

New Tools for Teaching/Learning Foreign Languages

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It is highly agreed that students expect teachers to teach them the English language as if they are empty ‘sponges’ waiting for their teachers to fill with knowledge. Unfortunately, to transmit lexical items, grammatical structures, and communication strategies into the blank minds sitting passively in front of them, teachers have tried with little success. (Rogoff, 1994).

Recent learning theories suggest that learning is an active process of meaning rather than acquiring knowledge. Following this line of thinking, instruction should be a process of supporting the process of construction and not merely transmitting knowledge (Duffy & Cunningham, 1995). This construction process requires learners to individually construct their own understanding by interaction in authentic situations. Because learners are central to this process they must have ownership not only of the learning process but of the problem itself. Therefore students should be given autonomy in setting up their personal learning objectives and take responsibility for their own learning. (Mar-Molinero & Wright, 1993).

In this new paradigm, teachers are no longer transmitters of knowledge but are coaches, mentors, and managers of

the learning environment to aid their students in constructing knowledge. Scaffolding, or supporting learners is a very demanding job. In addition to being subject experts, teachers must be experts in learning psychology as well.

Although learners have ownership of the problem, teachers ensure that the problem is authentic and sufficiently challenging. In some ways, computers can help, but teachers must acquire a measure of technical expertise as well. In short, in this new learning environment we need a 'super' teacher acting primarily as a 'resource provider and mentor, with students as apprentices who gradually advance themselves to gain an increasing measure of skill and independence over time' (Pennington, 1996). Thus, this paper is an attempt to shed light on some proposed new tools for teaching foreign languages and their proper implementation in the classroom.

Key principles for the process of teaching/learning foreign languages

As a lifelong learner of any age, you will learn faster and easier if these factors are organised brilliantly by a teacher who is an involver-not a lecturer- who, acting as a facilitator, orchestrates these factors:

- The best learning 'state';
- A presentation format that involves all your senses and is both relaxing, fun-filled, varied, fast-paced, and stimulating;
- Creative and critical thinking to aid 'internal processing';

- ‘‘Activations’’ to access the material, with games, skits and plays, and plenty of opportunity to practise;
- The transfer to real-life applications and connections;
- Regular review and evaluation sessions, and with them opportunities to celebrate learning.

- The best learning ‘‘state’’

It is believed that two core elements affect learning: state and strategy, the third is obviously content. ‘‘State’’ creates the right mood for learning. ‘‘Strategy’’ denotes the style or method of presentation. ‘‘Content’’ is the subject. In every good lesson the three should exist. But many traditional school systems ignore ‘‘state’’. Yet it is the most critical of the three. The ‘‘door’’ must be open to learning before true learning can happen. And that ‘‘door’’ is an emotional one- the ‘‘gatekeeper to learning’’, part of being in a fully resourceful state. (Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 307-309)

- Orchestrating

In many classrooms, learners are told to sit still on a classroom seat all day, in straight rows, listening to the teacher and not exploring, discussing , questioning or participating. A good teacher does know that is not the best way to learn. So, he tries to plan a classroom setting that facilitates easy learning. As some suggest they cover walls with colourful posters, highlighting all the main points of the course to be covered, in words and pictures. It is believed that most learning is subconscious, since students absorb the lesson-content even without consciously thinking about it.(Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 301)

Liechtenstein's Stockwell-one of Europe's leading new-style trainers in both schooling and business, says that the importance of well-designed colourful posters cannot be overstressed. "Overhead projector slides, 25 mm slides and flipcharts are fine....., but posters are miles better- and all should be up around the walls before any learning session begins. They are peripheral stimuli. Their constant presence engraves their content into your memory, even when you are not consciously aware of them..."(Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 303). He also says colour psychology is important " Red is a warning colour; blue is cool; yellow is seen as the colour of intelligence; green and brown have a pacifying effect and are warm and friendly. Never forget that effective posters make a strong impression on the long-term memory. They create memory pictures which can be called on when required although they were never consciously learned"(Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993: 303).

What is more striking is that some other teachers use music playing to establish the mood as students enter the classroom. The atmosphere can be stimulating when it is highly welcoming as it is stressed by many practitioners: "The total atmosphere must be non-threatening and positively welcoming" (Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993: 303). Top Swedish high school teacher Christer Gudmundsson agrees: "The atmosphere from the time your students enter the classroom must be thoroughly welcoming". (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993: 303).

- Setting the right mood and getting students' attention

It is said that variety, surprise, imagination and challenge are essential in creating a climate of delight. "Surprise guests, mystery tours, field trips, spontaneous projects (old-fashioned days, pet displays, research initiated by the children) add richness to reading, writing and discussion. The production of plays and puppet shows is stimulated by the children's reading and is masterminded more and more fully by the children themselves. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 301). Moreover, "Your classroom will rarely be totally silent. Sharing and interaction are the vital components of a climate of delight. Discoveries, new learning, the sheer joy of accomplishment demand expression".(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 304).

If that climate of delight sweeps over you as you enter a well-planned seminar room or classroom, it is the first step in setting the right mood for more effective learning.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993: 304).

- Early activity is vital

The colourful setting, posters will already have started to stimulate those who are mainly visual learners. The music will have "touched base" with mainly auditory learners. Early activity makes the kinesthetic learners feel instantly comfortable. Interspersing all three learning styles also makes sure that all three levels of the brain are activated: our thinking brain, our feeling brain, and our doing brain.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993: 305)

Californian accelerated-learning innovator Charles Schmidt told us not long before his death. "We learned our alphabet to music - ABCD - EFG - HIJK - LMNOP.

But in the last 25 years we've expanded our music knowledge tremendously. We've found out that in a special kind of relaxation, which music can induce, our brain is most open and receptive to incoming information. That type of relaxation is *not* getting ready to fall asleep. It is a state of relaxed alertness- what we sometimes call relaxed awareness''(Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 309).

- Break down the learning barriers

Lozanov says there are three main barriers to learning:

- The critical-logical barrier ("School isn't easy, so how can learning be fun and easy?");

- The intuitive-emotional barrier ("I'm dumb, so I won't be able to do that"); and

- The critical-moral barrier ("Studying is hard work – so I'd better keep my head down"). Understand where a student "is coming from" and you gain better rapport. Step into his world and you break resistance quickly, smoothly. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 313)

- Encourage personal goal-setting and learning outcomes
Encourage students to set their own goals - and to plan their own future. If they know where they are going, then their path is focused. In our experience, *most people will over-achieve personal targets that they set themselves* - possibly the soundest principle in management

In classroom settings, it is advisable to - to focus on "What's In It For Me?" Not in a selfish sense, but to get participants, perhaps in pairs, to tell each other and teachers what they specifically hope to get from the

session, the day or the year. The way this is introduced is vital, especially in school. Many at-risk students get very angry with the traditional "You-will-learn-this today" introduction. Instead, good teachers invite students to set their own goals, right from the outset, and the outcomes they would like from the session. Often students come with "hidden agendas" - and they don't always "buy in" to the instructor's agenda. The key is to make learning a partnership, where the instructor prepares a smorgasbord of possible "curriculum pieces" and the students get a big say in what they want out of it. (Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 313)

- Visualisation of goals

Visualizing is a powerful learning tool. An ineffective teacher might well say: "Don't forget to study or you might do poorly in the upcoming test" - a negative reinforcer. Two better ways are suggested:

One is to encourage students to visualize precisely how they would be using their new-found knowledge in the future.

The other is to plant a positive thought that will encourage students to browse through their study-book looking for specific answers that might be used in the future. We cannot stress this point too strongly: many teachers do not realize how damaging negative suggestions can be. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 313)

- Good presentation

The main keys to good presentation are:

- Positivity and linking

All good presentations must be learner-centered and linked to students' own goals and existing knowledge.

"The more you link, the more you learn."

Another technique to guarantee involvement from the start is for the learners and the instructor to draw Mind Maps covering the same points - from a pre-prepared map that lists the main "learning branches". The sequence is designed to encourage the learners of every subject to start by identifying what they want to know, and then proceeding from what they already know - generally an amazing amount. The entire presentation must also be positive. The facilitator should never suggest in any way that the session is anything but fun - no "now the break's over let's get to the hard work talk".

Lozanov called his fast-learning process "*suggestopedia*," from "*suggestology*" - but that is an unfortunate translation into English. Says Stockwell: "The name is rather unusual, but if you see 'to suggest' in the sense of 'to propose' or 'to recommend' then it is easier to understand the relationship." (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 315)

The power of suggestion is paramount in learning: we all do best when we think we can do it; we fail if we expect to fail. Every adult has seen how infants' learning abilities soar in a favorable, positive atmosphere. All good Lozanov-style facilitators try to recreate the same kind of positive fun-filled atmosphere in the classroom. And like all good advertising copywriters, they go out of their way to stress how easy the project is. Lozanov stresses the important links between conscious and

subconscious presentation. He believes each of us has an enormous reserve of brain power waiting to be tapped. He believes that by far the most important part of all learning is subconscious; and that good teachers remove the barriers to learning by making their presentations logical, ethical, enjoyable and stress-free. Hence the importance of posters and "peripherals" as part of the total presentation. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 315)

-Getting the big picture first

A major presentation technique is to present "the big picture" first - to provide an overview, like the total jigsaw puzzle picture, so that all the later pieces can then fall into place. Again, posters or other classroom peripherals may well present the big picture - so it's always there as a focusing point. Telling a story is also a great preview technique. And field trips are highly recommended at the start of any study - to see the big picture in action. Drawing Mind Maps at the start of study, including all the main "limbs", allows students to draw in the smaller branches later. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 317)

- Involve all the senses

All good presentations also appeal to all individual learning styles. The most neglected learning style in nearly every school system is kinesthetic - or movement. Every good learning experience has plenty of verbal stimulation, plenty of music, plenty of visuals - but the really great teachers make sure to have plenty of action, plenty of participation, plenty of movement. Even though

students may be visual learners, everyone embeds information by doing.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 317)

- Step out of the lecturing role

This is probably the major personal change required in teaching styles. All the best "teachers" are activators, facilitators, coaches, motivators, orchestrators. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 317)

- Organize plenty of "state changes"

The best teachers organize plenty of "state changes" so that students switch from singing, to action, to talking, to viewing, to rhyme, to Mind Mapping, to group discussions. This has a two-fold purpose:

It reinforces the information in all learning styles;
and

It breaks up the lesson into chunks for easy learning.

Both have a major bearing on how well the information is absorbed. For example, it is now well proven that, in any presentation, students can generally remember easiest the information at the start, the end and any "outstanding" examples that gripped their imagination. Regular "state changes" provide the opportunity for many more "firsts", "lasts" and graphic examples. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 319)

- The Lozanov "concerts"

Possibly Lozanov's greatest contribution to education has again been in the sphere of music: not only to relax your mind and put it into a highly receptive state - but to use music to float new information into your amazing memory system. Lozanov recommends *two concerts*:

a- The first concert - what Lozanov called **the active concert**. With the student looking at the text, the teacher turns on some selected music, and he reads the foreign language in time to the music. He deliberately acts out the words dramatically in time to the music. "Now there's no magic to this; it's precisely why it is easier to learn the lyrics of a song, rather than remember all the words on a page of notes. The music is somehow a carrier and the teacher surfs along with the music - almost like catching a wave." (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 319)
And again, Charles Schmid has summarized the theory and practice neatly: "If, say, a class is learning a foreign language, as the first step the teacher sets out the new vocabulary in the form of a play, and with an overview of it in pictures. The student sits there taking a 'mental movie' of it.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993:321)

b- Lozanov's second learning phase is called a **passive concert**. Charles Schmid again: "The second concert follows immediately after the first. And here we use very specific slow baroque music - around 60 beats to the minute - very precise. And while the first reading of the language was very dramatic, the second is in a more natural intonation. Now the students are invited to close their eyes if they want - although they don't have to. They put the text aside, and imagine, that they are in a theater

in the country they're studying, and somebody is acting a story in the background. Generally this will be the last part of a particular language session - and the students will then go home - and probably skim through their foreign-language 'play' just before they go to sleep." Overnight the subconscious goes to work - and the seemingly automatic start of the transfer to long-term memory storage. Lozanov fans claim the use of music in this way can accomplish 60 percent of learning in 5 percent of the time. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 321)

- Thinking about it, and deep memory storage

Education is, of course, not only about absorbing new information. It involves thinking about it and storing it into deep memory as well. Learning how to think is a major part of every educational program, and good facilitators use "thinking games" and "mind games" as part of synthesizing information - as well as providing "state changes". For deep memory storage, Lozanov's active and passive concerts are tops. They are designed to access the long-term memory system in order to link new information subconsciously with data already stored. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 321)

- Activate to draw out the learning

Storing information is also only one part of the learning process. The information also has to be accessed. So the next step is "*activation*". And here games, skits, discussions and plays can all be used to "*activate*" the memory-banks , and reinforce the learning

pathways. Again, this does not need to make more work for the teacher. The opposite, in fact. Students love to organize their own plays, presentations, debates and games. They need to be given the chance to present their new-found information to the rest of the class or group or any other way they prefer.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 :321)

Schmid explains a typical activation session, after French-language students have slept on a concert-session: "The next morning, or within 48 hours, the students come in; they haven't said a word of French yet - or at least not in the new vocabulary. Now comes three or four hours of what we call activation. "Now we play games with the vocabulary. We're feeding their brains in different ways. We've already done it consciously in showing them the words and pictures of their French play. Then we've fed it into their subconscious, with the aid of music. And now they're activating their brains in different ways to make sure it's stored. And I tell you: now I wouldn't teach in any other way."(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 323)

- Apply it

In our view, the real test of learning is not a written examination through multiple-choice questions. The key is to use the learning and apply it to purposeful situations, preferably real-life. The real test of a French course is how well you can speak French. The real test of a sales course is how well you can sell. You learn to play a piano by playing a piano, you learn to type by typing, to ride a bike by riding a bike, to speak in public by speaking in public. So the best teachers and business

seminar organizers plan plenty of action sessions to back up the theory so students can purposefully use and apply the learning. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 325)

- Turn your students into teachers

A in the activation phase, it makes sound sense to have students work in pairs or teams, with a free hand to prepare their own presentations of main points. Groups in a teacher-training class, for example, may each be asked to crystallize a specific aspect of educational psychology. And more and more schools are using the "buddy" system, where an older or more qualified student helps another, and both benefit.(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 325)

- Encourage Mind Mapping

We've already covered the principles of this and suggested you use it to preview the learning, but it is also a remarkable way to review and make notes. *It really is what it says: a map that records main points in the same way the brain stores information - like branches on a tree.* It's also a major tool in the next process. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 :325)

- Review, evaluate and celebrate

Even highly efficient learners will not always be conscious of whether they "know what they know". This can be done through many ways:

"passive concert" review, which also covers all the points handled.

the self-evaluation. This is where a student truly "digs within" to uncover those precious gems of the day. Self-evaluation is a tool for higher thinking: reflecting, analyzing, synthesizing, then judging.

Another way to review is to skim over your Mind Maps or "highlighted" notes, or both:

- * Before you go to sleep on the day you have been studying;
- * The next morning;
- * A week later;
- * A month later;
- * And just before you need to use it-or before an exam
(Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden ,1993: 327)

If you are on a one-week course with an examination at the end, spend at least 15 minutes a night on that day's Mind Map and highlights, and at least five minutes on each of the previous days. Or if you are writing an article or even a book, it's amazing how much you can recall by skimming your Mind Maps and underlined books. And always remember to celebrate every victory - just as any sporting achiever would celebrate. Praise the entire class effort, and whenever possible turn that praise into a recap of the main points learned. (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 327)

Conclusion

How does all this theory work in practice? Let us look at these examples: *Fluent French in eight weeks* and *The army learns a foreign language in record time*. Both examples are taken from (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 331-337)

Fluent French in eight weeks. For a class demonstration of accelerated learning in action, an excellent example comes from Beverley Hills Girls' High School in Sydney, Australia. In the early 1990s they introduced an accelerated learning course that successfully compressed a three-year French course into eight weeks. Says teacher Sylvia Skavounos: "I was amazed. We'd had a standard French course for two-thirds of a year before we started. Yet in the two weeks after we began, the students had learned at least 200 new words, and they could say them fluently" - much better in two weeks than the previous several months. (Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden ,1993:331). The course they chose was produced by Accelerated Learning Systems of England, mainly for self-help learning. It also comes with a teacher kit for classroom use. When a crew from Australia's Channel 7 television network visited the Beverley Hills French class, they found students doing exactly what Charles Schmid has described: starting with relaxation exercises; clearing their mind for the session to come; learning through *active* and *passive* concerts; reactivating their learning through games and even acting out and producing their own videotape.

TV brought in Jean-Philippe de Voucoux, an expert from Alliance Française, to check progress. And he was amazed "at how quickly they were able to speak without reading" and how easy it was to have a conversation with them.

As Channel 7 summed up: it's an experiment that could have turned Australia's education system "on its head". Unfortunately the rival Channel Nine Network later followed up with a program highly critical of some

claims for "accelerated learning", and the New South Wales Government reacted by stopping many of these new methods.

The army learns a foreign language in record time. Another example given is that of the American army and one of the best users of the new teaching techniques, Professor Lynn Dhority, of Boston.

Dr. Dhority was already a highly successful German teacher before he studied the *suggestopedia* method with Lozanov. He then had the opportunity of testing the method and comparing it with other measured results using standard-style German teaching. All materials for the course were prepared thoroughly in advance according to Lozanov guidelines: "peripherals", including posters, music, games, songs, activities and scripts. And because of Dr. Dhority's academic training, he was able to ensure that the results could be documented.

His "control group" of 11 students studied basic German, using accelerated learning techniques, for 108 hours over three and a half weeks (18 days) at Fort Devens army base. The results were then compared with another group of 34 army students, not taught by Dr. Dhority, learning basic German under regular "audio drill" methods over a period of 360 hours, spread over 12 weeks.

The comparative results recorded levels of "listening, comprehension, reading and speaking". And they were then checked by Dr. Lyelle Palmer, Professor of Education at Winona State University, Minnesota. They disclosed that only 29 percent of the "regular course" students reached the required "level one" of basic German in the 360 hours, while 73 percent achieved the required level of "listening understanding"

and 64 percent the required level of reading ability in the 120 hours.

Dr. Palmer recorded the results statistically in a joint paper headed: *The 661% Solution: A statistical evaluation of the extraordinary effectiveness of Lynn Dhority's U.S. Army accelerated learning German class* (Jeannette Vos and Gordon Dryden ,1993:335). And for us he summed them up even more succinctly: "Lynn Dhority achieved more than twice the results in less than one-third the time. Statistically, that was a 661 percent increase." (Jeannette Vos & Gordon Dryden, 1993 : 335). Major savings were also achieved, of course, in instructor time and expenses, daily expenses for trainees, and time away from the job.

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