

# Is Input More Interesting When It's About Me?

By Karen Rowan

Personalizing is one way to provide compelling, comprehensible input. Here are the five basic elements that contribute to language acquisition.

## **What the brain pays attention to**

The crucial missing element in many otherwise successful classroom instruction programs is personalization. Our brains are attracted to and learn relevant information. We pay attention to things that are relevant to us and disregard the irrelevant. In any given moment, we are disregarding more than 90% of the information available in our surroundings. This is why we can remember the entire plot of a TV show but cannot recall what commercials aired in what order at what time. Irrelevant information is not stored.

## **Relevant and compelling**

Information must be relevant and also compelling. Our brains pay attention if it's about us and also interesting. In fact, we will eagerly eavesdrop on a conversation happening at a nearby table if it is dramatic and exciting even if it's not any of our business. We may even remember the details of the strangers' argument well enough to recount the details later.

## **Relevant, compelling and comprehensible**

Information must be relevant and compelling but also comprehensible. That very same juicy conversation will be entirely disregarded if it is happening in a language we don't understand. Two people gesturing excitedly in Italian when we don't speak Italian leaves us with little to remember or recount.

## **Relevant, compelling, comprehensible, personalized**

There is no better way to pique a person's interest than to drop his or her name into the overheard conversation. A dramatic conversation in a language we understand that also happens to be about us is the most enticing thing to eavesdrop on. According to Krashen, personalization is a great way to make comprehensible input compelling.

## **Relevant, compelling, comprehensible, personalized and repetitious**

To recall specific words used in a story, we need to hear those words until they are acquired. Simply comprehending in the moment is insufficient because it does not create a long-term memory. With language learners, we must shelter the amount of vocabulary they are exposed to and expose them repeatedly to high frequency structures we want them to pick up. This can be boring, which is why providing compelling input is so critical.