

## COLLEGE LEVEL LINGUISTICS AINT COLLEGE LEVEL ANYMORE

Presented to California Literacy

October 15, 1999

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My title says it all: College level linguistics ain't college level anymore! If it ever was. Students live *down* to their teachers' expectations, as well as up. Which direction is your method? We were teaching it at adult fourth or fifth grade level about two decades ago. In English!

These days, you can find linguistics for children in the phonics flash cards sold under a variety of names. But those are only the most practical and profitable marketing methods that were designed years after my tutor's workbook and text was published. My title, *from 1983 draft copyright to 1989 publication, was Practical Word Power*. It still is. *And the established press had no interest in it* because it restricts its own sales to tutors, not millions of students. Consumables is where the government money lies--why bother with anything else just because it works? Should marketing take precedence over need? Tell that to the school systems that demand at least twenty students in each class--using consumables. Twenty students cannot have adequate feedback time in an hour; and people don't learn to pronounce or converse by lecture.

Yes, the computer has changed a lot of things, but it can't listen to and correct students. Fortunately, it does have infinite patience with repetition. I don't. So, students, pay attention. Some teachers stress fun in learning, but that compromises the present moment DISsatisfaction necessary to learning. Life isn't all fun. Some people learn from it. Some don't. Should we ignore the slow learners? Are today's children considerably brighter than we were when we were young, or is yesterday's educational system helping to dumb down the current generation? And since today's educational system is essentially the same as yesterdays, what can you conclude?

Today I want to tell you about my program because it has a direct relationship to the task we're all committed to: literacy for the masses. But I also want to tell you about the obstructions (other than language difficulty) that I believe are holding back that literacy for the masses. . .because we need to overcome the obstacles before we can progress as either individuals or as a literacy group.

So first, let's consider *Practical Word Power*. (Discussion of program format and content, with a brief description of the content of each of eight lessons.)

#### HANDOUTS (15 min)

I tell students that we speak English with our ears, not with our eyes. That always gets a laugh, but they don't forget! That also gives immediate purpose to the task at hand. I've had great success in opening up students to the bone-crusher task of learning diacritical (or pronunciation) codes by stating flatly--and early--that the English language is crazy--they're not. As soon as they can accept those personal judgments, I tell them, then the language makes a lot of sense: it's rich and flexible, and I'm glad it's my mother tongue. Guess what that means! My mother was not a PhD in linguistics, but I spoke the language fairly well before I went to kindergarten. Later schooling expanded and perfected. . .but I had already intuited the basics! So did everybody--it's human nature! Let's make language-learning accessible, not forbidding! We should always be teaching language mastery--not rules. There's a message somewhere in there, if we'll heed it.

Now let's talk about the literacy field's obstacles:

In my opinion, one of the chief obstacles is the American formal education system itself. Confronted with the huge numbers, the educational system has simply hunkered down and is teaching a few persons at a time--exactly as it always has--and teaching what it always has. In fact, one-to-one isn't dead, although it needs to be dead in most situations. No need to rethink anything in this Brave New World of Future Shock, is there? The problem is that the number of adults who need English language education is much larger than the US college population and 20 times larger

than the US military. There are not enough classrooms available to handle the crowd, if everyone did want to go. We need to do it piecemeal--moving tutoring as far down on the teaching stepladder as is possible. That means reassessing everything.

You might be aware that USC Professor Stephen Krashen was quoted in the LA Times recently as saying, "The state is focused on phonics for solving the literacy crisis, but what we really need are more books." Does that mean the same old kinds of books? Is there nothing new to be learned after decades of teaching and tutoring massive waves of immigrants? We might need new books, but is the educational system really open to new ideas? I wonder.

In August, I finally succeeded in reaching a PhD in charge of a California State University campus' second language program after more than a month of trying and leaving unacknowledged messages on her voicemail re: *PWP*. She refused to talk to me and hung up, because my program did not "fit our program." I consider that to be a compliment, because she had never seen my program nor reviewed its content. It never did "fit in" anywhere except into an unacknowledged hole in the education system-- between basic levels and GED entry level. By funding only basic level, the government helps to create marginally-competent learners and then abandons them.

*PWP* broke new ground by addressing the intermediates! But I do think that that teacher's rote answer is an indicator of what's wrong with the present schooling system. Does she ever talk with Krashen? Do they agree? Can nothing be improved? I could accept a studied rejection; that might represent my error. But a closed mind in a teacher? That's something else! And it certainly enforces my own fifteen-year prejudice that "You cannot teach new things easily to many of our nation's certificated teachers, because they already know it all." Hers is only one more example of a formal response similar to many other formal responses that I've been getting for more than a decade since publication of *PWP*.

Folks, I don't claim that I invented phonetics--I learned it in college! But I surely did help resuscitate it for adults; so the lowering of the age at which dictionary-related phonetics should and can be taught is probably a result of the work of this "outsider." Outsider-- that word rankles many certificated teachers and embarrasses others. It should. I was a corporate

trainer, and I know adult learners well. Possibly better than the teachers do. When you teach any type of dictionary access, you deliver a potent and practical launching tool for mastering other related disciplines as well.

Politics is another obstacle: Ambitious ethnic politicians are being elected on platforms that assure "rights" for their constituents. Ethnic groups deserve a voice, too. But when did the "right" *not* to speak our language take precedence over the right of the nation to preserve itself? English was the language chosen to be spoken back in Colonial days. Back then, German was a contender--and a single language was held to be necessary and desirable. It still is. There's enough confusion. We don't need shrill, self-serving voices adding to the din. I'm not religious, but I believe the Bible says that the Tower of Babel provoked a punishment from God: **polyglotism!** So why should a polyglot nation be considered desirable today? For whose benefit? What will happen when huge segments of the population cannot communicate with any other segments through any neutral language? Is that what the interpreters of the world are striving for? In this sense, English would be neutral--and common language at home is essential to everyone's sane survival in a disruptive world. Every civilized nation in the world with multiple languages has political problems along language lines. We'll come back to this idea.

Can you see the free press as an obstacle? I'm not saying that our national press is perfect or beyond reproach, but a single language made possible this nation linked by the ability of its all its inhabitants to communicate easily with each other! Foreigners? I'm not forgetting them, because I had five foreign-born grandparents. But in the recent past, (this century), foreigners either learned English or dropped out. They didn't demand unjustifiable "rights"! Neither did they ask foreign presidents to negate recorded voter preference. But we don't need drop-outs--not even our own! It's about time that we declare a ticket price for economic advancement: language-learning. Although the American press treats literacy generalizations, it hesitates to promote particular views for fear of delivering free advertising for certain publishers. Shouldn't that type of public discussion be seen, at least in theory, as a public service? But the press sees itself as a Constitutionally endorsed business--no obligation to anyone. How sorry a view!

I'm not denying the value of native-language newspapers as auxiliary informative material--they go into detail about concerns for relatives in the old home. But no other or alternate press is likely to provide a nationwide substitute for English. Yet a foreign-language paper does, unfortunately, provide a filter for ideas that can block out the information that all language-handicapped persons should get directly--especially political claims and social information here. In the last election I phoned for an American candidate. Several weeks before the election, the ethnic opponent had taken absentee ballots! One ethnic woman told me that the candidate arranged it so that she didn't need to bother any more. Legal? Probably. But intended, I thought, for the ill and lame and those legitimately out of town. But used to obviate polling place balloting? Forget the election date or the late campaign issues. This looks like manipulation. Or voting fraud?

Or how many immigrants still use their "native" driving speeds--no upper limit? In scandal-ridden Chicago right now, there's a scandal in which perhaps 500 persons have purchased driver's licenses although many or most do not speak English well enough to pass the driving test. Is there a "right" to drive without reading signs? How many in that city and this nation actually drive unlicensed without comprehending English signage? Their own ethnic groups often don't make it important to observe our conventions. We already know that some persons whom the American press quote as "leaders" of their respective communities are in fact only persons who can simply translate. Many are not necessarily considered to be actual leaders by their own ethnic community. By creating ersatz heroes, the press can claim to quote "important" people. That's artificial importance and reporting. And it's damaging

As for responsibility, who has a "right" to profit from our economic system without returning any effort into preserving or improving the nation? In the case of the Hispanics from South America, why do they demand "rights" here that they do not offer to the Indian population back home? Tolerated--yes. But where are the native Indian languages *legally* accepted? Doesn't Spanish or Portuguese take precedence "at home" in most of South America, as English should here? Only the Indian languages are truly "native." And in any case, why should the language of the *conquistador* be preferred to the language of the host?

Is the political clout of any ethnic group tantamount to “rights”? We already know that it’s easier for illegal aliens to vote than for you and me to get a library card. When will finger prints or eye prints begin to appear on voter cards? Or invisible ink stamp or indelible ink painted on a finger to prevent multiple votes? Aren’t voter cards at least as valuable as credit cards? Chicago’s slogan of “vote early and often” is a disgrace even there--but undocumented persons can vote almost anywhere in the States. Just apply. Are some politicians afraid that they won’t be re-elected honestly?

Keep in mind that, besides having untoward economic effects on the unskilled speakers themselves, language divisions have other debilitating effects on nations. For instance, political problems along language lines are evident not only in civil wars in Third World countries, but also in fights within such First World countries as Canada, Switzerland, and Belgium. . . shall we include Yugoslavia? Who has a “right” to import that problem of language-aided divisiveness into the USA? Warfare rages in Africa based on tribal affiliations enforced by their language differences. Language barriers helped to preserve Apartheid for generations in South Africa. And we’re creating a voluntary apartheid here, thanks to the *recalcitrant* foreign-born person. No. I’m not ignoring the less-competent American-born drop-outs, but they can usually get by in English, whether or not it pleases particular employers at desirable companies. By the way--both groups are failing to learn at the same public schools! Is that an obstacle? Like it or not, parents who refuse to learn English are voluntarily handicapping their own children. For love of their past they cheat their children’s futures.

Let’s not forget still other related obstacle areas: the not-for-profits and private “schools” that inhabit this field. I’ve been told often that--regardless of how successful my program might be--the school did not want to lose its students after only eight sessions or weeks: I assume that eight months would be preferable, and eight years would probably be the desired norm. Where is the national oversight ?

Many of these schools are also “selling” their test potential: “Bring us money and books and tutors, and we will try it.” I fell for that once--and so did a major corporation that funded us \$1,000 for a few of my books plus a hundred dictionaries. When the money ran out, this and other *gimme* groups quit. Fortunately, not before *PWP* had proved itself! Not surprisingly, the

groups who funded their own programs and/or provided their own tutors were using my program long after the free-funds groups had quit! It appears that helping people to help themselves is still the only thing that works, because handouts create only a demand for more handouts. Now, I believe, it's time for our nation to make demands!

Apparently, English literacy is not about literacy--it's about funding!

Late in the development of my *PWP*, I phoned the director of a state-funded group in Illinois to be listed among their resources, if they could not publish. The director very kindly gave me about six names of other persons who might be interested-- all of whom said that he himself was the person to contact for decisions. It appears that his local office staff published their own work, using state monies to gain personal prominence, and apparently resented any interlopers. After publication, my text was "sort-of" listed as his favor to my publisher, personally. Somehow, I don't feel honored.

Two ethnic schools in Chicago were falsely named by the Midwest Women's Center in Chicago when the ethnics were falsely reported as recipients of the teaching of my program. It never happened--that's provable. Although badly-used, the two ethnic groups were afraid to complain to any government office because they feared losing their funding from a third source. Some pipeline-funders apparently blacklist complainers--and they can't get replacement funding anywhere! That's plantation politics if ever I've seen it. And it's provable.

Neither would the oversight agencies of state or Fed admit that anything so despicable had happened on their watch--so thousands of dollars were wasted on a change (actually an upheaval) of the women's group's administration, with no public service delivered! At high public cost! Moreover, when that same women's group reported the one organization as a recipient of service, the women's group was funded to teach only adult women, although the reported "recipient" organization has only teens in its program. Any competent audit inquiry would have uncovered the problem, IF their discovering problems was in fact the intent of audit. Rubber stamping for careless funders seems to be the hidden agenda. Friends, this is fraud. It's happening now, and everyone should be prepared to challenge it. If you must, blow the whistle!

But there's more:

A prison in Chicago had agreed to test **PWP** on condition that my publisher give several hundred copies of the needed student-used dictionary to the prison, together with several freebie copies of my book. Freebies--okay. My publisher was not the publisher of that dictionary and would have had to pay over \$4 out-of-pocket for every gift book. Shared dictionaries, retained by the classroom, work, too. So we both refused. I don't regret our decision to decline--I regret only the negative attitude on the part of prison officials. In short, even some **needy** US institutions are now selling their potential to test new materials. That prison did already use a computerized but voluntary version of linguistics for self-help. The needy are not required to use it--it was free from the manufacturer. Apparently nobody provided a preliminary evaluation because that method teaches phoneticized spelling, whether or not it's the accepted, or correct, spelling. So even a student who "succeeds" at the self-serving "standards" of that method won't necessarily succeed in the outer world of correct spelling, which it does not teach as an adjunct. Unfortunately the program does deliver misplaced self-satisfaction and self confidence.

Literacy students cannot help themselves with pronunciation, as with book grammar learning. One girl came to my class crying, because her community college instructor told her that if she didn't "do something" about her accent, he would put her out of class. Do what? She couldn't **hear** her own accent, or she probably wouldn't have it! An **educator** did that? Maybe the educational system will catch up and catch on before long.

If a student doesn't already know the proper sounds when beginning, he cannot correct himself adequately. He can learn a pidgin-English by guesswork and can even pronounce some unintelligible sounds. It seems that the type of person-to-person volunteer work you're doing is possibly the only truly workable method around. . . we merely expanded 1-1 to 10-1. . . because we're not dogmatic about failed methods or wedded to the merely new. Always, let's do what really works... whenever it's discovered!

Feedback and correction are part of every competent program; and that calls for a live tutor, whether or not important corporations continue to put out the frappé versions. Many schools tape record the students' vocalized



pronunciation attempts and then play that vocalization back to the learner. It's a step in the right direction--but it's still inadequate. Sorry--but the learners are *not* competent to determine for themselves what is acceptable to native speakers' ears. Nor (until the foreign ear is sharpened on our American sounds) can they determine what we might comprehend among their approximations. Good *enough* is not always *good* enough! Otherwise, the student would be able to correct himself simply by listening. In that case, there would be no pronunciation problem. Pronunciation is narrow--but the dictionary is broad! *PWP* teaches the dictionary codes quickly and efficiently. It's an unparalleled coach for different language disciplines. Let the dictionary become a kindly friend. It's portable and cheap and doesn't depend on the availability of others. Now, *that's* true independence! Dictionary learning is *earned* self-respect!

Let's not forget the impact that fear has. Like it or not, fear is a common obstacle. Many people are afraid that English is forbidding--and because of silly rules, it's made so. It's a rich and easy language! Some of the volunteer literacy systems and formal systems, too, teach antiquated rules that are immediately broken by memorized exceptions--often those still don't always work. The net result is much additional but useless information to be memorized. Such names as "Long E" and "Short E" are useless. Besides not telling you the actual sound that's involved, they are incomplete-- what do you call the remaining "E" sound--as before "R"? Or how do we name the four commonly-used "A" sounds? Long, short, what, and what? But that's how schools "have always taught it"--and they're probably stuck with it.

A well-known literacy group headquartered in New York state teaches letter-names by key sound plus exceptions. The spouse of the originator assured me that they did not do that, although another system had already attempted to teach that method to me earlier, out of the NY books, when first I volunteered. Despite what I expect was a successful test of my book by their home office, that office consistently refused to discuss the test results with me. Apparently superior competition is not appreciated in some sectors of our competitive society. But let's not be swayed: I'd like to suggest a change "Toward Sensible English." For everybody!

As one example, I like to suggest re-evaluating the tenses of verbs. From my four years in an academic German class, I'll never forget the forbidding tense name "Plusquamperfekt"--although I haven't the least idea

today what time-value it has. Has it occurred to you that tenses should reflect time-of-the-action, not rules? To show you what I mean, I've constructed a time-wheel that emphasizes the state of verb-ing at the instant being discussed.

### HANDOUT (5 min max)

It's not hard to remember, in this context, that infinitives should never be conjugated--even if movie stars and other image-conscious people constantly do it incorrectly out of a mistaken sense of their own superiority. At that time, I "would have liked to go" or "I liked my already having gone" . . . not "to have gone." Newspapers and newscasters make errors like that, too; and so error is being built into the everyday language. France created language police under DeGaulle--do we need language police here, too? And should sensitivity toward correct grammar become a target activity of all literacy organizations toward the press? Can we accomplish with shaming the inadequate what we can't accomplish with reason? I expect that the self-appointed "superior" people will conform out of their own sense of urgency to prove something.

And while we're on the subject of objective case, why do we tolerate the misuse of personal pronouns, such as the horrendous "Person gave it to she and I"? Is it time to scream at the abusers of what they believe to be "correct" speech? That includes both press and some celebrities. Phony is phony--and deserves to be labeled such!

Or another example of common sense: why are verbs called *transitive* or *intransitive*? Learn that terminology, and there's still a question. Verbs either do or do not call for a direct or indirect object; and those language particles called *objects* are either verb-related or preposition-related. I teach prepositions in my course because most of the sense of the language, apart from subject/verb, is contained there. We came TO this hotel FROM home IN our cars or ON the bus FOR the purpose OF learning more ABOUT tutoring in order to \_\_\_\_\_. Didn't each of us already know "we came" here? The subtleties and intent of communication lie elsewhere. So let's teach language in ways far easier to understand now than when we learned it. The original rules were based on European convention-- itself based on centuries of unquestioned schooling. Forget it. Let's teach common sense in language learning.

Finally, in addition to the economic downside of all this, there's the human side. I grew up in a small town in Minnesota that was based on mining iron ore. It was a little United Nations before the United Nations was. Persons with no language skills whatsoever could still be hired to dig over there. It was all done by hand waving. But I've grown up witnessing the shame, frustration, and lost potential of those poor people. That's "poor" in the shameful sense, because many actually lived *economically well* on digging alone. The schools eventually taught the children--in English. And very few of my third generation peers cared enough about our grandparents' original language to learn it. That's the unhappy truth that most of today's first generation immigrants will have to learn. Their children must by necessity be bilingual, but their grandchildren probably will not be. The grandchildren will learn English because they're American. . . and they will stray from the old and inadequate society and customs that their forebears escaped but still want to preserve. The great grandchildren? Well, they'll have American-born grandparents, won't they? Guess what. Frankly, it makes little sense to me.

But I'm speaking from tougher experience, too. I've traveled in more than forty countries around the world, and I've been language handicapped. Often. And it isn't fun. But each time, I knew exactly whether I needed a noun or a verb or a modifier--let's give the same consideration to anyone who's literate in his or her own native language. That means the end of lock-step learning, except possibly to double-illiterates. Yes, it does work in kindergarten--but not with middle-competency adults. Teach the basics, re-evaluated to deliver useful information. To hell with the system of teaching what is essentially a test of testing-competency. That's for the formal school achievement system--to prove how wonderful is their work. And we all know already how wonderful that is! You can't provide the correct answers to someone else's life!

Yes, I have a lot of complaints about the tutoring climate. But I'm not looking for sympathy--I just want to say that these are all the negative experiences of a single individual with a single book in a field flooded with putative good works. . . and gimmicks. . . and hidden agendas. Will you experience them? I expect that you probably have--and surely will! Let's act against them. I'm not suggesting that we make quixotic forays, but I do think it won't hurt to remind people that we do have a formal language. Italian,

Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Romanian probably originated as improper Latin--and now some people can't speak the codified dialects properly. Yes, languages live--but to include sputnik, microwave ovens, and televisions--not to pamper failures.

Now that we've seen the downside, tell me again about who has "rights" to what!

None of this should leave us merely wringing our hands. Part of our obligations, I think, is to deliver English to even the recalcitrant residents here while promoting the key concept of *desiring* the learning of competent English in the ethnic communities. Our unilateral *push* is no longer enough--we need some *pull* from the ethnic communities themselves.

There should be a feeling in the ethnic communities that English-language- learning is just as important today as when my five grandparents came to this country early in the 20th Century. The grandparents all learned at least rudimentary English--but they had the advantage of being able to learn it from their children when the formal public education system did not do an adequate job with adults. As a matter of fact, the record is long and impressive for FAILURE by the public education system in language learning specifically, just as in high school graduates generally.. But from my high school graduation until her death, I never had an *adult* conversation with my paternal grandmother, because neither of us could comprehend enough of the other's adult native language! Her household language here had been her native tongue; and my father usually conversed in that language with her. How sad. Should I want to prolong that failure everywhere in this land? There seems to be evidence that single-language learning enhances overall same-language language-earning, when compared to bi- or multi-lingualism. Switch the kids over to the second language--fast! That's not an insult to the foreign-born--it's a help! Winston Churchill always credited his wonderful command of English to his having been *deprived* of Greek and Latin classes.

In case there's any doubt, these are my personal ideas, and they're not necessarily endorsed by California Literacy . Treat the ideas as you like. They might even help you. Please respect the copyright on new, not-yet published materials.

Let's teach--yes! Let's proselytize, too! And let's help put an end to the useless "political correctness" that's helping to dumb-down the general intellectual level and to sap so much of the nation's vitality. . .while it helps the language handicapped to stay language handicapped. Go figure. "Things are not what they seem," said Alice.

This has been a wide-ranging discussion--so let's tie it together: The real world of literacy and language-learning is a mess. We should want to restore it. . . except that the original is not worth restoring exactly "as is." So let's take this opportunity to simplify and improve whatever language-learning methods that we can. The purpose is not to change the language. The purpose is to make second-language-learning easier--to make the English language more accessible to all learners. . .and to remove the easy excuse of its difficulty. We can probably do that best by remembering during every tutoring moment that "college level linguistics aint college level anymore." Strive for sensible English--do what works!

"Things are not what they seem," said Alice. But this is happening in our wonderland. We know we'll ultimately succeed-- that's why we work at it. It feels good, too. So let's work it with our own insights and make no apologies. And when we succeed, so will the nation! Good teaching to you! And thanks for your attention.

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3:30 - 4:45 pm

**F 22 Teaching ESL Literacy with Styles and Colors**

Room: Newport Beach #2

Learn about using special color-coded materials and related teaching techniques for different learning styles in order to teach ESL Literacy. View a video clip of an adult ESL Literacy class. In this interactive demonstration, participants will experience and practice a few of the techniques and use the color-coded materials to decode words and form meaningful sentences. This approach is also successful with children.

*Presenter:* Clif de Cordoba, Assistant Principal/Teacher, LAUSD, Adult Education, Los Angeles, CA

**F 23 College-Level Linguistics Ain't College-Level Anymore!**

Room: Newport Beach #3

Stop and rethink the English language--as second-language learners do. Eighteen vowel sounds plus schwa are best taught as sounds from the dictionary codes (diacritical marks). Forget names and rules - even ESL Level III & IV can do it. Verbs should be conjugated according to their time-function, not according to arbitrary and meaningless terms that are relics of other languages and other ages. Rethink the purpose. Then teach ACCESS to the language via dictionary mastery! Independence and self-esteem are enhanced and accent reduction results.

*Presenter:* Richard Cavalier, Author, "Practical Word Power". Inglewood, CA

**F 24 Inside Dyslexia**

Room: Laguna Beach #1

Varda, a dyslexic writer, will share her misadventures in seeing the world through a dyslexic mindset. She will present the positive, humorous, surprising, embarrassing and maddening sides of dyslexia. Whether you're dyslexic or not, you'll discover something useful.

*Presenter:* Varda Murrell, Writer, Literacy Tutor, Hawthorne Library & Carson Literacy Center, Hawthorne, CA

**F 25 Turning Negatives Into Positives**

Room: Laguna Beach #2

This interactive, experiential workshop explores workplace conflict and working effectively with various personality styles. Participants will learn to transform negative communication into positive dialogue, producing WIN-WIN results while creating an environment of collaborative effort.

*Presenters:* Martin Evans & Naomi Uribe, Job Developers, LACOE, Downey, CA

**F 26 A Literacy Program in a Correctional Institution (Correctional Education Strand)**

Room: Balboa Bay #1 (Lower Level)

This workshop will discuss ideas on how to design, implement and maintain a learner-centered literacy peer tutor program in a correctional setting. Special attention will be given to establishing objectives in order to meet the Calif. Dept. of Corrections goals for providing inmate access to viable literacy programs.

*Presenters:* J. Uber & N.D. Kraft, Chuckawalla Valley Prison, Blythe, CA

**F 27 Affirmation That Works**

Room: Balboa Bay #2 (Lower Level)

Affirmations, Decoders & Brain Books: Literacy Techniques That Work. Building self-esteem, learning to decode words, and ways of storing information will be presented. The presenter will share what he has learned and encourage other students. A "can-do" attitude and warm personality are key to inspiring others. Many hands-on activities will help participants integrate the techniques into their own lives.

*Presenter:* Howard Walter, Hawthorne, CA



**CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR ADULT EDUCATION**  
**Los Angeles Metropolitan Section**

Annual Spring Teacher  
Conference

Saturday,  
March 17, 2001

Manual Arts  
Community Adult School  
4131 S. Vermont Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90037  
(323) 234-9177

L.A. Metropolitan Section  
President  
KAREN KUSER  
Van Nuys  
Community Adult School  
(818) 785-5427

Conference Chair  
ROBERTO CEJA  
Evans  
Community Adult School  
(213) 626-7151

Exhibitor Chair  
DON KIHARA  
North Valley  
Occupational Center  
(818) 365-9645

March 9, 2001

Practical Word Power  
Attn: Richard Cavalier  
1 South Locust No. 305  
Inglewood, CA 90301

Dear Richard,

Thank you for accepting our invitation to participate in the Annual Spring Teacher Conference sponsored by the California Council for Adult Education on March 17, 2001. This letter confirms your Exhibitor registration.

Vendor exhibits will be located in the Student Cafeteria at Manual Arts High School, 4131 S. Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, California. Refer to the enclosed map. Enter the campus from 42nd Street and follow signs to the unloading area between the faculty and student cafeterias. Plan to have your materials displayed prior to the beginning of the conference at 7:30 a.m. to minimize vehicle traffic in the registration area. The exhibit area will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Each exhibitor will be provided a table(s) measuring approximately 30 inches by 6 feet and an identification sign. An electrical outlet will also be provided to all exhibitors who have requested this service.

We look forward to your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, please call (818) 365-9645, Ext. 330 or FAX (818) 838-0719. See you on March 17.

Sincerely,

Don Kihara  
Conference Exhibitor Chair

Enclosures

## CCAЕ

California Council for Adult Education  
Los Angeles Metropolitan Section  
Manual Arts Community Adult School  
Los Angeles, March 17, 2001

### Key considerations regarding ESL and second-language learning:

1) **Outreach:** Our nation can't afford the one-to-one instructions delivered by many national literacy organizations; nor can we afford the huge-group classroom teaching that allows little actual practice of correct forms because there is little feed-back and practice time for individuals when the classes are so huge. So let's move on out! Many of the target populations are working two or more jobs in order to offset poor wages. . .and might never get into schools on school schedules. Solution: Teachers, proctor the efforts of bonafide ethnic organizations. They have the advantage of having community acceptance as well as the flexibility to deliver educational sessions when needed and whenever it's possible.

2) **Handicaps:** If you've never been language-handicapped, it's difficult to know *what* to teach even if you know *how* to teach. Don't resent experience! You know about your handicapped students' problem from your viewpoint, not theirs. It's different, and it matters!

3) **Generic lists:** None of these lists has ever fit what might be my real-world needs. . . nor have they fit the needs of anyone I know. Yes, lists are test-able. But should we continue to teach "tests"? By contrast, *Practical Word Power* teaches the codes to the entire dictionary! Let students look up the words that they really need. A two-language dictionary for translation is terrific—but get the pronunciation from an American dictionary with standard sounds. Unfortunately, most of the electronic translators I've seen are great for word translations but provide no pronunciation—so they're worthless in making the user more competent with conversational English.

All three of these objections are answered by *Practical Word Power*. And



Richard Cavalier

assuming that they're reasonable observations, something is blocking change. Actually it's a lot of somethings operating together, and it's not really your fault, even if you haven't the authority to change things at your school or in the state or nation.

So what are some of the key matters that are holding us back? Three big ones: verbatim texts; magic pills; and money grubbing organizations.

Let's take a longer look at those ideas:

1) Objections by some teachers to verbatim outlines or texts that present the materials that they might not in fact know about—specifically foreign-language handicaps from the viewpoint of the handicapped person. Folks, that's not an insult unless you won't recognize that fact.

I know language handicaps first-hand because all of my grandparents were foreign-born and I lived with them in a relatively small town in which most of my grandparents' generation were foreign-born. Accents were the norm. So much so that I once asked my mother why her older American-born friend did not have an accent. As a child, I thought that an accent was a concomitant of old age!

My parents were American-born and bi-lingual of necessity. But perfectly bi-lingual. Later my mother refused to speak her parents' language, because becoming American was the expected response, and speaking English was the primary proof of acceptance. And also because I've traveled in more than 40 countries—usually language handicapped. And also I spent more than a year living in the Orient courtesy a government program called the Army. And also I have dabbled in various degrees of language-learning for five languages without ultimately mastering any of them. Everything from 4 years of academic German (once decent but unused and now withered) to Berlitz Spanish and tutored French to survival Korean and Japanese. I can mutilate all without favoritism. So I know it isn't easy or necessarily fun—but it is necessary here! And the huge press and broadcast and movie industries were the result on one language. Whether or not you believe that that's an advantage (I do!), keep in mind that our development as a homogenized nation was made possible by the selection of a single language back in the

**Colonial days.**

**To what degree necessary? That depends on need. Shut-ins need mostly to communicate with their care-givers. If none of the care-givers speaks only English, then it's hard to make the case for English learning. But if the handicapped have any dealings in the community at large, then they should be helping themselves to fit in. But it's not encouraged.**

**There are more than thirty different language spoken at one Chicago high school in which I tried to help. Although the school attempt to translate notes intended for the parents among the larger ethnic groups, that turned out to be counter-productive because the parent were reluctant to admit to their adult friends that they might be illiterate in their own language as well as English. Responses were few, therefore. So sending notes home written in English provided cover—no one was afraid to admit to friends that they couldn't read English fluently.**

**There's something else at issue. That's the matter of "rights." Although some immigrants demand "rights" NOT to learn English, none of them offers that same "right" back in the native country to groups that are minority or other-ethnic there. That's hypocritical. Besides, there's a ticket price for everything we ask for in life. . .and the ticket price for enjoying the good life here—whether or not the streets are paved with gold—should be English language learning.**

**2) Magic-pill complex by many of the foreign-born or otherwise language-handicapped. Yes, for a year (or even two) native-language (or bi-lingual) teaching is defensible. . .BUT we can't really continue on one hand to say that we will teach in any foreign language for multiple years and on the other hand to say that persons who want to enter into mainstream activities and have access to better jobs should learn to speak English competently. Keep in mind that not only third-world countries, but even first-world countries like Canada and Switzerland and Belgium have political problems drawn along the lines of their language problems. We don't need any more problems here. . .especially those that are so easily solved.**

**3) Money-grubbing: All right, we can't accuse public school teachers of that. But in both some of the voluntary tutoring organizations and surely in**

Richard Cavalier

**the commercial language schools, language-teaching is about money, more than about language-learning. I can tell horror stories about malfeasance and even fraud by Federal- and State-funded organizations who take money for jobs never performed. The government oversight offices don't want to hear about it, because they often believe that their job is to pump out the money to any takers.**

**Now what can we do about this combination of problems?**

**First and foremost: multiply your own personal effectiveness! I suggest that you consider establishing an outreach program that teaches the various ethnic organizations to conduct their own worthwhile programs for persons who are not clinically dysfunctional. Of course professionals should deal with them.**

**Second: turn some of their prejudices to your own advantage: Assuming that they speak standard English, American born students of foreign-born parents can make excellent tutors of pronunciation and other language skills IF you put the ideas and tools in their hands. Those students, teens or older, have instant acceptance from the community and will make excellent models for correct sounds. Accent is, after all, only the application of foreign-language sounds to our literation. And computers can repeat but can't listen via any program that I've seen.**

**Third: encourage all ethnic persons and groups to think about becoming at least partially self-sustaining for educational programs. Too many of those persons and groups are held hostage to the plantation system of funding, which funds them through established "commission" organizations but not directly. This means that they are perennially on the hook for program that are bleeding about 8% commissions for no real work. In short, they don't get what they want when they want it, and they also don't get sufficient funds to do the contemplated work, in many cases.**

**These ideas and methods are not the only ones that will work, but they are methods that have worked for me in the past and should work for you in the future because they're based on real-world problems and solutions.**

Richard Cavalier

**I won't even pretend to have all the answers. . .and I'm sure that some of you have good actual or potential solutions. So before we push any further with these ideas, let's open up the discussion to ideas of yours. Who wants to begin?**

(Continue as a variation on presentation to California Literacy)

Is the political clout of any ethnic group tantamount to “rights”? We already know that it’s easier for illegal aliens to vote than for you and me to get a library card. When will finger prints or eye prints begin to appear on voter cards? Or invisible ink stamp or indelible ink painted on a finger to prevent multiple votes? Aren’t voter cards at least as valuable as credit cards? Chicago’s slogan of “vote early and often” is a disgrace even there--but undocumented persons can vote almost anywhere in the States. Just apply. Are some politicians afraid that they won’t be re-elected honestly?

Keep in mind that, besides having untoward economic effects on the unskilled speakers themselves, language divisions have other debilitating effects on nations. For instance, political problems along language lines are evident not only in civil wars in Third World countries, but also in fights within such First World countries as Canada, Switzerland, and Belgium. . . shall we include Yugoslavia? Who has a “right” to import that problem of language-aided divisiveness into the USA? Warfare rages in Africa based on tribal affiliations enforced by their language differences. Language barriers helped to preserve Apartheid for generations in South Africa. And we’re creating a voluntary apartheid here, thanks to the *recalcitrant* foreign-born person. No. I’m not ignoring the less-competent American-born drop-outs, but they can usually get by in English, whether or not it pleases particular employers at desirable companies. By the way--both groups are failing to learn at the same public schools! Is that an obstacle? Like it or not, parents who refuse to learn English are voluntarily handicapping their own children. For love of their past they cheat their children’s futures.

Let’s not forget still other related obstacle areas: the not-for-profits and private “schools” that inhabit this field. I’ve been told often that--regardless of how successful my program might be--the school did not want to lose its students after only eight sessions or weeks: I assume that eight months would be preferable, and eight years would probably be the desired norm. Where is the national oversight ?

Many of these schools are also “selling” their test potential: “Bring us money and books and tutors, and we will try it.” I fell for that once--and so did a major corporation that funded us \$        for a few of my books plus a hundred dictionaries. When the money ran out, this and other *gimme* groups quit. Fortunately, not before *PWP* had proved itself! Not surprisingly, the

groups who funded their own programs and/or provided their own tutors were using my program long after the free-funds groups had quit! It appears that helping people to help themselves is still the only thing that works, because handouts create only a demand for more handouts. Now, I believe, it's time for our nation to make demands!

Apparently, English literacy is not about literacy--it's about funding!

Late in the development of my *PWP*, I phoned the director of a state-funded group in Illinois to be listed among their resources, if they could not publish. The director very kindly gave me about six names of other persons who might be interested-- all of whom said that he himself was the person to contact for decisions. It appears that his local office staff published their own work, using state monies to gain personal prominence, and apparently resented any interlopers. After publication, my text was "sort-of" listed as his favor to my publisher, personally. Somehow, I don't feel honored.

Two ethnic schools in Chicago were falsely named by the Midwest Women's Center in Chicago when the ethnics were falsely reported as recipients of the teaching of my program. It never happened--that's provable. Although badly-used, the two ethnic groups were afraid to complain to any government office because they feared losing their funding from a third source. Some pipeline-funders apparently blacklist complainers--and they can't get replacement funding anywhere! That's plantation politics if ever I've seen it. And it's provable.

Neither would the oversight agencies of state or Fed admit that anything so despicable had happened on their watch--so thousands of dollars were wasted on a change (actually an upheaval) of the women's group's administration, with no public service delivered! At high public cost! Moreover, when that same women's group reported the one organization as a recipient of service, the women's group was funded to teach only adult women, although the reported "recipient" organization has only teens in its program. Any competent audit inquiry would have uncovered the problem, IF their discovering problems was in fact the intent of audit. Rubber stamping for careless funders seems to be the hidden agenda. Friends, this is fraud. It's happening now, and everyone should be prepared to challenge it. If you must, blow the whistle!



But there's more:

A prison in Chicago had agreed to test *PWP* on condition that my publisher give several hundred copies of the needed student-used dictionary to the prison, together with several freebie copies of my book. Freebies--okay. My publisher was not the publisher of that dictionary and would have had to pay over \$4 out-of-pocket for every gift book. Shared dictionaries, retained by the classroom, work, too. So we both refused. I don't regret our decision to decline--I regret only the negative attitude on the part of prison officials. In short, even some **needy** US institutions are now selling their potential to test new materials. That prison did already use a computerized but voluntary version of linguistics for self-help. The needy are not required to use it--it was free from the manufacturer. Apparently nobody provided a preliminary evaluation because that method teaches phoneticized spelling, whether or not it's the accepted, or correct, spelling. So even a student who "succeeds" at the self-serving "standards" of that method won't necessarily succeed in the outer world of correct spelling, which it does not teach as an adjunct. Unfortunately the program does deliver misplaced self-satisfaction and self confidence.

Literacy students cannot help themselves with pronunciation, as with book grammar learning. One girl came to my class crying, because her community college instructor told her that if she didn't "do something" about her accent, he would put her out of class. Do what? She couldn't *hear* her own accent, or she probably wouldn't have it! An *educator* did that? Maybe the educational system will catch up and catch on before long.

If a student doesn't already know the proper sounds when beginning, he cannot correct himself adequately. He can learn a pidgin-English by guesswork and can even pronounce some unintelligible sounds. It seems that the type of person-to-person volunteer work you're doing is possibly the only truly workable method around. . .we merely expanded 1-1 to 10-1. . . because we're not dogmatic about failed methods or wedded to the merely new. Always, let's do what really works... whenever it's discovered!

multiply

Feedback and correction are part of every competent program; and that calls for a live tutor, whether or not important corporations continue to put out the frappé versions. Many schools tape record the students' vocalized

pronunciation attempts and then play that vocalization back to the learner. It's a step in the right direction--but it's still inadequate. Sorry--but the learners are *not* competent to determine for themselves what is acceptable to native speakers' ears. Nor (until the foreign ear is sharpened on our American sounds) can they determine what we might comprehend among their approximations. Good *enough* is not always *good* enough! Otherwise, the student would be able to correct himself simply by listening. In that case, there would be no pronunciation problem. Pronunciation is narrow--but the dictionary is broad! *PWP* teaches the dictionary codes quickly and efficiently. It's an unparalleled coach for different language disciplines. Let the dictionary become a kindly friend. It's portable and cheap and doesn't depend on the availability of others. Now, *that's* true independence! Dictionary learning is *earned* self-respect!

Let's not forget the impact that fear has. Like it or not, fear is a common obstacle. Many people are afraid that English is forbidding--and because of silly rules, it's made so. It's a rich and easy language! Some of the volunteer literacy systems and formal systems, too, teach antiquated rules that are immediately broken by memorized exceptions--often those still don't always work. The net result is much additional but useless information to be memorized. Such names as "Long E" and "Short E" are useless. Besides not telling you the actual sound that's involved, they are incomplete-- what do you call the remaining "E" sound--as before "R"? Or how do we name the four commonly-used "A" sounds? Long, short, what, and what? But that's how schools "have always taught it"--and they're probably stuck with it.

A well-known literacy group headquartered in New York state teaches letter-names by key sound plus exceptions. The spouse of the originator assured me that they did not do that, although another system had already attempted to teach that method to me earlier, out of the NY books, when first I volunteered. Despite what I expect was a successful test of my book by their home office, that office consistently refused to discuss the test results with me. Apparently superior competition is not appreciated in some sectors of our competitive society. But let's not be swayed: I'd like to suggest a change "Toward Sensible English." For everybody!

As one example, I like to suggest re-evaluating the tenses of verbs. From my four years in an academic German class, I'll never forget the forbidding tense name "Plusquamperfekt"--although I haven't the least idea



today what time-value it has. Has it occurred to you that tenses should reflect time-of-the-action, not rules? To show you what I mean, I've constructed a time-wheel that emphasizes the state of verb-ing at the instant being discussed.

### HANDOUT (5 min max)

It's not hard to remember, in this context, that infinitives should never be conjugated--even if movie stars and other image-conscious people constantly do it incorrectly out of a mistaken sense of their own superiority. At that time, I "would have liked to go" or "I liked my already having gone" . . . not "to have gone." Newspapers and newscasters make errors like that, too; and so error is being built into the everyday language. France created language police under DeGaulle--do we need language police here, too? And should sensitivity toward correct grammar become a target activity of all literacy organizations toward the press? Can we accomplish with shaming the inadequate what we can't accomplish with reason? I expect that the self-appointed "superior" people will conform out of their own sense of urgency to prove something.

And while we're on the subject of objective case, why do we tolerate the misuse of personal pronouns, such as the horrendous "Person gave it to she and I"? Is it time to scream at the abusers of what they believe to be "correct" speech? That includes both press and some celebrities. Phony is phony--and deserves to be labeled such!

Or another example of common sense: why are verbs called *transitive* or *intransitive*? Learn that terminology, and there's still a question. Verbs either do or do not call for a direct or indirect object; and those language particles called *objects* are either verb-related or preposition-related. I teach prepositions in my course because most of the sense of the language, apart from subject/verb, is contained there. We came TO this hotel FROM home IN our cars or ON the bus FOR the purpose OF learning more ABOUT tutoring in order to \_\_\_\_\_. Didn't each of us already know "we came" here? The subtleties and intent of communication lie elsewhere. So let's teach language in ways far easier to understand now than when we learned it. The original rules were based on European convention-- itself based on centuries of unquestioned schooling. Forget it. Let's teach common sense in language learning.

Finally, in addition to the economic downside of all this, there's the human side. I grew up in a small town in Minnesota that was based on mining iron ore. It was a little United Nations before the United Nations was. Persons with no language skills whatsoever could still be hired to dig over there. It was all done by hand waving. But I've grown up witnessing the shame, frustration, and lost potential of those poor people. That's "poor" in the shameful sense, because many actually lived *economically well* on digging alone. The schools eventually taught the children--in English. And very few of my third generation peers cared enough about our grandparents' original language to learn it. That's the *unhappy* truth that most of today's first generation immigrants will have to learn. Their children must by necessity be bilingual, but their grandchildren probably will not be. The grandchildren will learn English because they're American. . . and they will stray from the old and inadequate society and customs that their forebears escaped but still want to preserve. The great grandchildren? Well, they'll have American-born grandparents, won't they? Guess what. Frankly, it makes little sense to me.

But I'm speaking from tougher experience, too. I've traveled in more than forty countries around the world, and I've been language handicapped. Often. And it isn't fun. But each time, I knew exactly whether I needed a noun or a verb or a modifier--let's give the same consideration to anyone who's literate in his or her own native language. That means the end of lock-step learning, except possibly to double-illiterates. Yes, it does work in kindergarten--but not with middle-competency adults. Teach the basics, re-evaluated to deliver useful information. To hell with the system of teaching what is essentially a test of testing-competency. That's for the formal school achievement system--to prove how wonderful is their work. And we all know already how wonderful that is! You can't provide the correct answers to someone else's life!

Yes, I have a lot of complaints about the tutoring climate. But I'm not looking for sympathy--I just want to say that these are all the negative experiences of a single individual with a single book in a field flooded with putative good works. . . and gimmicks. . . and hidden agendas. Will you experience them? I expect that you probably have--and surely will! Let's act against them. I'm not suggesting that we make quixotic forays, but I do think it won't hurt to remind people that we do have a formal language. Italian,

Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Romanian probably originated as improper Latin--and now some people can't speak the codified dialects properly. Yes, languages live--but to include sputnik, microwave ovens, and televisions--not to pamper failures.

Now that we've seen the downside, tell me again about who has "rights" to what!

Wrap  
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None of this should leave us merely wringing our hands. Part of our obligations, I think, is to deliver English to even the recalcitrant residents here while promoting the key concept of *desiring* the learning of competent English in the ethnic communities. Our unilateral *push* is no longer enough--we need some *pull* from the ethnic communities themselves.

There should be a feeling in the ethnic communities that English-language-learning is just as important today as when my five grandparents came to this country early in the 20th Century. The grandparents all learned at least rudimentary English--but they had the advantage of being able to learn it from their children when the formal public education system did not do an adequate job with adults. As a matter of fact, the record is long and impressive for FAILURE by the public education system in language learning specifically, just as in high school graduates generally.. But from my high school graduation until her death, I never had an *adult* conversation with my paternal grandmother, because neither of us could comprehend enough of the other's adult native language! Her household language here had been her native tongue; and my father usually conversed in that language with her. How sad. Should I want to prolong that failure everywhere in this land? There seems to be evidence that single-language learning enhances overall same-language language-earning, when compared to bi- or multi-lingualism. Switch the kids over to the second language--fast! That's not an insult to the foreign-born--it's a help! Winston Churchill always credited his wondrous command of English to his having been *deprived* of Greek and Latin classes.

In case there's any doubt, these are my personal ideas, and they're not necessarily endorsed by ~~California Literacy~~. Treat the ideas as you like. They might even help you. Please respect the copyright on new, not-yet published materials.

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Let's teach--yes! Let's proselytize, too! And let's help put an end to the useless "political correctness" that's helping to dumb-down the general intellectual level and to sap so much of the nation's vitality. . . while it helps the language handicapped to stay language handicapped. Go figure. "Things are not what they seem," said Alice.

This has been a wide-ranging discussion--so let's tie it together: The real world of literacy and language-learning is a mess. We should want to restore it. . . except that the original is not worth restoring exactly "as is." So let's take this opportunity to simplify and improve whatever language-learning methods that we can. The purpose is not to change the language. The purpose is to make second-language-learning easier--to make the English language more accessible to all learners. . . and to remove the easy excuse of its difficulty. We can probably do that best by remembering during every tutoring moment that "college level linguistics aint college level anymore." Strive for sensible English--do what works!

"Things are not what they seem," said Alice. But this is happening in our wonderland. We know we'll ultimately succeed-- that's why we work at it. It feels good, too. So let's work it with our own insights and make no apologies. And when we succeed, so will the nation! Good teaching to you! And thanks for your attention.

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