A MEANINGFUL COMPROMISE

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English subjects are one of the basic subjects that do not seem so basic when the perception of the learners is considered, which is also true when it comes to teaching it.

Aside from the content and competencies, one basic requirement in teaching the subject is for learners to be able to understand, and utilize the language. One example of achieving such scenario is the common strategy of traditionalists which implements the “EOP”, or the English Only Policy, which requires learners to utilize the English language alone during classes – where learners are required to speak and engage in the class using the English language as their medium in communicating. This is truly a time-tested strategy that forced students to use the language, and usually bears great results, if it meets one condition – the learners being able to at least have basic understanding of the language.

However, forcing the students to speak in English does not always end well. One common reaction of students is to be anxious in using the language, which results to the rejection of the English language. In an article published by the TEFL Blog (2016), they claimed that one of the disadvantages of the English Only Policy in classrooms is that it makes beginner-level English language learners struggle, and it makes them uncomfortable that may impact their learning.

One solution to the problem is adjusting for the needs of the learners. If learners could not really adapt with the English Only Policy, language teachers may utilize Code Switching and Code Mixing.
Code Switching and Code Mixing are language strategies that are typically applied when speakers have at least one more language aside from their target language. Kester (2019) summarized code switching as Alternating between two or more languages or language varieties/dialects in the context of a single conversation. Using elements of more than one language when conversing in a manner that is consistent with the syntax, morphology, and phonology of each language or dialect. On the other hand, she claimed that code switching and code mixing are usually defined interchangeably, but Kester further elaborated that Code Mixing refers to the hybridization of two languages (e.g. parkear, which uses an English root word and Spanish morphology) and Code-Switching refers to the movement from one language to another.

In applying the concepts to the educational setting in teaching the English language, Code Switching and Code Mixing can be used in utilizing the language that the learner is most comfortable with, while giving them the needed competencies to be unlocked in their English subjects. A lot of traditional English teachers may give a frown and explicitly claim that English subjects should be taught purely in English, but if it fails, and the learners are not learning, a little compromise and adjustment might be the needed help, while learners slowly build their confidence and competence with the language.

Starting with a little switching and mixing may be the first steps in helping failing students in learning in English subjects. It may be unconventional, and others may be skeptical, but at the end of the day, the learning of the students is always more important than following traditional rules and teaching strategies.

References:

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