

of these language schools survive is that students obviously receive something they do not get in school, namely some form of communicative language instruction, which is essentially motivating.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, there are not necessarily cultural reasons for students not wanting to learn the FLs in particular ways, but rather other factors. Secondly, many state school students are underprivileged because they may not be receiving the instruction they perhaps deserve, or achieving the goals they might achieve. One conclusion that is not to be drawn from this is that the success of foreign language schools is due to the teachers

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being native speakers of English. When I taught at the SBCI in Sao Paulo, Brazil, one of the biggest non-state language teaching organisations in the world, most of the teachers were Brazilian native speakers of Portuguese, which did not deter the public, maybe even the contrary, for the simple reason they received instruction that was professional, relevant and motivating. Of course, in the case of some state teachers, they may need (to be encouraged) to convince themselves that they do not need to be perfect oral communicators in the FL, nor that the FL classroom need become a communicative free-for-all, but that they too might benefit from communicating with their students, and in the target language.

Two final questions: first, is a strong form of CLT, of the type that is apparently being 'exported' to other cultures around the world, that widespread in both US and UK state secondary schools? Neither Klapper (2002) suggests that it is in the UK, nor VanPatten (2002) in the US. Secondly, when it comes to adopting or adapting alternative pedagogical options, is it teachers or students who are generally more reluctant? From the evidence gleaned from numerous studies on attitudes to the communicative approach, cited in a talk I gave at the IATEFL conference this year, the majority verdict seems to suggest that, if anything, it tends to be the former. Which prompts a third, parting, question. When authors, such as Bax, talk about empowerment, who exactly is empowering whom, and with what power? Administrators, academics, teachers or even students?

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Cardiff feedback form winner

Thanks to all of you who filled out feedback forms at the Cardiff Conference. We have drawn from these the winner of the free conference registration (for the 40th IATEFL International Conference in Harrogate, in 2006). We are pleased to announce that the winner is Mrs Justine Rutledge of Wicken, UK.

Justine, a new member of IATEFL, having joined only this year, commented 'Great! Thanks a lot. Maybe I can now persuade the college to pay for my accommodation instead I was afraid I wouldn't be able to come to Harrogate and I really enjoyed Cardiff, my first IATEFL conference'.

Classified Ads

FLEXIBLE WORK FROM HOME - EFL Tutors living in a family unit required to host (full board in your own home) and teach General and Professional English to mature overseas students on short courses in UK throughout year. Call Lynn at Intuition Languages on 08456 588 440, or email: learn@intuitionlang.com

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Patterns of literacy

JoAnn Salvisberg examines the effect of modern life on reading habits and acquisition.

Young people in Switzerland these days spend fewer hours reading books than they do text messaging their friends. Furthermore, they spend much more time watching films, and surfing the Internet than visiting their local library. This is based not only on my own observations, but on discussions with students in some of my classes who are primary and secondary school teachers.

Young people are neither afraid, shy of, nor unfamiliar with the media world. It seems rather to be an integral component of their everyday life, and its contents are regarded by many as being as influential as the social structures of their families, school and/or occupation. Media, including all computer activity as well as Internet access, is viewed by children and young people alike as not only a medium for communication and information, but games, and support (for example, using email and chat rooms). This is not surprising since approximately 3.2 million Swiss households (i.e. 94 per cent of Swiss TV households) have cable service. Furthermore, Swiss households spend more money on telecommunications than any EU country, the USA or Japan.

What young people here in Switzerland do read in hard-copy print form, from Monday to Friday, is a shortened version of the daily newspaper on their way to school. It takes about twenty minutes to read (incidentally the name of this daily is: *20 Minutes!*), the average time it takes in the morning for a local train, bus or tram ride to school. Although I do give them credit for following the main news stories, their penchant for brief news items indicates a shorter attention span (and craving for entertainment bites!) in contrast to the rare soul who can spend hours enthralled by the tale of a good piece of literature.

As a language teacher, I fear for those who grow up not knowing how to read books (on- or off-line). Not because they will lose the historical, sentimental sense and skill of reading literature and libraries as communities and social centres of interaction with others. Rather, reading has been shown to increase the mind's ability to learn. I am not only talking about languages. (See Krashen's books and numerous articles citing the advantages of a good reading program and a well-equipped libraries, for example, Krashen 2004.)

Reading has been found to also help even those considered unintelligent and even beyond help. Take, for example, the experience of Renée Fuller. As a bright, dyslexic child she had to learn to read on her own, and later developed a reading method specifically for bright,

dyslexic children. Colleagues at a state mental hospital where she was chief of psychological services asked her one day, though, to consider teaching her reading methods to a few retarded patients. She reluctantly agreed, but found the results astounding. Those with a lower IQ level than 30 learned to not only read with comprehension, but to re-tell stories and eventually to create their own stories. Needless to say their lives were transformed as others (caring for them) viewed them differently, and they began taking

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better care of themselves, had a different look in their eyes, and to behave more intelligently. These once retarded individuals even taught themselves how to write! Dickinson (2002), reporting on Fuller's work writes:

When you think about it, every culture in the history of the world has relied on story to teach its history, mores, and life skills. The great religions all have relied on stories from the pulpit, in images and sculpture, in drama, and in literature. Stories bind us together as a species. Powerful ways of learning—powerful ways of helping the mind to make meaningful, intelligent connections. They also guide our lives.

From my perspective, I do not think online texts, and short daily newsbytes are bad, *per se*, but they are not representative of the fabric of life, and people rarely write similar stories relating personal experiences they have lived through to carry on the tradition. This is where, I believe, the sense of online community comes in. Requiring more than the response to questions, but a search for more personal, meaningful details to relate in a complex piece of writing. This can only come, in my opinion, through guided training and keeping students motivated by offering challenging yet useful tasks whether they are in the real or virtual classroom.

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