect because immersion imitates the process by which children acquire their first language skills in their home dialect… (5).” This presents a negative aspect to the use of immersion-based programs. When dealing with students from elementary to high school most of the student’s brains have already developed enough to where they cannot learn a non-native dialect or language as easily as their first language when they were a child and learned it instinctually. If one is immersed in a setting where only the language or dialect being spoken is the only way to communicate, then over time one will adapt to the language or dialect, but when dealing with older students that cannot learn a dialect or language instinctively as when they were a child they could become discouraged due to the process of immersion. Another negative aspect of interest is that if a student experiences full immersion then the student may lose his or her culture and lose the dialect or language that was connected to that culture.

This takes us back to the fact that not all individuals learn language or dialects the same way. Another way that language and dialects can be taught to students is through nurture and relations of the non-standard dialect or language to Standard English. In Dennis Craig’s writing Teaching Standard English to Nonstandard Speakers: Some Methodological Issues, he states, “Any demands of the standard-language program which set arbitrary levels of achievement with which learners are uncomfortable will result in negative attitudes on the part of the learners. The solution to the problem is not to make such demands (73).” By this he is saying that if a teacher expects too much from a student, or pushes the student out of his or her comfort zone the student is more subjected to develop a negative attitude towards learning the language or dialect and towards the teacher. When teaching a student a language or dialect other than their own they may take offense to the criticism one may give about their language or dialect. To avoid this teachers instructing the students must approach them cautiously, and remember that their dialect or language is not inferior to their own it is just how they were raised and the culture they grew up in.

There are many successful ways to teach a student the standard dialect or language, but everyone learns differently, therefore a balance needs to be sought for. Teaching students that their language is wrong or unintelligent is wrong in itself. Just because a student’s standard or non-standard dialect in this case is the minority doesn't mean that the majority’s dialect or language is superior to theirs. Yes, more people may speak the English language or a more prominent dialect, but what about those within the minority? If one does not want to learn the language or dialect other than their own, then no matter how hard you try to teach them they will not learn it if they do not desire to do so. Some individuals see it as their own culture and part of their life and personalities. If you try to tell them to learn a language other than theirs some may think that you are saying that the dialect or language they speak is wrong. So in order to attempt to teach a non-native speaking individual, or an individual speaking in a non-standard dialect the teacher must understand the rules, and implications within the dialect or language. The only way you can teach someone of a different dialect or language is to understand it and study it to where you can speak it and understand it yourself. John Baugh states in the article *Ebonics and Its Controversy,* “There are two major points of view taken by educators. One view is that any recognition of a nonstandard language as a legitimate means of expression will only confuse children, and reinforce their tendency to use it instead of Standard English.” This is why teachers and other means of authority must learn the implications of the nonstandard dialect or language in relation to Standard English. This would help prevent confusion and encourage the students to want to learn and use Standard English as opposed to other dialects in certain settings. To do this successfully the instructor must understand the culture of the student’s dialect, language and everything along with it to avoid ignorance and prejudice towards the students so that you can make more of a connection with them in order for them to be interested in learning the "standard" dialect, or intended language. When this is done the teacher can refer to phrases, contractions and other implications of the dialect or language to those that are in “Standard” English. The most important aspect of this teaching technique is the repetition of rules, and the speaking of the dialect or language itself. In order for the kids to remember the "standard" dialect or language they must repeat and be explained what they have learned over and over again for it to be second nature. If a student can do this then he or she will eventually have it embedded into his or her brain.

Attempting to teach a person a nonstandard dialect or language is a very hard task to achieve. There are many different ways to teach and one of these methods alone cannot satisfy all of the various ways that people learn. Students who are non-native speakers or speakers of non-standard dialects of English should be taught the standard dialect or language using a balance of various teaching methods to satisfy the majority of the students. A little immersion, relations between a dialect or language, repetition, and the nurturing of a student’s cultural pride can all be incorporated to create an effective protocol for teaching students in grade schools the standard dialect or language.

Works Cited

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