

Reports

Workshop on the Teaching of Kannada as a First Language

6-8 February 2013

Azim Premji University, Bangalore

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As children have no difficulty in speaking their home language, it is often assumed that they will have no difficulty in acquiring the same language in school. The reality is, however, starkly different. It has been observed that even in class V, many children are unable to read and write in their first language. One part of the explanation comes from the fact that the language variety spoken at home is different from the language variety taught in school and therefore, students face difficulties in acquiring the school language. This hypothesis however, leaves several issues relating to first language pedagogy unexplained. It is essential to understand how children learn their first language; how they can be meaningfully engaged in learning the school language; and how children can be engaged in using language for the purpose of communication information, expression, analysis, critical thinking and interactions. In view of the need for such in-depth understanding, a three-day workshop on teaching Kannada as a first language was held at Azim Premji University, Bangalore from 6th to 8th February 2013. The workshop was organized by the Academics and Pedagogy unit of the University Resource Centre, Azim Premji University. It was attended by the Kannada language teacher trainers of the District Institute, Yadgir; members of the Child Friendly School Initiative scheme of Shorapur, Karnataka; and teachers of the Migrant Labour schools, Bangalore.

The primary objective of the workshop was to have a shared understanding of the needs of the participants as language teachers and teacher educators in the field of teaching Kannada as a first language, to see their own roles as teacher trainers and to prepare a road map for their professional development and engagement.

The workshop started with a detailed analysis of the nature and functions of language, the acquisition of the first language and the transition from home language to school language. The participants showed a keen interest in the theories of language universals, innateness of language and the socio-linguistic variables affecting the acquisition of the first language. They also shared their assumptions underlying first language teaching, and the experiences and challenges faced by them in the field of language teaching.

During the post-lunch session of the first day, Prof. Vanamala Viswanatha made a presentation on the use of language in teaching the first language. Citing plenty of examples from Kannada poetry, she demonstrated the pedagogical relevance of literature in teaching the first language to the tiny tots.

On the second day of the workshop, Dr Devaki Lakshminarayana interacted with the participants and prompted them to contemplate the correlation between the linguistic and the cognitive development of the child, and the nature and functions of language which go beyond mere communication. Her presentation and

suggestions helped the participants to channelize their perceptions on language, language learning and language teaching. This in turn has a direct bearing on the qualitative improvement of the teaching and learning of Kannada as a first language. She also guided the participants in conceptualizing the vision statement of the Kannada Language Co-dev Group proposed to be formed shortly. The aim of this group would be to enhance the professional competence of the members of the Foundation involved in teaching Kannada as a first language.

Participating in the deliberations of the workshop, Dr Parthasarathi Misra spoke on the theory and practice of reading and writing, and the participants tried to relate the findings of the recent research on reading and writing to their field experience. A detailed discussion on reading and writing prompted the participants to conclude that they would like to attend a few sessions on “Reading and Writing” for a better understanding of its theory and practice with reference to the teaching and learning of Kannada as a first language.

On the last day of the workshop, the participants discussed the pedagogical issues of teaching Kannada as a first language with reference to the guidelines formulated by NCF 2005. Under the guidance of Dr Devaki Lakshminarayana, the participants shared their understanding of the core issues of teaching Kannada as a first language.

The three-day workshop created awareness among the participants of the need for their professional development in the field of language and language pedagogy. It was decided that a Kannada Co-dev group meant for the teachers and teacher trainers involved in teaching Kannada would be formed soon to carry forward the dialogue initiated in the workshop.

The 3rd International English Language Teacher Educator Conference 2013

16-18 March 2013

International Convention Centre, Hyderabad

Partha Sarathi Misra

The 3rd International English Language Teacher Educator Conference mentioned in the section on forthcoming events in the January 2013 issue of *Language and Language Teaching* was held at the International Convention Centre, Hyderabad from 16-18 March 2013. The conference, organized by the British Council in collaboration with the English and Foreign Languages University (EFL-U), Hyderabad with support from the English Language Teachers’ Association of India (ELTAI) and the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) was a highly focused international academic exercise that ignited the imagination of more than 1300 delegates representing 22 countries of Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Besides the key note and plenary speakers, 122 speakers presented their research papers in parallel sessions.

On the first day Ms Alison Barrett and Prof. Paul Gunasekhar welcomed the participants. The keynote address was given by Prof. B. Kumaravadivelu of San Jose State University. The keynote and the plenary talks by Penny Ur, Adrian Holliday and Ajit Mohanty set the tone of the conference which aimed at exploring the theory and practice of English language teacher education in diverse environments.

In his keynote address, Prof. B. Kumaravadivelu observed that the current approaches to English language teacher education were too inadequate to prepare teachers to meet the emerging challenges posed by economic, cultural and educational globalization. He also called for restructuring the English language teacher