

dimensions de *personne*, d'*individu acteur social* et de *professionnel dans son métier d'élève* (l'artisan, comme nous l'appelons); et ce sont là les statuts, à ne pas omettre, de l'apprenant. Une meilleure connaissance du négociateur qu'il a en face de lui, l'enseignant se « jouerait » de l'apprenant en le menant là où il veut bien aller. Ces manières, non maniérées, de faire permettent à l'enseignant de recouvrer son statut réaliste d'*acteur socio-didacticien* utile et performant dans le registre de sa spécialité revalorisée au vu des échéances de l'avenir du monde.

Repères bibliographiques

Francis DEBYSER, « *Styles et stratégies d'apprentissage* », article paru dans *INTERCULTUREL*, n°6, Lecce, Argo, 2002

Janine COURTILLON, « *L'unité didactique* », article paru dans *Le FDM, Recherches et applications*

Janine COUTILLON, « *L'enseignement des langues peut-il échapper à la routine ?* », article paru dans *Le FDM* n° 285

Education: The Pursuit of Understanding not just Knowledge

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Almost anywhere we turn we can find textbooks, lectures, workshops, and courses on the art of teaching a foreign language. Never before have we had so many resources available to us! However, we still do not find an answer to a question we have been asking for a long time: what is the best way, if there is any, to follow in the pursuit of a foreign language?

In Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, the 'nouveau riche' Jourdain, who wants nothing more than to be accepted in the company of the French Aristocracy, makes an interesting discovery: "I am speaking prose! I have always spoken prose! I have spoken prose throughout my whole life!". Jourdain's realization highlights the notion that not all of us are necessarily directly guided by a great knowledge

transfer their thoughts and meanings to the passive student. There is little room for student-initiated questions, independent thought or interaction between students. The goal of the learner is to regurgitate the accepted explanation or methodology expostulated by the teacher”.

The feeling of dissatisfaction grows and I came to the conclusion that something must change. This is how I started an experiment in the department of English with my third and fourth year students in written expression and literature modules. The first step of my experiment consisted of a questionnaire which contained 10 statements about practices that could take place in a classroom. This questionnaire was given to four teachers. They were asked to say how often each practice occurred in their specified course. There were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Their opinion is what is wanted.

Question 1.

teaching relates to experiences or questions about the world in and outside the university

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	Often	Almost always
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Question 3

It's OK for students to question the way they're b

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	oft
T1	+			
T2	+			
T3	+			
T4	+			

Question 4

I feel I teach better when students are allowed to or how I'm teaching.

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	oft
T1		+		
T2		+		
T3	+			
T4	+			

Question 5

Students help to decide how well they are learning

Teachers	Almost	seldom	sometimes	oft
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Question 7

Students talk with other students about how to solve problems.

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	often	Almost always
T1			+		
T2		+			
T3	+				
T4		+			

Question 8

Students collaborate with each other

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	often	Almost always
T1		+			
T2	+		+		
T3		+			
T4	+				

Question 9

Students ask me to repeat my ideas.

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	sometimes	often	Almost always

Question 11

Students help to decide how well they are learning
decide which activities work best for them.

Teachers	Almost never	seldom	Sometimes	often
T1	+			
T2	+			
T3	+			
T4	+			

This survey shows one crucial truth: traditional teaching takes place without any questions whatsoever. The teacher delivers the lesson already prepared at home, then instructs her students and evaluates them. Students do not interfere in the elaboration of activities and do not give their opinion about them. Teaching is the teacher's domain. Two years ago, before this survey, I used to teach American literature modules in a traditional way. On the one side, teaching the techniques of writing, the two weeks of American literature and analysing a work of famous authors of the period (drama, prose and poetry). Lectures

sense, I encouraged students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving, group project works, information gathering from different sources) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they were doing and how their understanding was changing. I tried to understand the students' pre-existing knowledge, and guided the activity to address them and then build on them.

For example, groups of students in my literature class were discussing a problem: the climax of the play **The Crucible**. Though I know the **answer** to the problem, I focused on helping students restate their questions in useful ways; when one of the students came up with the relevant answer, I seized upon it, and indicated to the group that this might be a fruitful avenue for them to explore. Afterward, we talked about what they had learned, and how their observations helped them to better understand and find the answer.

In addition to this activity, I carried out another one with my students while studying Arthur Miller's **The Crucible**. My students arranged themselves in the groups in which they had

interpretations of and transactions with Miller's text. This exercise was an experience from which they would gain a deeper understanding of linguistic evolution and character development. As I move from group to group, I encounter interesting and often entertaining discussions as students negotiate interpretations of Miller's discourse. I try to understand how particular characters might say their new conclusions. At the same time, I tried to provide assistance when needed and probed to elicit personal responses and to encourage them in their discussions.

My third step was to exploit the capacities of students. Abundant evidence from young people's special interests suggests that they can develop a high degree of expertise and skill in some particular field. student-as-expert challenges the assumption that an ordinary student can, to some extent, adopt some essential features of an expert. I encourage them, taking on challenging knowledge-building tasks, adopting practices that facilitate high educational and cognitive development.

Inspired by The complete *Learning Guide to T*

The fourth step had been using films. A film can be an alternative educational experience and highlights points covered by the curriculum. Some literature is difficult for foreign readers. Movie renditions can introduce and help students comprehend these works. For example, many teachers contend that watching films based on Jane Austen novels enables their students to better understand, appreciate and enjoy the books. See e.g., the *Learning Guide to Pride and Prejudice*. Showing the film before reading the book can help poor readers comprehend challenging texts boosting them to a higher level of critical thinking and language analysis.

My fourth year students were able to understand and appreciate the play of miller **The Crucible** after having watched the film. It was so motivating! After, they were asked to write an essay on the differences between the film and the book, what new understanding of the story they came to after watching the film, etc. From this humble experiment, it appears clearly that activities that favour project-based, process-oriented, product-centred learning promote autonomy and help the construction of meaning. This is how I, incidently, discovered that what I was experimenting is called Constructivism.

As Papert (1991: 3) says: "In our opinion, *students could, in the future, serve as the guiding principle in curriculum design, materials development, and classroom practice.*"

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