

works well for bringing up this topic also with teenagers. I wish to stress that I'm using the term 'neutral' here to describe the perspective of 'the Other' as opposed to using any other more familiar 'Other' that might obscure the view in case students carry certain prejudice, not to imply that the perspective of the students really could be objective. However, through the relativization of their own cultural practices, such activities can bring about the emergence of a 'third place' from which students then more easily can go on exploring boundaries between specific groups with a more objective stance, e.g. concerning phenomena that can cause misunderstandings or possible value clashes, thus being more open to authentic communication and work towards negotiating common ways and values when encountering difference. This also means that students get useful tools for lifelong learning, which is necessary since we only can include so much in our teaching.

To conclude, I will give a few concrete examples of reflective activities used in the project: the first steps in the direction of developing the ability to decentre were taken right in the beginning of our first term together with the help of an insightful cartoon drawing attention in a humorous way to the haphazard nature of the social convention of greeting someone by shaking hands and how we take it for granted. In the following reflective work, which included brainstorming around other more or less imaginative ways of greeting people, I pointed out that we are simply so used to our own ways that we seldom question them, but we still

tend to question other people's conventions. Why, if social conventions mainly and merely are conventions? This was directly followed by two other brainstorming activities on 'rules' that might have been construed or agreed upon differently in our society, to further emphasize the arbitrariness of our own ways. One of these concerned what kind of tools we could have developed for eating as an alternative to spoons, knives, and forks, the other how we could show our appreciation at a play instead of clapping our hands, i.e., we looked at conventions shared by everybody in the class and also by many other cultural groups. Consequently these activities were not experienced as threatening.

For those who are interested in finding out more (e.g. full references for research mentioned) I refer to Forsman (2004a, 2004b), where I have written more extensively on these matters from two slightly different angles. I can also be contacted via e-mail.

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## Teach as you would be taught

**Bettina Ribes Gil reflects on how in her teaching she can draw on her own language-learning experiences**

How many of you who speak other languages have ever reflected on your own learning experiences: motivation, success or failure, group empathy or how the teacher functioned? Has your teaching been influenced by how you learnt? It is said that teachers teach how they were taught, or should it be that they teach as they learnt? Below I focus on my recollection of acquiring several languages and highlight some elements that influenced my own EFL teaching.

English: my mother tongue, was absorbed from babyhood through the innate listening skill which enables children to produce their own language. At primary school repetition was the in-method of the 1950s and I have stimulated very young learners to reproduce nursery rhymes, songs, rhythmical

patterns, etc. followed up by appropriate role play, which I enjoyed and so do they. I learnt the alphabet from letters fixed on the blackboard in various colours which has led to a form of synaesthesia: adjectives, Asia, Arthurs are red; pronouns, Poland and Peter are blue, and so on. The use of colour is a strategy that works well with students unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet. Animals are also common to all cultures and can easily be used in less privileged teaching situations, but beware of cultural variations if introducing metaphors – black cats have varied connotations in different countries!

French: introduced at four years old with numbers written on the blackboard with an animal pasted by each multiple of ten. I have adapted this



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for teaching very young learners who much enjoy imitating the animals' sounds and actions which encompasses multiple intelligences.

French was obligatory at secondary school using the then fashionable mother-tongue supported grammar/translation method. My teachers were English and unsurprisingly I failed my O-level French. Thereupon I went to a *lycée* in France. Placed in a class of my own age group, who were studying for university entrance, I christened this the 'thrown-in-at-the-deep-end' method, being subjected to texts well above my level, writing essays and taking dictation at Formula one speeds. With intermediate students upwards I have observed that they too can be thrown into linguistic situations where tasks are, at first sight, too advanced, but they respond to the challenge of demanding material and where there is motivation there is definite intake. French acquisition was completed by a commercial course at the London Institut Français (where I finally passed O-level French!) leading to employment in a French company and later in the francophone region of Switzerland.

Italian: motivation being fundamental in acquiring languages, to facilitate communication with a Roman boyfriend, I enrolled for classes at the London Berlitz with Italian teachers, classes which, in pre-techno days, were based on their course book. Later I continued with Professor Umberto Morelli who taught his own analogical method involving introducing words that are substantially the same in both languages (lemon/limone). His two course books extend the student's knowledge to over 2,000 words per book and grammar is systematically strengthened and extended in the second. A significant amount is learnt over a short period with minimal dictionary assistance.

I personally benefited from the repetition method at the Berlitz and compiled material, specifically for use in one-to-one situations, introducing verbs and basic grammar within simple statements, progressing to texts appropriate to the students' interests and potential, followed up by topic-based question and answer exercises introducing cultural aspects within the content. Concurrently I have had great success adapting Dr. Morelli's analogical method which puts no strain on your recall-memory, as much transmuted lexis has been familiar since childhood. This enables students to concentrate on sentence construction and thus bolsters confidence in the four skills due to familiarity with the vocabulary.

My knowledge of Italian opened the door to employment as assistant to an Italian film producer.

Spanish: again motivation was the key element: an increasing interest in linguistics and marriage to a Spaniard. I returned to the Berlitz and later followed a course at the United Nations in Switzerland geared to their Spanish examination. This method included Latin Americanisms,

necessary within the UN framework, reinforced through Hispanic literature. Thereafter my international career followed a linguistic pattern. The tasks I found most useful were dictation, *précis* writing and preparation of talks which I have developed in my EFL teaching. Dictation is a useful tool covering the four skills, as the way students write determines how well they listen and understand, and reading aloud, prior to correction, allows errors to be picked up. Prepared talks help in memorizing collocations, chunks and phrasal verbs, and I encourage students to note these rather than plain vocabulary. Preparation of preliminary phrases to be recycled at oral examinations and in daily discourse to give a good first impression is a tactic which has proved valid both for myself and the students!

Portuguese (Brazilian): as a corollary to the above career pattern I joined an audio-visual class which, learning this language in later life, was an essential element for pronunciation comprehension and confirmed the potential of videos I present to my students, introducing a variety of voices and accents, especially in one-to-one lessons. Recording students and listening to tapes are excellent methods for word recall and facilitate absorbing chunks. However, TTT was anathema to the teacher and resulted in group aphasia and time wasted. I believe leaving the initiative to the student too often is a strategy risking failure and incidental colloquial utterances by the teacher are paramount in extending the students' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Consequently I changed to a teacher whose approach was definitely more affective than analytic and her anecdotal asides proved useful in daily discourse when travelling in Brazil. My adolescent students appreciate learning vernacular utterances to help them feel integrated when communicating with their English peers. I encourage them to pick out lexis from films, pop songs, etc. for discussion in class and guidance toward the culturally acceptable.

I have never been tied by pronunciation to help my recall-memory. Despite relative fluency acquired living in *immersed* environments, my accent remains 'English'. By analogy I encourage students to complete an utterance, irrespective of minor grammatical errors and pronunciation, the goal being to communicate. Obviously, when teaching an examination syllabus this is not a method to use! Nevertheless, successful language learners are risk takers.

It is axiomatic that testing is a valuable tool for assessing students' progress, even though this conflicts with my desire to teach communicatively and humanistically, but it is unavoidable. For me past test papers, together with audio material in preparation for oral exams, have been the most helpful tools I have used in my teaching.

Motivation, in my opinion, is a key requirement