

In the Face of Resistance

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1. Introduction: hit in the face with resistance on a study skills course at Saint Louis University's Madrid Campus.
2. The course

a. Learners

b. Topics

- *Keeping your Journal*
- *Keeping your Vocabulary Notebook*
- *Questionnaire on Language Learning*
- *Key factors in Second Language Learning*
- *Successful Language Learners: What Do We Know About Them?*
- *Six Keys to Quicker Learning*
- *Questionnaire on Concentration*
- *Critical-period Hypothesis*
- *Questionnaire 2 on Concentration*
- *Memory Retrieval*
- *What's Your Best Time of Day?*
- *Time Management*
- *SQ3R - A Reading/Study System*
- *Increasing Reading Speed*
- *Dealing with Problems and Stress*
- *Taking Tests*
- *Listening to Lectures*
- *Giving an Oral Presentation*
- *Final Project*

c. Journal prompts

1. What is your attitude towards learning English (that is to say, how do you feel about learning English)? Has your attitude towards English changed over time?
2. How do you feel when you are speaking English:
 - a. in the classroom?
 - b. with an American student?
 - c. in a mixed group (e.g. with other Spanish and American students?)
3. What activity did you just come from? What were you doing? Who was there? How can you connect what you were just doing to this class?
4. Based on the reading on good language learners, write about some of the different psychological factors involved in language learning. What kind of language learning do you think you are? Would you change anything after reading in terms of how you approach your language learning?
5. How would you evaluate your progress this past month in English (speaking writing, vocabulary, grammar, listening)? How actively have you been involved/engaged in your learning process (inside and outside of class)?
6. Why do you think you're a bad language learner? What can you do to change? How can the system help you better?
7. What worried you about coming to SLU? What kind of problems might make it difficult for you to concentrate on your studies?
8. What ways do you have of handling stress?
9. What are a student's rights and responsibilities in a class?
10. Have your reading strategies changed this semester? What have you done recently to work on your reading comprehension in English?

Focus on Reading Strategies:

SPQR3 (HANDOUT AVAILABLE)

PREDICTION: I introduced this notion through the following text, which I put up on the OHP, and uncovered line by line. The students talked after each line about what they were envisioning based on the text, and how they had to revise this vision with the last line.

John picked up the lunch his mother had packed for him and set out for school.

When he arrived, some kids were playing with the papers in his desk.

As soon as they saw him, they ran to their own desks.

John put his briefcase down, picked up the chalk, and said "Now, class, please turn to p. 15..."

UNPACKING MEANING:

How would you say this same information?

Sometimes information can be neither recalled nor recognized with certainty, as when a student seems to have forgotten everything learned in last year's German class.

Many people have experienced an inability to recall on the following morning events that accompanied heavy drinking the night before.

Frustration!!

My journal entry, September 20, 2004

I am quite frustrated by this class. There are at least 3 people who feel that it is a waste of time. They don't see how study skills can help them improve their English. We are working now on language learning strategies, and I have discovered that they do not seem to have any real, specific goals with relationship to learning the language. They have end-user goals—they feel that they need the language for their future. Yet no one expressed short term goals in working on any specific area of the language. I am hoping that I can help them clarify some short-term, even weekly, objectives, that they could work towards. If I can achieve this, I think then that they will feel more confident in their abilities, and hopefully will feel more positive towards the course. I still feel that the course is a good idea, and that it is worthwhile. I struggle not to take personally their feelings about it!

3. Search for reasons:


A. socialization into educational processes

- 📖 "Mezirow's (1984) research in adult learning has shown that in some cases socialization processes lead to the acquisition of beliefs that encourage dependence rather than independence on the part of the adult. In matters related to learning, Knowles (1976) suggests that this attitude may be acquired in grade school where, gradually, students find that responsibility for their learning is taken on by formal institutions and the teacher. Consequently, as young children, students begin to believe that to be a learner is to be dependent, and when they enter into an educational activity as adults they expect to be treated like children. This attitude persists despite their resentment at learning under conditions that are incongruent with their self-concept as autonomous individuals. In fact, this expectation, based on early socialization is so strong that they often put pressure on their teachers to behave towards them in this way" (Wenden, 1991: 56).
- 📖 Wenden reports on a study by Holec (1987) in France, who suggests that the "students in the study saw themselves as consumers of learning while teachers were perceived as the source of knowledge and the ultimate decision makers about success or failure in examinations" (Wenden, 1991: 56).
- 📖 "It is reasonable to suggest, however, that the educational system as it operates in a society like Britain is structured and functions in such a way that it is less and less likely for a person to develop as an autonomous learner because the formal conventions of the system seriously challenge the exercise of authentic autonomy" (Breen & Mann, 1997: 138).

B. motivation:

- i. integrative: “a desire to identify with and move closer to the community where the language is spoken” (Graham, 1997: 96)
- ii. instrumental: “the language is viewed as a means to other ends, such as career enhancement or educational goals” (Graham, 1997: 96).
e.g. Leila: *Personality I don't like learn language so much. I like science more than language but I have to learn language to study and to communicate with other people different culture.*
- iii. extrinsic: for outside reward
- iv. intrinsic: for the enjoyment

C. Attribution theory:

- i. how learners attribute causes to their success or failure: ability, task difficulty, luck or effort
- ii. For Rathbone (1971: 100, 104, cited in Candy, 1991: 271), the autonomous learner is:
 a self-activated maker of meaning, an active agent in his own learning process. He is not one to whom things merely happen; he is the one who, by his own volition, causes things to happen. Learning is seen as the result of his own self-initiated interaction with the world.

D. Perceptions of control (QUESTIONNAIRE SEPARATE HANDOUT)

3. Way forward:
Change focus from study skills to **learning to learn:**

Differences between study skills and learner training:

Study skills	Learning to learn
objectives imposed from external source	provides more opportunity for learners to select own learning objectives
focus on products	focus on process for wider insights into own learning
focus on tasks & activities related to requirements of course of study	more opportunities to reflect on attitudes towards themselves as learners and their personal learning preferences, & to experiment with different learning and practice activities
prepare learners for external systems of assessment	focus on self-assessment

(based on Ellis & Sinclair, 1989: 4)

So...

- A. more holistic, taking into account dif. learning styles
 - i. to determine learning styles, initial questionnaire:
 - online (see websites at end)
 - or Joy Reids version (HANDOUT)
 - ii. to keep in mind in designing activities: below is a table of learner types and some suggested activities for each type, adapted from Jeremy Harmer's book *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, originally taken from 'How to use Gardner's intelligences in a class program' by M Loon for the University of Canberra, and as appearing in Budden:

Learner type	Is good at	Learns best by	Activities
Linguistic	Reading, writing and stories	Saying, hearing and seeing words	Memory games Trivia quizzes Stories.
Logical / mathematical	Solving puzzles, exploring patterns, reasoning and logic	Asking questions, categorising and working with patterns	Puzzles Problem solving.
Visual / Spatial	Drawing, building, arts and crafts	Visualising, using the mind's eye	Flashcards Colours Pictures Drawing Project work.
Musical	Singing, listening to music and playing instruments	Using rhythm, with music on	Using songs Chants Drilling.
Bodily / Kinaesthetic	Moving around, touching things and body language	Moving, touching and doing	TPR activities Action songs Running dictations Miming Realia.
Interpersonal	Mixing with others, leading groups, understanding others and mediating	Co-operating, working in groups and sharing	Mingle activities Group work Debates Discussions.
Intrapersonal	Working alone and pursuing own interests	Working alone	Working individually on personalised projects
Naturalistic	Nature	Working outside and observing nature	Environmental projects.

B. For locus of control: attribution training:

E.g. teaching students to say positive things as they work, first out loud, then in a whisper, then silently to themselves (like "I did a good job on that one" or "this is tough, but hard work pays off")

It seems more helpful if, rather than reinforcement statements like:

"I'm proud of your work."

"I'm pleased with your progress."

"Excellent progress."

teachers say:

"You seem to know your presentation very well."

"You really work hard in English."

"You're trying more, keep at it!"

C. Some more brain based activities, e.g. Ana Leiguarda: <http://www.tesol-spain.org/newsletter/leiguarda.html> (to lighten up the dryness of the study skills, then have them suggest application)

D. However, it is not all in the brain! ... **Activity theory/Sociocultural theory**

An ecological perspective to teaching and learning "questions the common assumption that language, cognitions, memories, and intelligence are uniquely contained inside the brain, and that learning consists of various ways of putting them there. We have to learn to understand what Harold Garfinkel meant when he said that, to find answers to our questions, 'there is no reason to look under the skull since nothing of interest is to be found there but brains' (1963: 190)" (Van Lier, 2000: 257)

Van Lier goes on to say...

"[An ecological approach] avoids seeing learning as something that happens exclusively inside a person's head. Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships

among learners and between learners and the environment. Language is also connected with kinesic, prosodic, and other visual and auditory sources of meaning, and as a result of this contextualized and process-oriented thinking new ways of practicing and theorizing language education will emerge” (Van Lier, 2000: 258).

“...affect is, by being enmeshed with cognition, inextricably linked to context as well” (Verity, 2000: 181)

“‘activity’ (*deyatel’nost’*) for Vygotsky is not action as opposed to thought or mental process, but, rather, a ‘frame’, or sociocultural interpretation that the participants construct of the events in their context of occurrence. To be engaged in a particular activity only means that the individual is functioning in some socioculturally defined context” (Kramsch, 2000:)

Pavlenko & Lantolf use another metaphor, which is “second language learning as the struggle for participation” (2000: 155). They suggest this as complementary to learning as acquisition. Learning as participation “does not involve acquiring rules or codes, but ways of acting and different kinds of participation” (Hanks, 1996: 222, in Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000: 156).

“...if one adopts the participation metaphor, alternate reasons for an individual’s failure to achieve could be posited, such as the individual’s marginalization from a community of practice, insufficient mediation from an expert, or scant access to a learning community” (Donato, 2000)

Mediation – e.g. **instructional conversation**

According to Donato, “Tharp and Gallimore (1991) define an instructional conversation as verbal interactions that share both conversational features (for example, responsiveness, joint participation, thematic focus, and few known-answer questions) and instructional goals (for example, outcomes-based, direct teaching, assistance in the development of more complex language and concepts, and on-going teacher assessment)” (Donato, 2000: 48 note 5).

“During activities that are ostensibly communicative, Sanford [1996] argues that very little instructional conversation takes place. Rather, he states, when the teacher steps out of her position of authority and talks to the class as a co-participant in the interaction, instructional conversations emerge” (Donato, 2000: 36).

So....conceptualize the classroom as a community of inquiry – finding out why...with the students.

So...perhaps next September some freewriting activities on prompts such as the following:

Freewrite for 10 minutes on a memory you have of school that stands out in your mind because it was a bad experience for you. Write as much as you can remember (where it happened, who was there, what was said, why you remember it).

Freewrite for 10 minutes on a memory you have of school that stands out in your mind because it was a good experience for you. Write as much as you can remember (where it happened, who was there, what was said, why you remember it).

Freewrite on your experience with grades. What was the best grade you ever got? What subject was it in? How did you get that grade? How did you feel about it?

Followed by discussion of why the educational system is the way it is, why learners resist, why teachers continue to resist their resistance...

Role-swapping: With the late paper narrative, participants (students AND teacher) take on different roles and argue why they are NOT at fault (perhaps teacher could play KIM...).

References:

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Websites for study skills, etc.

The Good Language Learner: <http://www.smithworks.org/chinese/articles/goodll.html>

http://www2.bgfl.org/bgfl2/custom/resources ftp/client ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/questions/choose_lang.cfm

What kind of learner are you?

http://www2.bgfl.org/bgfl2/custom/resources ftp/client ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/questions/choose_lang.cfm

Study Skills & related links (including activities for English language teaching:

<http://www.studygs.net/studyskills.htm>

Dialang:

www.dialang.org