

# Breeding Better Language Learners

## Highlands College Jersey

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# What are we doing today?

## Breeding Better Language Learners

Stimulating reflection about practice

Taking the learners' point of view

Focusing on: independence in language learning; meaning and understanding; the role of text books

Sharing information about language teaching and learning matters and about ALL

# What's happening in languages?

Adult education

Support networks

The curriculum review

The Wolf report

The BBC

# Session 1

## Letting Learners Take the Strain

What can learners do for themselves (and what can't they do)?.

# Some facts and figures

1 in 3 people have experience of learning language as an adult (almost 30% of the population)

Only 18% learn by attending a course

The majority of adults learn through self study (texts; online; DVDs; CDs)

# What do facts and figures tell us?

- That adults are capable of learning other languages on their own
- That they need skills and resources but not necessarily teaching to be able to do so
- That people who join a class are likely to have specific reasons for doing so and, therefore, specific expectations of teaching

# How do people learn on their own?

- Skills for learning
- Organisational skills

Where do they get these skills from?

From life and learning experiences that they have  
already had

# Skills for learning

Research

*e.g. choosing a school*

Memorising

Lateral thinking

Risk taking

Checking

Action planning

Evaluating



# Organisational skills

Analysis (need; current position; options; choices)  
*e.g. making holiday plans*

Problem solving (problems; coping strategies; overcoming obstacles)

Managing time (time needed; dealing with timescales and deadlines)

Maintaining motivation (goals; rewards; checking progress)

# The theory

**What is andragogy?**

# The knowledge

Adults transfer learning and organisational skills from one context to another including language learning.

They're what we use to acquire 'knowledge'.

The '*knowledge*' of language learning includes:

Grammar

Vocabulary and.....

Phonology

Script

Meaning

Culture

# Sources of knowledge

Where is the knowledge that language learners need?

Are there any sources of knowledge that can only be accessed by joining a group?

# Why do learners join groups?

NOT because they can't learn language but because they have identified that they need face to face **support** to learn.

Common areas of support need are:

- How to learn
- Maintenance of motivation
- Checking learning and rectifying error

# Maintaining motivation

Motivation to do what? To continue to learn and use the language.

Some motivational techniques bind the learners to the teacher and to attendance at sessions but have nothing to do with language learning:

- Force of personality
- Threats
- External impetus
- The creation of a club mentality

# Maintaining motivation

People are better motivated by:

Relevant content

Stimulating teaching

Successful learning

# Relevant content

**Relevant language:** a focus on language (grammar) that is of fundamental importance in transmitting meaning effectively and that may be difficult for learners to access without support (e.g. verbs).

**Relevant topics:** contexts that are up-to-date, of interest and use to learners and that provide a forum for extensive practice. Contexts that generate opportunities for all 4 language skills and for learners to diversify the language to suit their own purposes.



# How stimulating can you be?

1. Numbers (the learners can count from 1 – 1000)	2. Instructions (the learners know the grammar of instruction giving )	3. Negatives (the learners know the most straightforward way of forming the negative)
4. Gender and number (the learners have met definite and indefinite articles)	5. Personal details (the learners know how to give basic information about themselves)	6. The weather (the learners know basic phrases for talking about the weather)

# Instructions

A receptive skill for most adult learners

- Web quest
- Satnav
- Odd road signs
- Role plays: doctors; chemists; holiday home owners; making machines work
- Treasure trail clues
- Rules of etiquette
- Card/board games – the rules

# Letting learners take the strain

- Help learners be responsible for their own learning
- Rebalance group sessions – less teacher input, more chance for learners to practise on their own, with others, as a group
- Facilitate the learning, don't control it
- Check and correct performance and make sure that this process results in improvement
- Create learners who don't need a teacher

# The Association for Language Learning

- UK national professional association of language teachers
- All languages, all sectors
- 5,000 members
- For teachers, by teachers
- Representation
- Training
- Support
- Information
- Networking
- Competent, confident professionals

# Making Sense of it All

- What is 'meaning'?
- What skills do adult learners have already that will help them to make sense of another language?

# Discussion points

- How do you work out what people mean when they speak to you?
- How do you get hold of meaningful information from a holiday brochure?
- Does translation help or hinder understanding? How?

# Culture and meaning

What images spring to mind?

Alcazaba

Château

Castle

Schloss

Castello

# Cross cultural howlers

The word "mist" seems to get many a company into trouble. Poorly thought through uses of the name in Germany has resulted in "Irish Mist" (an alcoholic drink), "Mist Stick" (a curling iron from **Clairol**), "Cashmere Mist" (deodorant from **Donna Karen**) and "Silver Mist" (**Rolls Royce** car).

What the companies did not realise is "mist" in German means dung/manure. Fancy a glass of Irish dung?



# Context and meaning

Toilet or.....

- lavatory; latrine; WC; powder room; closet; privy; loo; bathroom; bog; convenience.

In what context might these words be used and by whom?

# Accuracy and meaning

- According to research at an English university, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that first and last letter is in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem. This is because we do not read every letter by itself but the word as a whole.

# Translation and meaning

- Allo, Sophie. Ça va?
- Non, pas du tout. Le service email ne marche pas. J'attends le technicien.
- Hello, Sophie. Does that go?
- Not, at all. The service email does not go. I await the technician.

Source: Babelfish

# Meaning

Meaning is not just acquired through recognition of:

- words, grammar, pronunciation and intonation

We use our experience and understanding of:

- Context
- Culture
- Non-verbal clues

**And** we apply key literacy skills such as prediction, inference and decoding.

# Listening comprehension

Describe the experience of listening comprehension in your class.

What do your learners think of it?

Why do you use listening comprehension? To what extent does it fulfil your purpose?

# Listening comprehension

*How much do **you** like comprehension?*

You will have one chance to listen to the directions to the Post Office and mark it on your map.



# Listening

Listening is:

- A language learning activity.
- The physical gateway to the meaning of the spoken word.

# A language learning activity

Important for:

- Familiarisation with the sound of the language
- Support for pronunciation and intonation
- Practice in locating key words and phrases in an exchange
- Practice in extracting key information



# A Welsh Christmas

Listen to the conversation and identify three desserts that are mentioned.

In Welsh what do the words for: 'sure'; 'please' and 'dessert' sound like?

Time for reflection: What helped you to get these answers right? 

# Grasping meaning

Implications for the language classroom:

- Are your activities for language practice or for developing real understanding? Have you got the balance right?
- Do you provide opportunities to practise inference; prediction; skimming; key word identification?
- Are learners getting enough exposure to real TL use that challenges them to apply **all** their skills to grasp meaning?
- Have you done enough to expose learners to TL material that will highlight differences in cultural and contextual use of language?

# Risks in grasping meaning

## Learners:

- Transfer cultural and contextual understanding from their own language and infer incorrect meaning as a result.
- Have insufficient exposure to the target language and its culture to be able to infer meaning accurately.
- Lose confidence in their ability to grasp meaning through over-exposure to activities focusing on listening techniques

Reading is perceived to be the  
easier of the receptive skills partly  
because.....

Most language classes are based on an assumption of literacy in the  
mother tongue

Learners are expected to transfer skills for dealing with their own  
language to the language they are learning.

Although different scripts may complicate the reading process, success  
in reading still relies on the assumption of key literacy skills

**E**en appel is rood,  
de zon is geel,  
de hemel is blauw,  
een blad is groen,  
een wolk is wit ...  
en de aarde is bruin.

**E**n zou je nu kunnen  
antwoorden  
op de vraag ...  
welke kleur de liefde heeft

from *Welke kleur heeft de liefde?* by  
Joan Walsh Anglund (Zomer &  
Keuning, Wageningen, Holland)





# Coping with unknown language

You made sense of the poem because you:

- Recognised letters.
- Associated writing with sound and spotted cognates.
- Inferred and transferred grammar rules.
- Recognised punctuation and its impact.
- Used visual clues.
- Used cultural and contextual knowledge.

*How do you help learners to acquire these basic skills for reading?*

*Exercises, activities....  
Answers on a post-it, please!*

# Reading that draws on experience - guess the phrase

Bună seara

La revedere

Vă rog să intrați

Încântat de cunoștință

Doriți o cafea?

Felicitări

Vă deranjez?

Cu plăcere

Vă rog să mă scuzați

What's please?

Good evening

Good bye

Please come in

Pleased to meet you

Would you like some coffee?

Congratulations

Am I disturbing you?

You're welcome

Please excuse me

Vă rog.

## Transferable literacy skills

***Skimming*** – running your eyes over a text and noting important information.

***Scanning*** – running your eyes over a text to looking for the specific piece of information you need.

***Prediction*** – guesswork based on clues drawn from context, culture, experience, knowledge.



## The Brighton Marathon challenge.

Who will be fastest to tell us the date of registration for the  
marathon?

The Grounded Events Company is pleased to announce that  
the second Brighton Marathon will take place on Sunday  
April 10th 2011.

After the stunning success of the year-one event, it has been  
proposed to increase the number of entries by 25 percent  
from 12,000 to 15,000. Registration will open at 10am  
Monday May 10th.

# What's 'glockum'?

'Tom decided that he desperately needed the glockum if he were to solve the problem.'

What do think 'glockum' might be?

How did you reach your conclusions?

# Key thoughts on meaning

- Meaning is at the heart of effective communication – it cannot be ignored.
- Meaning is not simply about listening
- Adults will understand complex concepts of meaning – with support, illustration and practice. They need to do so in order to avoid bad practice such as word for word translation.
- Adults already possess literacy skills that help process meaning. They need to be reminded of that fact.

# Beyond the Text Book

**Text** – an essential part of the language teacher’s toolkit

Text **books** – one of the many resources teachers can draw upon to create an effective lesson

“Like teachers, they mediate between the target language and the learner”

Adaptation of text book content is a skill that language teachers need

# Mini Reviews

List all or some the text books that you either use with learners and/or to prepare teaching

For each write a **one sentence** review: 'good because.../bad because...../OK but needs....'

# Strengths and weaknesses

## Task

1. On your own make a list of five strengths/advantages of text books and five weaknesses (5 minutes)
2. Compare your list with those on your table and compile a longer, composite list (10 minutes)
3. Choose one person from the group to report back

# Strengths

- Structure and syllabus
- Sequential, clear learning goals
- Standardises teaching
- Conforms to accepted 'good practice'
- Provides a variety of resources
- Enables self-study
- Save time
- Visual appeal
- Support a new/less confident teacher

# Weaknesses

- Stands between teacher and learner
- No teacher “buy-in”/reflection
- ‘Artificial’ language, ‘grammatically’ organised
- Limited application of language
- Insufficient demonstration of key language
- Insufficient practice opportunities
- Visualisation of ignorance
- Distort content – e.g. stereotypes



# Books and learners

## Task

You have a class profile for a group of Spanish learners and the index of a Spanish text book for beginners.

In groups discuss and list the ways in which individual motivations might be met by what is proposed in the text and identify where and what teacher intervention might be necessary to fulfil learner expectation.

# Choosing a textbook

Team game

A

Determine the ..... of the course and  
choose a ..... that matches them.

goals    textbook (2 points)

# B

Make sure content matches student's .....  
Don't teach adults from a ..... textbook

**need**      **children's** (2 points)

A

Choose a book that ..... the uses which learners  
will make of the language and which will help  
them to use language .....for their own  
purposes

**reflects**      **effectively** (2)

# B

Choose texts that will .....learners; look for  
..... materials, realistic situations and  
activities that develop communicative skills  
and strategies

motivate

authentic (2)

A

Choose texts that take account of learners' ....  
and do not dogmatically impose .....  
“method”

needs rigid (2)

# B

Look for texts that support learners in using  
their own ..... style and that .....them.

**learning challenge(2)**



## A and B

A Texts should be a support for .....

B They should promote fluency and accuracy  
at a level that is .....for the learners.

learning     appropriate (2)

1. Determine **goals** of the course and choose a textbook that matches those **goals**.
2. Make sure content matches student's **needs**. Don't teach adults from a **children's** text.
3. Choose a course book that **reflects** the uses which learners will make of the language and which will help them to use language **effectively** for their own purposes.

Alan Cunningsworth  
*Choosing your Coursebook,*  
Macmillan 1995

4. Choose texts that will **motivate** learners; look for **authentic** materials, **realistic** situations and activities that develop communicative skills and strategies.
5. Choose texts that take account of learners' **needs** and do not dogmatically impose **rigid** 'method'.
6. Look for texts that support learners in using their own **learning** style and challenge them.
7. Texts should be a support for learning. They should promote fluency and accuracy at a level that is **appropriate** for the learners.

## Support for learning comes from:

- The teacher
- Other learners
- Family and friends
- Travel
- The internet and technology-based communication
- Realia
- Media
- Dictionaries
- Grammar references
- Text books

# You and your resources

What are the advantages and disadvantages in always creating or devising your own resources against using textbooks?

# Do we agree?

## Advantages

- Personalised
- “Buy-in”
- Appropriate for learners
- Differentiated
- More likely to work well
- Build own resource bank

## Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Risk being “bitty” and lack progression
- Student experience varies across groups at same level
- May not be as accurate as published resources