



SPEECH SKILLS ESSENTIAL TO TEACHING

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Every genuinely successful and dearly beloved teacher I have found anywhere, be it in the grades or in high school, possesses, and possesses in a great measure what I term in this article speech skills essential to teaching. These skills are no other than effective voice control, pleasing expression, distinct pronunciation and enunciation, absence of irritating mannerisms, good diction, and expertness in eliminating pupils' language errors. More than any other profession, with the possible exception of dramatics or the ministry perhaps, teaching requires unceasing and arduous efforts on the part of the practitioner to perfect his mastery of the speech arts. A teacher who talks too loudly, has a monotonous expression, mumbles his words, exhibits odd little habits of speech, uses bad grammar and unidiomatic expressions, and is unskilled in correcting errors, can never expect to win out in the exacting task of educating young people. In order, therefore, that a teacher may be better equipped for her job, especially if she has had little or no professional training, she must endeavor through self-education and dogged determination to improve her command of English, our principal medium as well as subject of instruction.

Voice Control

Recently I observed two beginning teachers on their toes, a young man and a young woman, and to tell the truth I was much impressed with their teaching ability and their classroom work—they were intelligent, resourceful, active, and stimulating, they had satisfactory lesson plans, good board work, enough instructional materials and devices, and what is more, they

had fine personality — but I could not help regretting the one thing in which they both failed utterly, that is, the inability of either of them to control his voice as he talked to the class. One or the other simply allowed his voice to run away with him in reckless abandon: the young man, who was once an army lieutenant, spoke to his children as if he were commanding a platoon of privates; and the young woman, who graduate as salutatorian of her class from the Bukidnon Secondary Normal School, just talked as though she was afraid she might not be heard by her sixty odd pupils.

At a conference I had subsequently with these teachers I politely and good-naturedly called their attention to this particular shortcoming of theirs, and it surely is most provocative to make note of their replies — so interesting and revealing were they indeed!

Said the young man, "Pardon me, Mr. Feliciano, if I have to think about my voice while I teach, I am sure I can't teach very well because then I won't be able to concentrate on my teaching. You say I disturb my neighbors by talking with a loud voice—so why not put me in a building all by myself?" (Words of wisdom or of artlessness from the lips of a teacher who never had any professional preparation!)

Said the young woman, "Mr. Feliciano, I know that my lack of control over my voice is one of my weaknesses—my supervisor in the Training Department kept telling me about it when I was a student teacher. The truth is that I forget myself once I am absorbed in my teaching, and consequently I can't tell any more how my voice sounds. From now on I'll try my best to bring my

voice under my control." (An honest confession from a professionally trained teacher.)

Well, since these two greenhorns expected me to make some comments, I did say something to this effect, not with nose turned up but with a lot of fellow feeling:

You are very young teachers, and so you still have many things to learn and master before you become really proficient in the practice of your calling, and one of those things is voice control.

Learn to breathe properly, for you make your voice with your breath.

Learn to listen to your own voice so that you may be able to tell its sound.

Learn to speak neither too loudly nor too softly, but be sure to make your voice carry as far as the most removed child in your schoolroom.

Don't speak to the pupils in the front row alone, nor to those in the back row alone; speak to all the pupils in the room.

Don't shout to call anybody's attention, because even a whisper, if made properly, will carry to the back of the room.

Open your mouth wide and speak naturally and distinctly.

Expression

By expression as a speech skill I mean both the look on one's face and the manner in which the meaning or beauty of something spoken is brought out by the speaker. A good many teachers, both male and female, bore their pupils to distraction with their deadpan expression: their faces show no evidence whatever of changing thoughts and emotions — their facial expression simply does not change no matter how happy or sad they may be. Teachers there are who do not even smile, much less laugh; perhaps they take pride in their solemn expression and find satis-

faction in the deference their pupils show them. Why can't certain teachers loosen or unleash themselves once in a learned man.

A question you may now wish to ask is: How shall I therefore express myself?

Above all, express yourself clearly and well.

Speak sincerely, that is, from the bottom of your heart, from your inmost soul.

Know what you are talking about, mean what you say and say it with earnestness.

In order to be able to speak with more expression, with more warmth and feeling, remember what the Bible says and put it into practice: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Pronunciation and Enunciation

In the minds of most Filipinos, teachers not excluded, while the meaning of the term *pronunciation* is clear and well-understood, the significance of the term *enunciation* is but vaguely comprehended. While the two terms are closely related in meaning and, consequently, in function, they can hardly be used interchangeably because they are not one and the same thing. Pronunciation has to do with the sounding of the syllable or syllables making up a word and the accenting of such syllable or syllables, while enunciation has to do with the force and manner in which words are uttered or spoken. Good pronunciation implies correct sounding of every vowel and every consonant in a syllable or word as well as correct accentuation of the syllable. In careful speech, syllables and words are not slurred, mumbled, or run together, and they are hastily uttered either, and so good enunciation results from such a precise practice.

Filipinos must not try so hard to ape Americans in matters of pronunciation

and enunciation, because they don't have to, in the first place, and, in the second place, English has such high adaptability and flexibility that it comes out beautiful and arresting from anybody's tongue, regardless of race or nationality, provided it is well spoken. There is absolutely nothing wrong with speaking English with a Filipino accent. What else is to be expected of us?

To be sure, English is by no means a lazy tongue or a tongue for lazy persons, and this is what I mean by that: if you want your pronunciation and enunciation to be as nearly perfect or faultless as you can possibly make them, then you must set to hard work all your speech organs and instruments of articulation—tongue, lips, palate, teeth, and voice—whenever you give utterance to your thoughts and feelings. There is no other way for anyone, even an American or a Britisher, to speak English felicitously and with telling effect, but undeniably the reward of mastery is immeasurable.

Some of the common mistakes in pronunciation that I have noted among teachers are: bad short vowel sounds, particularly short *a*, short *i*, and short *e*; inability to sound *th* (both hard and soft) correctly; failure to make the sound of *z* in such words as *is*, *was*, *has*, *used*, *does*, *goes*, *exact*, *example*; mispronouncing *of* (correctly pronounced *ov*); not putting sufficient stress on such final consonants as *t*, *d*, *p*, *k*; misplacing the accent; and not knowing the use of the rising and the falling inflection.

While teachers are not in the habit of running their words together—seldom do you hear a teacher say *didya* for *did you*, *gotta* for *got to*, *doncha* for *don't you*, *gimme* for *give me*, *hafta* for *have to*, and the like—still it is very important that they avoid hasty and careless speech. Correct pronunciation and

distinct enunciation are essential to successful teaching.

Mannerisms of Speech

A mannerism of speech is a particular manner of speaking which is used too much by a person and thereby becomes a peculiarity of his. Examples of undesirable mannerisms of speech I have observed among teachers are: the use of a false or artificial voice; using too many exclamations or certain exclamations too frequently; punctuating sentences with "no?", "isn't?", "isn't that so?" etc. in an effort to become emphatic; verbosity or wordiness; the use of insipid or colorless language; ungrammaticalness or speaking out of the idiom; disconnected speech; and rare cases of stammering. There is not a shadow of doubt that a mannerism of speech, particularly when it is too pronounced, is a handicap to a teacher, because it attracts too much attention to its peculiarity and because it sometimes causes uneasiness or irritation on the part of the listeners. If a teacher is aware that she has an unpleasant mannerism of speech, she must do everything within her power to break herself of that mannerism. There is nothing more satisfying and pleasing to give attention to than a natural and unpretentious manner of speaking.

Diction

Good diction, I'll venture to say, is one of the most important elements of the equipment of a proficient teacher. Good diction implies, among other things, a wide vocabulary, grammatical correctness, and skill in the choice and arrangement of words. Teaching, especially the type employed in progressive schools, is practically synonymous with the stimulation and expression of ideas, ideas on a thousand and one topics, and so a teacher with a poor command of language is almost certain to fail in her pedagogical work. How in this wide world

can an instructor who talks incoherently, who is vague and confused, who violates the rules of grammar, and who tautologizes, guide his young students effectively in their study of the manifold affairs about them—I repeat, how indeed?

It is a fairly well-established fact in educational circles that there is a high degree of correlation between teaching success and the extent or size of a teacher's vocabulary. I have noted that among the most ineffective and uninteresting teachers in the classrooms are those whose vocabulary is limited and unvaried: they have at their command no more than a handful of words and phrases which they use over and over again to express their thoughts and ideas indifferently or to echo the thoughts and ideas of others imperfectly. Sometimes it is truly pathetic to watch the feeble attempts of such teachers at making their pupils talk, think, answer questions, or follow directions, because the whole thing is, to say the least, a case of "the blind leading the blind."

Since a wide vocabulary is a vital factor of success in teaching, it behooves every teacher from grade one through college to do all in his power to enlarge his vocabulary. It is inexcusable for a teacher, since a teacher is supposed to be interested in self-improvement, not to own a good and up-to-date dictionary which he can consult readily, for no other book is more helpful to an individual in the enlargement of his vocabulary and in the acquisition of knowledge than a dictionary. Then a teacher must read constantly and widely, and must read purposely for English and not just for pleasure or information, so that he may enrich his vocabulary thereby. Even a dictionary and wide reading cannot help a person considerably to increase his power over words unless he uses as often as he

can in speech and in writing the new words that he learns.

The use of grammar for propriety or gracefulness of speech is incontrovertible, for grammar is the study of the correct forms and uses of words, and yet many a teacher does not take pains to learn grammar to a nicety. Anyone who is really desirous to improve his command of English must know his own weaknesses or difficulties in the use of grammar, must be bent upon eradicating his weaknesses, must learn the solution to his grammatical problems, and must be careful not to lapse into the old incorrect habits of speaking. Teachers' grammatical errors are mostly in the number of verbs (failure of subject to agree with predicate); in the use of the different verb tenses (confusing the past tense with the present perfect, and the past tense with the past perfect); in the use of the wrong case forms of pronouns; in faulty sentence construction; in deviation from the idiom; and in obscurity of meaning.

Correcting Pupils' Speech Errors

The most important thing to remember and to do in connection with the correction of speech errors committed by the pupils is that the teacher must not only correct the errors by supplying or eliciting their right forms, but also give the children opportunity to use by themselves the proper language forms thus provided. It is a mistake for a teacher who is dissatisfied with a pupil's incorrect answer to snatch it from him and explain or finish it herself; what she should do instead is to help the pupil repeat or give the answer correctly so that the right form may be impressed upon his mind. It is the pupil who needs supremely the practice in correct speech, and so it is he who should get that practice, and not the teacher.