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“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
— Nelson Mandela

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Abstract: Penny, an eight-year-old student of English as a foreign language, heard and discussed interesting stories over an eight-week period. No attempt was made to teach her vocabulary, but every effort was made to make sure the stories were comprehensible. Pre- and post-testing revealed that Penny had acquired receptive knowledge of 52 words from the stories, acquiring about five words per hour. In comparison, she acquired or learned about .5 words per hour from her EFL class.

A number of studies have demonstrated significant increases in vocabulary knowledge among children after hearing stories containing unfamiliar words (Eller, Pappas, and Brown 1988; Elley 1989, Leung and Pikulski 1990; Stahl, Richek and Vandeveer 1991; Mendelsohn, Mogiler, Dreyer, Forman, Weinstein, Broderick, Cheng, Magloire, Moore and Napier 2001). In a series of studies, Mason (2013) demonstrated that hearing new vocabulary in a second language in meaningful stories results in more efficient vocabulary development than formal instruction; Mason’s studies, however, were done with adults, and may have involved some conscious learning in addition to subconscious acquisition.

This study examines vocabulary development in one child in English as a foreign language. Our goal is compare the efficiency of vocabulary acquisition from stories (read-alouds) accompanied by discussion of the story, with the efficiency of formal instruction.

There is good reason to hypothesize that stories (read-alouds) will be more efficient for vocabulary acquisition than traditional instruction. Read-alouds are a rich source of vocabulary: Hsieh, Wang, and Lee (2011) compared the vocabulary input provided by the 65 storybooks (from Wang and Lee, 2007) with three representative textbook series used in Taipei, Taiwan. The books provided far more vocabulary than any of the three textbook series. Also, stories often contain rich and interesting context, which is lacking in textbooks (Wang, Hsieh, and Lee, 2011), context that helps make unfamiliar vocabulary comprehensible.
THE SUBJECT

The subject of this study, Penny, was an eight-year-old second grader from a middle class family in a public elementary school in northern Taiwan. Penny thought that English was an easy subject, and she always got high grades. Her parents sent her to a cram school in order to expose her to more challenging English input. She did not, however, enjoy the learning environment in the cram school, especially the many tests and quizzes, and stayed only one year.

After two years of English study, Penny’s proficiency was still at the beginner level, despite her high achievement in class. Our observations were that she had not, for example, acquired important aspects of verb tense and pronoun case.

Eight storybooks, well-known to children in English-speaking countries, *Leo the Late Bloomer*, *The Snowman Storybook*, *Little Beauty*, *Willy the Dreamer*, *The Other Day I Met a Bear*, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, *The Carrot Seed*, and *The Giving Tree*, were selected by the first author as the materials for a one-month storytelling project (Table 1). These eight storybooks, varying in length, covered a myriad of topics—colors, animals, occupations, and included intense, emotional and encouraging story plots—all designed for pleasure reading with meaningful and authentic contexts, a clear contrast with textbook-like reading materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Storybook</th>
<th>Author / Illustrator</th>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leo the Late Bloomer</td>
<td>Robert Kraus / Jose Aruego</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Snowman Storybook</td>
<td>Raymond Briggs</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Beauty</td>
<td>Anthony Browne</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willy the Dreamer</td>
<td>Anthony Browne</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Day I Met a Bear</td>
<td>Russell Ayto</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Carrot Seed</td>
<td>Ruth Krauss / Crockett Johnson</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Giving Tree</td>
<td>Shel Silverstein</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STORYTELLING PROCEDURE

The first author and Penny met twice a week for a total of eight sessions, each lasting about an hour, with 40 minutes for storytelling (and retelling; see below) and 20 minutes for a discussion of the story, except for the first and the last sessions, which included an extra hour in order to include the pre-tests, post-tests, and an interview. All storytelling sessions took place after the end of the school year (second grade).

English was the major medium of communication. When there were comprehension problems, the first author would appeal to Penny’s background knowledge, point to pictures in the books, and, as a last resort, explain in Mandarin, their first language.

After reading the story through without interruption, with the first author pointing to the words and occasionally pointing to pictures, the first author would ask Penny to tell him what the story was about. They would then go...
back to the storybook, starting from the first page, to see if Penny was right. If time permitted, the first author would ask Penny to take turns reading the story out-loud with him and sometimes they would role-play the story.

For the discussion, the first author would prepare several questions for Penny, asking about the story content and her opinions about the story. Most of the time only the content was discussed, as Penny would come up with her own questions about the stories. The first author would conclude story time by playing a recording of a story he had made himself. Since the storybooks were borrowed from the reading lab in the first author’s university, Penny did not have access to them after story time. For this reason, the first author provided Penny with story recordings and slides with pictures that went with the story. We have some evidence that Penny did indeed listen to the recordings at least occasionally, but do not have quantitative data.

At no time was Penny asked to do any activities related to vocabulary, nor was she told that she should try to remember the vocabulary used in the stories.

THE VOCABULARY LISTS

Two kinds of vocabulary lists—a storybook vocabulary list of 307 words and a textbook vocabulary list of 241 words, 80 for production and 161 for recognition, were used to measure Penny’s acquisition of vocabulary. The textbook vocabulary list was based on the vocabulary lists provided in the textbooks used in Penny’s EFL classes in school (Pearson Longman Book 1 to Book 4). The lists are presented in appendix 1 and appendix 2.

The full storybook list was used for the pre-test and post-test. Different forms of a verb, such as eat and ate, were counted as two different words.

VOCABULARY TESTING PROCEDURE

The first author tested Penny on the pre-storybook test and textbook test at the start of the first storybook session and the post-storybook test (identical to the pre-storybook test) after the last storybook session. Each administration of the tests took about an hour; Penny was willing to take the tests when it was explained that tests would not be included as part of the storytelling sessions. If Penny could supply the meaning(s) of the word in Chinese, she was given credit for knowing the word. In other words, the tests probed recognition.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of the vocabulary tests. The table includes the results of the storytelling vocabulary test given before and after the eight-week storytelling sessions, and the results of the test for the textbook words, administered once, before the read-aloud sessions began.

Table 2: Results of the Vocabulary Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>rate/hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storybook</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>256</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Storybook = words contained in storybooks
Textbook = words contained in textbooks used in school; test given before storybook sessions began.
Following Mason (2004), we performed an efficiency analysis, calculating words acquired per hour. As presented in Table 2, Penny acquired 52 new words over the eight weeks, a total of ten hours, resulting in a gain of 5.2 words per hour. We estimated that Penny had had 256 hours of English instruction before the storytelling sessions began. Her score of 111 on the pretest represents the number of words she had learned from her English textbooks in English class. The textbooks thus helped her learn new vocabulary at the rate of .43 words per hour in school, or about half of a word per hour. Picking up words incidentally from listening to stories appears to be more than ten times as effective as traditional formal English instruction for vocabulary acquisition based on a textbook, a result identical to that reported for reading in English as a first language (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson, 1985).

If Penny had spent a significant amount of time listening to the recordings the first author made for her, our figure of 5.2 words per hour would be an overestimate. But even if Penny had been a dedicated listener, spending 10 hours with the recordings, her resulting rate of acquisition would be 2.6 words per hour, still more than five times more efficient than instruction. In addition, it must be noted that we have no idea of how many words were introduced in class that were not in the textbook.

It could be argued that the pre-test, given in the first session, may have primed Penny to pay attention to certain words. This is possible, but there was no focus at all on remembering vocabulary during the reading sessions.

**DISCUSSION: AN UNFAIR COMPARISON?**

It can be argued that we have made an unfair comparison: Classes do more than focus only on vocabulary. But read-alouds and stories do far more than help vocabulary acquisition. There is good evidence that read-alouds and stories are a much richer source, not only of vocabulary, but also of grammar and cultural knowledge than textbooks (Hsieh, Wang, and Lee, 2011). It is therefore no surprise that studies show that read-alouds improve listening comprehension (Senechal and Lefevre, 2002) and grammatical development (Chomsky, 1972). In addition, read-alouds promote voluntary reading (Wang and Lee, 2007; Brassell, 2003; Cho and Choi, 2008), a powerful source of nearly all aspects of literacy.

Of course, the treatment included more than read-alouds. As noted in the text, Penny also engaged in discussion and retold the stories. Read-alouds were, however, the core of the treatment and consumed most of the time spent with Penny. Most important, none of the additional activities involved any kind of direct teaching.

Future research could systematically analyze all curriculum goals of traditional second and foreign language programs, and determine whether read-alouds and other forms of comprehensible input are more efficient for each goal. There is no question that they are more pleasant than traditional programs as well as less expensive than traditional materials.

**REFERENCES**


Can Stories And Self-Selected Reading Slow The Decline In Attitudes Toward English?

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Young Kim  
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ABSTRACT

Both fourth graders and sixth graders participating in an English program emphasizing hearing stories and self-selected reading had better attitudes than comparison students about English classes and liked reading more. Although sixth graders in both groups had more negative attitudes than the fourth graders, the difference between the groups was larger in sixth (6th) grade, suggesting that stories and reading can slow the decline of attitudes.

1 INTRODUCTION

It has been sixteen years since elementary English education started in Korea. Since then “English Fever” (Krashen, 2006) has spread throughout the country. There has, however, been a growing concern over declining children’s attitudes toward English as a foreign language. According to teachers, the majority of sixth (6th) grade students show negative attitudes while third (3rd) grade students are enthusiastic (Seong, 2003; Ryu, 2005).

Study after study has confirmed that including pleasure reading and hearing stories in EFL improves not only English competence, but also attitudes toward English (Cho, Ahn & Krashen, 2005; Cho & Choi, 2008; Cho & Kim, Hee J., 2005; Cho & Kim, Hey J., 2004; Wang & Lee, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to investigate if hearing stories and free reading in English make a difference on children’s attitudes toward English and can prevent or slow down this decline.

2 PROCEDURE

2.1 Subjects

Subjects were students of English as a foreign language enrolled in two different elementary schools in Korea in two grade levels, fourth grade (4) and sixth grade (6). According to the Busan Board of Education, the two schools were similar in socio-economic status.

Subjects from the experimental school were 127 fourth graders in five different classes and 165 sixth graders in six different classes.
Subjects in the comparison school were 135 fourth graders in five different classes and 128 sixth graders in five different classes.

2.2 The Experimental Program

In the experimental school, fourth graders had participated for two years in an English reading/story program as part of their English as a foreign language class and the sixth graders had participated for four years. In addition to regular instruction, thirty (30) minutes per week were dedicated to read-alouds by the teacher, and ten (10) minutes were dedicated to student self-selected reading in the library. Reading related activities such as book making and reading response journals were included. Students were not required to comment in their logs on each book they read.

Students in the experimental program had access to an English library containing about 4000 books and 2000 books were available on the Internet. In addition to the library book access, all of the Internet books were available for free reading.

The comparison school did not include reading or read-alouds as part of English class, but followed the traditional national English curriculum.

2.4 The Survey

In order to examine the effects of the read-aloud/reading program on students’ attitudes toward English and toward reading, a questionnaire in Korean was distributed to students in each school at the beginning of the spring semester.

The survey questionnaire consisted of four items and was administered in Korean. Students were asked if they agreed or disagreed with each item, responding on a five-point scale (1= a great deal, 5 = not at all). Reliability was high (Cronbach alpha = .95).

2.4.1 Questionnaire items

1. I like English. (ENGLISH)
2. I usually enjoy reading English storybooks or other English books. (PL READ)
3. I enjoy English class and look forward to it. (LIKE CLASS)
4. I have confidence in my English study. (CONFIDENCE)

3 The Hypotheses

The hypotheses to be investigated were these:

1. The experimental groups in both grades will show superior attitudes toward English and reading for pleasure, will like English class better and will have more confidence in studying English.
2. Differences in attitudes will be larger in grade six (6) than in grade four (4), because of experimental students' greater participation in the story/self-selected reading program.
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

Hypothesis 1: The experimental groups in both grades will show superior attitudes toward English and reading for pleasure, will like English class better and will have more confidence in studying English.

For both grades four (4) and six (6), this hypothesis was supported. Differences between the groups were statistically significant for all measures (table 1).

### Table 1. Difference between the groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>PL READ</th>
<th>LIKE CLASS</th>
<th>CONFIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRADE 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp (N=120)</td>
<td>4.03 (.108)</td>
<td>3.41 (1.27)</td>
<td>3.91 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.02 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com(N=134)</td>
<td>3.64 (1.28)</td>
<td>2.89 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.46 (1.2)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DF = 252</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRADE 6</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp (N=158)</td>
<td>3.95 (.94)</td>
<td>3.05 (1.10)</td>
<td>3.73 (.92)</td>
<td>3.69 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com (N=128)</td>
<td>3.43 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.43 (1.12)</td>
<td>3.02 (1.02)</td>
<td>3.27 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DF = 284</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All t-tests one-tailed.
Standard deviations in parentheses

Hypothesis 2: Differences in attitudes will be larger in grade six (6) than in grade four (4).

Inspection of effect sizes in Table 1 shows that this was true for all measures.

4.2 A decline in attitudes

The data in table 1 reveals that both groups of fourth graders had better attitudes in all measures than did sixth graders. Table 2 shows that the difference was significant in all cases except for experimental groups' attitude toward English and toward English class (p = .13, in the latter case, two-tailed test), and the comparison group's attitude toward English (close to significance, p = .07, two-tailed test).
Table 2. Difference between attitudes in grades 4 and 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Df</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL READ</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Df</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIKE CLASS</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Df</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFIDENCE</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>2.52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Df</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ES</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All t-tests 2 tailed

Effect sizes in table 2 also indicate that the difference between grades four (4) and six (6) was larger for the comparison group in these cases. This is an important finding. It suggests that reading experience and hearing stories slow the decline of attitudes between grades four (4) and six (6).

Figure 1 illustrates the "braking effect" of the read-aloud/self-selected reading program, based on the attitude toward English class results. (All numbers rounded off, for ease of interpretation.)

Figure 1. Attitude toward English class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As presented in figure 1, in grade four (4), the experimental group scored .4 points higher than the comparison group. Grade six (6) scores are lower than grade four (4) scores for both groups, but in grade six (6), the experimental group scored .7 points higher than the comparison group. The "decline" is greater for the comparison group.

If reading and hearing stories can slow down the decline in attitudes toward English, and toward reading itself, it may be the case that more stories, and more reading, especially more comprehensible and exciting reading, can eliminate the decline completely and even improve attitudes among older children. One teacher of the experimental students, in fact, remarked that students often found the books available to them to be difficult.

4.3 Caveats

4.3.1 Social class differences

According to the Busan Board of Education, the two schools participating in this study were similar in socio-economic status. Higher SES children generally have more access to reading material, but precise data for these subjects is lacking.

4.3.2 Cross-sectional

The grade four (4) - six (6) comparisons were cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and should be confirmed in a longitudinal study studying the same children in grade four (4) and two years later in grade six (6).

The results, however, are very consistent with previous studies showing the impact of reading on language acquisition and literacy development in first and second language development.

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References


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Does Duolingo “Trump” University-Level Language Learning?

Stephen Krashen

Duolingo is a web-based self-paced language teaching program that guides students step-by-step through a sequence of tasks, largely based on translation. It is clearly aimed at conscious learning, although some subconscious acquisition of language is inevitable, as students hear and read samples of the language.

The Duolingo website (http://www.duolingo.com) claims that Duolingo is “scientifically proven”: “An independent study found that Duolingo trumps university-level language learning.” That study is Vesselinov and Grego (2012), funded by Duolingo.

Vesselinov and Grego, however, do not claim that Duolingo is better or worse than any other language course, but restrict their analysis to progress made on Duolingo by volunteer subjects who responded to an ad on the internet.

Subjects were asked to use Duolingo for 30 hours and to take a standardized test, the WebCAPE, a multiple-choice test that is clearly form-based (http://cflc.bard.edu/test/).

The subjects

Participants in their study were not typical of university students: Their average age was 35, 69% were college graduates and many had graduate degrees.

The mean time dedicated to Duolingo was 22 hours, but there was substantial variation: 25% of the subjects completed eight hours or less, with one student doing only two hours. Some students did much more than the average, with one student completing 133 hours. The standard deviation around the mean of 22 hours was large, 20.4 hours. There was a high drop-out rate: Only 90 of the 156 subjects who started the program lasted until the end.

The results

Vesselinov and Grego report that their students gained at a mean rate of 8.1 points on a standardized test for each hour of study. There was, however, substantial variability in rate: the standard deviation was 12.1. Vesselinov and Grego reported the median rate of development as well as the mean: The median is a measure of the average that is less influenced by extreme scores: The median rate was 3.9 points per hour.

Those who said they were studying Spanish for personal interest or school did much worse than those with a more focused purpose, business or travel (26 of the 88 whose scores were used on the final exam). In fact, the differences among the groups were astonishing (table 1):
Table 1: Reason for Study and Rate of Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>reason for study</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>rate (mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business/work</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal interest or school</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From: Vesselinov and Grego (table 11).
Rate = points gained on standardized test per hour

In summary, Vesselinov and Grego clearly show that there is a great deal of variability in time dedicated and progress when volunteers do an online, self-paced foreign language class that focuses on conscious learning of rules and vocabulary.

**Does Duolingo “trump” university level language classes?**

Vesselinov and Grego, as noted above, calculated a mean gain of 8.1 points per hour (and a median gain of 3.9 points per hour). At a rate of 8.1 points per hour, it would take a beginner 34 hours to do the equivalent of one semester of college Spanish, based on 34 * 8.1 = 275; 270 is the minimum score needed on the WebCAPE to enter the second semester. It is difficult, however, to compare this to typical university foreign language instruction in which students are often not volunteers, are typically less motivated, are younger and less experienced, and there is little or no chance for students to proceed at their own pace.

**Students’ reactions**

Of the 88 who completed the program, 66 completed an exit survey, and of these 66, 78.8% said they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were “satisfied with Duolingo.”

This is impressive, but we must consider that this was the view of 66 out of the 156 who started the program; of course, we do not know the reasons of the other 90 for dropping out of the program.

**Acquisition versus Learning**

Both Duolingo and most foreign language instruction are based on conscious learning, as was the test used in Vesselinov and Grego. There is a great deal of evidence showing that conscious learning does not produce true language competence. Among this evidence is the consistent finding that methods that promote subconscious language acquisition are far more effective than traditional methods on communicative tests and are slightly more effective or just as effective on tests of grammar (Krashen, 1982, 2003). Efficiency studies of the impact of comprehensible input (gains per unit of time) also reveal a superiority for acquisition-oriented methods over skill-based methods (Mason, 2004; 2011; Mason, Vanata, Jander, Borsch, and Krashen, 2009).

It will be of interest to see the effect and the efficiency of self-paced, easily accessible courses that focus on encouraging language acquisition, as contrasted with language learning. (Rosetta Stone does not fit this description. For discussion, see Krashen, 2012).
Acknowledgement

I thank Prof. Roumen Vesselinov for very helpful and patient discussion.

References


Mason, B. 2011. Impressive gains on the TOEIC after one year of comprehensible input, with no output or grammar study. International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 7(1). (www.ijflt.org)


Pleasure reading and the acquisition of second language by adult ESL students

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Abstract
The study examined the effects of pleasure reading by comparing performance between aesthetic readers and efferent readers on a proficiency test that tests knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, writing competence and general understanding. The aesthetic readers easily outperformed the efferent readers as the input they received was more pleasurable, which lowered their affective filters. The results showed that pleasure reading is a powerful tool that helped the readers acquire language in a low anxiety state.

Keywords: Low Affective Filter, Pleasure Reading, Pleasant Comprehensible Input, Incidental Acquisition

Introduction
It has been hypothesized that extensive reading results in the acquisition of all measures of language competence including grammar, comprehension, vocabulary, syntax, fluency and writing style in a second language performance. (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Waring & Takaki, 2003; Hitosugi, C. I. & Day, R., 2004; Kim & Cho, 2005; Krashen, 2004; Lee, S.Y., 2005; Ponniah, 2011; Liburd & Rodrigo, 2012). Extensive readers, in general, read either for information or for pleasure. This study attempts to explore the potentials of pleasure reading, a powerful tool in second language education that not only results in language acquisition but also creates a pleasurable learning environment. The anxiety level of the readers will be very low when they are
involved in pleasure reading because this kind of reading is enjoyable. The pleasure component becomes the driving force for the readers to read more and eventually they may spend more time on reading and will read more frequently (Ujiie & Krashen, 2002).

Readers who read for information read only when the need arises and do not read frequently and for long durations. It is thus likely that pleasure reading or aesthetic reading is more efficient when compared to reading for information and the readers who read for pleasure outperform those who read for information.

The goal of the study is to determine the effects of pleasure reading by comparing performance between aesthetic readers and efferent readers on a proficiency test. If Pleasure Reading results in better comprehension, writing competence and overall acquisition of language including grammar, vocabulary, writing style and general understanding, language acquirers can be encouraged to read for pleasure.

THE STUDY

Participants

The participants in this study were fifty first-year engineering students from India who had had studied English as a second language for twelve years. All subjects had received the same amount of formal instruction and exposure in English. Their English language proficiency and their general understanding of the language were considered to be fairly high as they all had passed the All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE), one of the toughest competitive exams for higher education in India.

Procedure

A challenging test comprising four components, reading comprehension, vocabulary (cloze test), grammar and error correction and written language competence, was administered. The difficulty level of the test was high. The test contained items such as the following:

*After reading a passage explaining the causes of obesity:*

People’s eating habits during the time of stress are said to indicate

- a) Overweight people are tense
- b) Thin people don’t eat under stress
- c) 56% of the population is overweight
- d) A large number of people deal with stress by eating.
A cloze test in which subjects were asked to fill in each blank with a suitable word:
The system at ___ in the schools and at the work ___ should change from sheer
obedience as a ___ greater than inquisitiveness.

Rewrite the passage, correcting errors.
Interviewees should be encouraged to relax, talk freely about themselves and to ask the panel
questions.

Write a paragraph incorporating a given sentence:
That was when he realized why so many people believed Krishna.

The test papers were evaluated by the authors. The reliability of the test was modest, Cronbach alpha = .683, just below the .7 level usually considered to be adequate.

A questionnaire was given to the students to confirm that they had the habit of reading in
English and to categorize them as Aesthetic or Efferent readers. Four subjects responded that
they read both informative articles and stories, comics and novels. Discussion with the subjects
indicated that they read some informative articles for pleasure and are therefore categorized as
aesthetic readers.

Results
All 50 students answered that they indeed had a habit of reading in English. Their answers
to the second question and discussion with the students helped the researchers to categorize the
participants as aesthetic readers and efferent readers.

Table 1 presents the responses of the subjects to the second question ‘State the kind of
books you read.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s. no</th>
<th>Aesthetic Readers</th>
<th>Efferent Readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Novels / short stories / newspapers / fiction / adventure / mystery / plays</td>
<td>I read the newspaper everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I sometimes do like detective novels or adventure novels or any book not in my syllabus.</td>
<td>Hindu newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I read stories of genres like thrillers, mystery and science fiction. Authors being Sidney Sheldon, Isaac Asimov, Peter F. Hamilton, Jeffrey Archer, Robin Sharma, etc.</td>
<td>Newspaper reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Usually authors like Chetan Bhagat, Jeffrey Archer and Dan Brown</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My preferred genres are science fiction and high fantasy. Eragon, Lord of the Rings and Septimus Heap are the three series I have recently read in the high fantasy genre. In science fiction, my most recent reads were Ender’s Game by Orson Scott Card. I am planning to read Isaac Asimov next.</td>
<td>Newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Comics</td>
<td>I read technical books and autobiographies of famous personalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fantasy, biography, thriller (the subject reads biography for pleasure even though “biography” is categorized here as informative)</td>
<td>I read only technical books and magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>I read newspapers and academic books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Novels – science fiction, thrillers</td>
<td>Academic books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Comics or detective novels</td>
<td>I read articles of various kinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>I read encyclopedias and when some news is interesting in newspapers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like to read novels which involve fantasy and adventure.</td>
<td>I like to read technological books. My favourite is Digit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Novels – thrillers, science fiction, classics, sometimes fantasy</td>
<td>1 hour a week. (discussion with the student shows that he reads only for information. He does not have a pleasure reading habit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Novels – thrillers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I read fiction and adventure stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I prefer novels to short stories. Any interesting papers on astronomical studies are also one of my choices. (the subject also reads informative articles on astronomy for pleasure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I read storybooks and novels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Historical stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Story books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Fantasy, mystery, thriller, horror, comedy, romance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Crime and thriller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fiction, short stories. Anything with a good story line.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Comics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Novels, by prominent writers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Fiction, fantasy and thrillers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>I read fiction mostly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I read novels (mysteries) and books about astronomy (the subject reads astronomy articles for pleasure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>I like to read adventure and mystery books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I read sports articles (Discussion with the student indicated that he reads such articles for pleasure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Mostly fiction, detective stories, comics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>I mostly read novels by Sidney Sheldon and Dan Brown and also short stories by Ruskin Bond and Katherine Mansfield.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Sci-fi novels, comics, crime &amp; thriller novels, fantasy novels, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>I read detective novels and fiction books.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 presents the Independent samples t-test results for both groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean score for Aesthetic readers</th>
<th>Mean score for Efferent readers</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Effect size (d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>6.93 (1.57)</td>
<td>6.38 (1.12)</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary (Cloze Test)</td>
<td>6.84 (1.34)</td>
<td>5.84 (1.84)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and Error Correction</td>
<td>7.71 (2.41)</td>
<td>5.38 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3.55 (.94)</td>
<td>2.26 (.99)</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>25.05 (4.12)</td>
<td>19.88 (3.88)</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 37 for Aesthetic readers and 13 for Efferent readers, standard deviations for raw scores given in parenthesis. Maximum score for Reading comprehension, Vocabulary, Writing competence is 10 each and for Grammar and error correction 20.

Aesthetic readers clearly did better on the test, and the differences were statistically significant for Vocabulary, Grammar and Error Correction; Writing, and Reading Comprehension, but the difference was not statistically significant in the case of Reading Comprehension.

The overall scores of the Aesthetic readers were significantly greater.

**Discussion**

The subjects of both groups acquired language subconsciously as they received comprehensible input. But, the presence of a pleasure component in the input helped aesthetic readers acquire more language, which is consistent with the pleasure hypothesis.

Because Aesthetic readers have enjoyment as their goal, it is likely that they read more than Efferent readers. It is plausible that this is the reason for their superior performance, as well as the presence of a lower affective filter.

A possible flaw of the design is the fact that the study is the lack of control of out-of-school reading. A severe test of the hypothesis that reading for pleasure is superior would make sure all reading is done in-class. This may be impossible to do, because Aesthetic readers will continue to read outside of school.
References
Ponniah, R. J., 2011. Incidental Acquisition of vocabulary by Reading. The Reading Matrix 11(2), 135 – 139.

“The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.”

Ezra Pound
Making Movies More Comprehensible: The Narrative/Paraphrase Approach (reprinted from IJFLT Vol. 2, Num. 2, Fall 2006)

Brenda Murphy and Ashley Hastings

Shenandoah University

It can be argued that movies are today’s literature: newspapers regularly report movie attendance and publish detailed reviews, and a sure way to open a successful conversation is to ask “Did you see …?” But this potential source of comprehensible input is not available to second language acquirers until they reach the highest levels.

In this paper, we describe an approach to making movies more comprehensible for second language students and present evidence supporting its effectiveness. The approach was developed as a part of the Focal Skills Approach (Hastings 1995, 1996) in which university level ESL students participate in models devoted exclusively to one aspect of language at a time. Each module lasts several weeks, and includes 15 hours per week of class-time. The approach we describe here is part of the Listening Module, which is presented first in the sequence of modules.

Movies have the potential of being excellent sources of comprehensible input, since they usually feature a coherent plot, a set of main characters, and recurring environments. Viewers thus establish a framework that facilitates the comprehension of new information as the movie progresses. But the language of movies is complex.

The central purpose of the Narrative/Paraphrase technique is to enhance the input that students hear, making it more comprehensible than the movie sound track. The technique has two key features.

First, the teacher narrates the scenes in deliberate, clear, simple English, describing and commenting on the objects, characters, places, and actions that are on the screen at that very moment. This enables the students to associate what they hear with what they see, making the spoken input more comprehensible than it would be without the images.

Second, the teacher paraphrases some of the dialogue, especially when it is of particular interest or importance in following the story. These paraphrases make the input more comprehensible than the original sound track by replacing less common words with more common ones, by simplifying structures, and by furnishing deliberate, clear pronunciation. This is important, because there is often little on the screen in the way of visible referents to assist students in understanding.

the MSEd-TESOL.
She taught English in Japan for 17 years and recently spent 8 months in Italy.

Ashley Hastings has taught in Wisconsin, Texas, and Virginia, and is now Professor Emeritus of TESOL at Shenandoah University.

Brenda Murphy, Associate Professor and co-founder of the TESOL program at Shenandoah University, received her PhD from New York University's Graduate School of Education, and later added the MSEd-TESOL.
Research on Effectiveness

The movie technique has usually accounted for most of the class time in the Focal Skills’ Listening Module. Thus, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Listening Module is, at least to some extent, an evaluation of the movie technique, even though other means of delivering aural comprehensible input are typically used.

In Hastings (1995), 74 students in the Listening Module of a FOCAL SKILLS program were compared with 42 similar students in a standard ESL program. The scores are from the FOCAL SKILLS Listening Assessment, and represent the percentage of items understood. As indicated in table 1, Focal Skills students easily outperformed the comparisons.

Table 1: Focus Skills vs. traditional ESL, Listening Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>duration</th>
<th>pretest</th>
<th>postest</th>
<th>gain/wk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focal Skills</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>20.8 (18.8)</td>
<td>43 (26.9)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>20.7 (20.7)</td>
<td>27 (25)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effect size (d) = 1.81, p < .001

A Quantitative Lexical Analysis of the Narrative/Paraphrase Technique

Additional evidence comes from a study of the vocabulary used in the movie technique, as compared to the vocabulary used in the actual film. In these studies, we asked two questions: First, to what extent does the teacher’s narration use words referring to visible matters, and how does this compare with the soundtrack? Second, to what extent do the teacher’s paraphrases of dialogue simplify the vocabulary of the soundtrack by using more common words?

“Illustrated” Words

In order to study the first question, we selected 15 movies that had often been used in the Listening Module. We then used a random number generator to pick a single one-minute segment from each movie. We viewed the segment, listening to the soundtrack and noting every instance of a word that was heard while its referent was visible (nouns, verbs, and adjectives were considered). We then replayed the segment and narrated the scenes, noting the nouns, verbs, and adjectives that we were able to use while their referents were visible. This procedure was repeated for all 15 movies; the combined results are given below.

Table 2: mean number of “illustrated words” in 15 segments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>sound track</th>
<th>narr/paraph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean (s.d.)</td>
<td>2.1 (1.5)</td>
<td>18.5 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that the movie narration technique far exceeds the typical soundtrack in terms of the amount of illustrated vocabulary provided, strongly suggesting that a student can get many more comprehensible words from the teacher’s narration than he or she could obtain by listening to the soundtrack alone.

Word Frequency

We approached the second question by videotaping a portion of a Listening Module class taught by Brenda Murphy at Shenandoah University and studying the differences between the vocabulary used in the soundtrack dialogue and the vocabulary used in the teacher’s paraphrase. We examined the first 100 nouns, verbs, and adjectives occurring in each source and determined their frequency by consulting Carroll, Davies, and Richman (1971). The mean ranks of the words in the dialogue and the narration are shown below.
Table 3: Frequency of words used in the film and in the narration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frequency rank</th>
<th>sound track</th>
<th>narr/paraph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the teacher’s paraphrase used a vocabulary that, on the average, contained more high-frequency words and fewer low-frequency words than the original dialogue. Because most of the words are relatively common, students are more likely to be at least somewhat familiar with them. The paraphrase can therefore be considered more comprehensible than the movie sound track.

**Conclusion**

The data presented here support the hypothesis that the narrative/paraphrasing movie technique enhances the comprehensibility of input. Students in the Focus Skills Listening Module spend many hours every week listening to spoken English that is transparently related to visible referents, or that is phrased in relatively accessible vocabulary.

Since the sound tracks are not very comprehensible to our students, we use narration and paraphrase. These measures allow the students to hear language that is much more comprehensible than the sound track, because the vocabulary refers to visible matters or is drawn from those words that they are likely to know already. The requirements for acquisition are thus satisfied, and we observe that our students do in fact develop listening comprehension much faster than students in other ESL programs that do not use the movie technique.

Of course, this technique is not the only one that can be used to make movies more comprehensible. Cho (in press) provides strong evidence that reading a graded reader corresponding to a movie before seeing it also enhances comprehensibility. We are eager to see if combining these two ways of making input more comprehensible will lead to even stronger results and more movie enjoyment for second language acquirers.

**References**


Cho, K.S. Read the Book, See the Movie, Acquire More English. Reading Improvement (in press).


MovieTalk: 25 Years Old and Still Going Strong

Ashley Hastings
Global Language Education Services
December 18, 2013

As MovieTalk seems to be gaining in popularity within the TPRS and CI communities, I thought a quick review of its history might be of interest to readers of this journal.

The roots of MovieTalk go back to the fall of 1987, when the teachers in the Intensive English Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee were preparing for a fundamental change in program structure—from a traditional multi-level integrated skills approach to an innovative modular system that later came to be called “FOCAL SKILLS.” This new approach was designed to feature comprehensible input and authentic materials in all phases of instruction, with full-time instructional modules focused on listening, reading, and writing, in that order. (For details, see the International Center for FOCAL SKILLS.)

Barb Wheatley and I were developing ideas for the Listening Module, which was meant to boost students’ listening comprehension to the low-intermediate level. We needed to find ways of presenting comprehensible aural input without relying on written materials for support, since many of the students might lack English reading ability. We were intrigued by the possibility of using ordinary English language movies, because they are authentic, enjoyable, and plentiful.

Our initial plan was to focus on dialogue, seeking ways to make it more comprehensible for the students. We chose “The African Queen” as our first project. The two of us wrote simplified dialogue and recorded it on an audio cassette, paraphrasing the actors’ lines. Barb spoke the lines of Katharine Hepburn; I used my normal voice for Humphrey Bogart and altered my voice in various ways for the other male actors. We did this for the entire movie. The audio recording was carefully constructed so that it could be played in synchrony with the movie. As readers can imagine, this work took many hours.

We field-tested our concept in two low-level oral skills classes. Our procedure was to show the movie in short segments, each played twice: first with the movie sound on, then with the movie silent and the simplified dialogue tape playing. During the repetition, we narrated the scenes whenever there was no dialogue. The students thought this was all a bit strange, but they seemed to like it, and their listening comprehension did improve noticeably.

Although this field test was somewhat encouraging, we had already realized that the amount of labor required to prepare and use the dialogue tapes was prohibitive. Furthermore, by this time it had dawned on us that our narrations were providing vastly greater amounts of comprehensible input than the dialogue could give.

Every language teacher knows how useful pictures can be in illustrating the meanings of new words. A movie contains thousands of pictures (frames) that illustrate many nouns, verbs, and adjectives. When we narrate a movie scene in clear, simple language, while pointing to various parts of the picture, we are providing
vocabulary that corresponds to what the students are seeing. We are also modeling the common grammatical structures that occur naturally in our narration. All this adds up to high-quality comprehensible input embedded within the flow of a coherent, interesting story—which, in terms of Krashen’s Input and Affective Filter hypotheses (Krashen, 1982), should be ideal for language acquisition.

With narration assuming center stage, dialogue was relegated to a supporting role, requiring attention only when it was essential for understanding the plot of the movie. I calculated that I could meet this need on the fly during my movie presentation, by paraphrasing, pantomiming, or drawing simple sketches to clarify the meaning of important dialogue.

Armed with this new approach, I used “Rear Window” for my second field test, and it went amazingly well. By June 1988, when I taught the first FOCAL SKILLS Listening Module, I was using a technique that for all intents and purposes was identical to what we now call “MovieTalk.” (Originally, I called it the “FOCAL SKILLS Movie Technique”; I coined the name “MovieTalk” in 2009.)

MovieTalk, then, was originally designed for use in the Listening modules of pre-university intensive English FOCAL SKILLS programs, and my accounts of this technique, in various writings, presentations, demonstrations, and training materials, have always assumed this type of environment. (See the MovieTalk Tutorial link at the end of this article for a detailed description.)

The three essential components of MovieTalk are: selection, preparation, and presentation. Movies selected should be visually appealing, with an interesting plot that does not rely too much on dialogue. Preparation involves viewing the movie several times in order to divide it into coherent short segments, rehearse narration, and plan ways to deal with difficult dialogue. Presentation takes place in cyclic fashion: each segment is played once without interruption, then repeated with frequent pauses for narration, paraphrases, etc. During the repetition, the audio is normally allowed to play as before; it will of course fall silent when the movie is paused for narration. In cases when the teacher wishes to narrate during action, without pausing, it’s usually best to mute the audio temporarily.

No doubt there will be many adaptations and modifications as MovieTalk finds its way into more and more language classrooms. In public schools, for example, it will be important to select age-appropriate movies; and because of the shorter class meetings, teachers may find materials such as cartoons, television shows, and internet videos to be more useful than feature-length films.

The essential feature of MovieTalk is comprehensible input through narration of interesting movies. As long as this feature remains front and center, I believe MovieTalk will continue to be a productive and enjoyable way to teach languages.

I would like to thank Barb Wheatley for reading earlier drafts of this article and suggesting several improvements. I alone am responsible for any errors.
For further exploration

Articles


Other Internet Resources
International Center for FOCAL SKILLS. http://focalskills.info/


— Nelson Mandela

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”
Building Community with “The Special Person”

Bryce Hedstrom  
Roosevelt High School, Johnstown, Colorado

The Special Person (La Persona Especial) is an important and popular part of the class that involves getting to know real facts about real people with real language. Every student is interviewed in the target language at some point toward the beginning of the semester. The complexity of the interview grows along with student growth in the language. Students are continually learning about each other throughout the semester. This kind of questioning can help students in a number of ways:

1) It helps students to learn the language in a relaxed social context. We use the most useful expressions and highest frequency vocabulary repeatedly, which helps students to acquire the target language quickly and subconsciously and in a comfortable way. Students are not forced to produce the language, but most of them want to speak because they are sharing their stories and details about their lives.

2) It helps to build community in the classroom by modeling respect and interest in others. When students know one another they are more likely to treat each other better. The growing knowledge base bonds the class together and makes each student feel like a viable member of the tribe.

3) It teaches a combination of vital 21st Century Skills: Learning & Innovation Skills (Thinking Creatively, Working Creatively with Others, Communicating Clearly), Life & Career Skills (Interacting Effectively with Others, Guiding and Leading Others, Being Responsible to Others) and of course the 21st Century Core Subject & Theme of World Languages. All of these can be taught with or without high technology applications. (Terminology borrowed from Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel’s 21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in our Times)

4) It teaches students how to have a conversation and how to show interest in others. When someone says he plays the guitar, for example, we NEVER just

EXAMPLE:
So with the guitar player we follow up with questions like:

• How many years have you played the guitar?
• Do you play the guitar every day?
• What kind of guitar do you have?
• How many guitars do you have?
• Where is the guitar from?

• Did you buy the guitar?
• Did you buy it with your own money?
• Was the guitar a gift?
• Do you take guitar lessons?
• Do you play in a band here at school?
• Do you play your guitar alone?
• Do you play with friends?
• Do you play in your own band?
• Do you want to play in a band?
• Do you play any other instruments?
shrug and say “cool”, we ask follow up questions. We try to draw some more information out of the person because we are genuinely interested in him. We try to engage him and get him to open up a bit by focusing on his experience, background, activities, interests, abilities, talents and strengths. Students are later responsible for the information they learn about each other. This allows them to focus on meaning and content and more easily acquire the language. They will later be responsible in extension activities or class discussions and asked to recall details that students shared during these interviews.

I want my students to know that the things that create an interesting life are not merely the typical straightjacket thinking that too often passes for interesting in school. I want to free up each student to create a lasting and interesting life by embracing openness, taking risks, being honest, making friends, thinking, understanding humor, having a sense of adventure, developing sensitivity to others, awakening confidence, appreciating family, becoming humble, trying new things, trusting intuition, exploring gifts, having the courage to be different, developing a quick wit, reading, writing, telling good jokes, embracing different hobbies, delighting others, doing non-standard activities, and appreciating the world. There is at least one student’s name and face attached to each of those outstanding qualities in my mind—and we learned about those qualities by interviewing students in the target language. We can encourage students to explore and develop these qualities by showing interest in them and appreciating their responses—by asking them questions and urging them to tell their stories. I want to communicate clearly that we don’t expect perfection; we expect growth.

The day after we interviewed a new transfer student (with significant assistance with translation from her new classmates) I overheard a couple of girls walking out of the classroom with her. They said, “You are going to love this class. We all know each other and like each other.” That was a proud moment, because the Persona Especial part of the class was working the way it was designed to work. The kids were getting to know and respect one another and they were learning a lot of Spanish at the same time.

The possibilities for conversation are endless and so are the amazing things we can learn about one another when we just talk. This kind of interaction is the foundation of the crucial Interpersonal Communication component of learning another language and it is also the foundation of knowing and respecting one another in the classroom.

Bryce Hedstrom teaches Spanish at Roosevelt High School in Johnstown, Colorado. He writes TCI/TPRS teaching materials and is a workshop presenter. More information may be found on his website, brycehedstrom.com. An excerpt from 21st Century Skills can be found here: http://21stcenturyskillsbook.com/wp-content/uploads/21stCS_excerpt.pdf

This is another in a series of articles on personalizing the Comprehension-Based language classroom. Previous articles can be found here:

Is Input More Interesting When It's About Me?

10 Ideas for Personalizing that Language Classroom Every Day
Upcoming workshops on personalization include:
Karen Rowan, Austin, Texas, June 19, 2014
http://www.rsvpbook.com/event.php?432106#Sessions

Karen Rowan, Los Angeles, August 9, 2014
http://www.rsvpbook.com/event.php?432106#Sessions

Sessions at iFLT, Denver, Colorado
http://tprstorytelling.com/conference/

Sessions at NTPRS, Naperville, Illinois
http://www.ntprs.org

Bryce Hedstrom, Greeley, Colorado, Understanding TPRS Workshop, February 8, 2014

Bryce Hedstrom, (CCFLT) Spring Conference, Loveland, Colorado, 2/21-2/24

Additional resources can be found on Bryce Hedstrom's website, brycehedstrom.com

Submissions for future editions by teachers on their experiences with personalization are invited.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela

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The link is: https://www.facebook.com/ijfltorg
By Karen Rowan

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in attempting to explain the African concept of Ubuntu, begins this way:
“Ubuntu is an approach to life that is very difficult to describe in English words.”

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, understood the crux of this problem. We cannot completely understand the perspective of another without understanding the language in which he speaks.

He cautioned his wardens that someday, when all of this was over, that they would be sitting across a table from each other negotiating. The outcome of that conversation, he prophesized, would be determined by how the wardens treated the political prisoners during their years of captivity. Twenty-seven years later, that proved to be true.

In endeavoring to understand the perspective of his captors while a political prisoner, he began to learn the language of his white wardens, Afrikaans.

Fellow political prisoner Fikile Bam gave an interview with PBS about Nelson Mandela.

“Well, Nelson was very serious about his Afrikaans, and not just the language, but he was very serious about learning to understand the Afrikaner--his mind and how he thought. Because in his mind, and he actually preached this, the Afrikaner was an African. He belonged to the soil and that whatever solution there was going to be on the political issues, was going to involve Afrikaans people. They, after all, were part and parcel with the land, apart from the points that they were the rulers of the land, but ... they had grown up and they had a history in the country, which he wanted to understand. And hence put a lot of work and effort into learning to speak Afrikaans and to use it ... He had absolutely no qualms about greeting people in Afrikaans, and about trying his Afrikaans out on the warders. He did not have any inhibition at all about that [...] He wanted to really get to know Afrikaners, as part of the people who belonged to the country.”

“Mandela himself studied Afrikaans systematically,” writes Sampson, author of the authorized biography of Nelson Mandela, “reading many Afrikaans books, and spoke it quite well.”

Here’s an excerpt from the History Channel’s biography of Mandela:

“During his incarceration Mandela taught himself to speak Afrikaans and learned about Afrikaner history. He was able to converse with his guards in their own language, using his charm and intelligence to reason with them and try to understand the way they thought. This caused the authorities to replace the guards around Mandela regularly as it was felt that they could were becoming too lenient in their treatment of their famous prisoner.”

What Language Teachers and Learners Can Learn from Nelson Mandela: Ubuntu: I am because we are
Archbishop Desmond Tutu continues struggling to find English words to define Ubuntu:
“It speaks to the very essence of being human. Saying, ‘My humanity is caught up… is inextricably bound up in yours. We belong in a bundle of life.’
And so we say in our part of the world, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’

It says not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather ‘I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. In harmony, friendliness, community[…] that you and I are made for interdependence. You and I are made for complementality. You have gifts that I don’t have and I have gifts that you don’t have.’
And you might almost see God rubbing God’s hands in glee… Voila! That is exactly why I created you… that you should know your need for the other.”

At the age of 91, Nelson Mandela was sitting eating in his own living room. John Carlin, author of the 2009 book “Knowing Mandela” said that Mandela, previously barely engaged in the conversation interjected “My people said I was afraid. They said I was a coward because I reached out to the Afrikaner… They have seen the results. We have peace.”

It is notable, that the growth of Mandela’s Afrikaans was attributable to reading. All that is required for language acquisition to take place, according to Stephen Krashen, is “access to books and a quiet comfortable place to read.” Mandela had time and access to books, if not a comfortable place in which to read.

Language and culture are intertwined and interdependent. As speakers of other languages, we are also sowing the seeds of peace and mutual understanding. The big picture of language teaching and learning is the responsibility we have to conscientiously seek to understand the perspective of the people whose language we are learning.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, died at the age of 95 on December 5, 2013. A political prisoner for 27 years, he learned Afrikaans while in prison and ultimately obtained for the citizens of South Africa the right to vote. For his collaboration with then President Frederik Willem de Klerk, they both received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 “for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa.” Mandela followed as the next President of South Africa.
Perspectives on Ubuntu

“Ubuntu is an approach to life that is very difficult to describe in English words. It speaks to the very essence of being human. Saying, ‘My humanity is caught up… is inextricably bound up in yours. We belong in a bundle of life.’ And so we say in our part of the world, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’

It says not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather ‘I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. In harmony, friendliness, community[...] that you and I are made for interdependence. You and I are made for complementality. You have gifts that I don’t have and I have gifts that you don’t have.’ And you might almost see God rubbing God’s hands in glee… ‘Voila! That is exactly why I created you… that you should know your need for the other.’” -Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“A person is a person through other people strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance”. -Michael Onyebuchi Eze, addressing “the core of Ubuntu.”

“In the old days when we were young, a traveller through a country would stop at a village, and he didn’t have to ask for food or for water: once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it will have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not address themselves. The question therefore is, are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you, and enable it to improve? These are the important things in life. And if one can do that, you have done something very important which will be appreciated.” Nelson Mandela, in an interview with Tim Modise.


Tutu, Desmond on Ubuntu. Web. youtube.com/watch?v=GaiKX5VdfVE
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