Problems and Opportunities in Foreign Language Teaching Approaches
the Identification of Improved Personal Approaches

"But the whole story of words is full of mystery, and the attempt to reduce the process of words to a science has always seemed ridiculous enough….." Belloc, The Cruise of the Nona (1928: 14)

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Overall Introduction

One could well ask what justification there is in doing research about foreign language acquisition, for there have certainly been many studies done in this field, see Coady and Huckin (1997), Celce-Murcia (1991), Ellis (1998) enough theories written about learning, see Chomsky (2003), Pinker (1994), Lutzker (1996) enough new methods and approaches created and promoted, see Krashen and Terrell (1983), Curran (1972), Lozanov (1979). The actual reality is rather different for those working daily in a classroom situation and trying to come to terms with theories that often have little to do with the reality of a classroom. Here I must make the clear distinction between classroom learning in a school situation, and other types of L2 (second language) learning. A classroom situation often has no direct link to the authentic language situation and tends to be an artificial situation, whereas learning a second or foreign language directly in the land amongst the native speaking people is an entirely different situation. Classroom learning of a foreign language is often very limited. Some of the most obvious reasons are, first of all timewise, often no more than 2 or 3 hours a week. Second, very much depends on the teacher and his or her language, whether they are native speakers or not. The learners are limited to the input from only this one person, not getting the wide variety and richness of a language that they would when surrounded by native speakers. Pupils might get some input through music, films or t.v., but the qualitity of the language might not always be something for pupils to copy, depending on the correctness of the grammar used, slang expressions and other mangling of the language.

In this piece of research I explore the literature dealing with the approach to teaching foreign languages, analysing it in light of a classroom situation. This work is not

trying to discover some new way of teaching, but by looking at the reality of what is going on in today's classrooms and taking into consideration what has been written on the subject, trying to crystalise out axioms of effective teaching for foreign language teachers to accomdodate his or her situation and put individually into practice. I feel that we language teachers must become much more conscious of what we are doing, how we do it and why we do it. Only then can we critically reflect on what we are doing, evaluate it, develop it and experiment with new ways to be an effective foreign language teacher. As remarked by Bowen and Marks (1994:2) 'who is in a better position to be an expert on teaching-the doer or the theorizer?' Is top-down always better than bottom-up?

Often teachers do experiment, but there are many others who are over-dependent on course books or what they were taught in their initial training. I would like to encourage teachers, and especially new teachers through my work to not just be consumers of top-down ideas, but generate their own ideas based on their own reflection. Through this analysis of the literature I show some of the limitations of the past but also current approaches of teaching and try to show implications for classroom situations.

I make suggestions as to how foreign language teachers can take full advantage of the situation they are in. First of all by being aware of the new changes in language learning, second by seeing the importance of professional development and last but not least possibly through the fundamental axioms of foreign language teaching that I have developed through my observations and own experience of teaching as a resource for use in their classrooms.

Problems and Opportunities in Foreign Language Teaching Approaches: An Analysis of Literature

Introduction

Beginning with such a title one presupposes several factors. First of all, that in the field of foreign language teaching there is not always a general satisfaction with learning results, nor in teaching methods. There is not a great deal of agreement within the teaching profession on the nature of language learning. Secondly, the field is characterised by what seem to be changing fashions of the time. The heterogeneity of the field makes it difficult for professionals to base their work on generally agreed principles or standard research findings. Mackey (1973:255) already talked about this over 30 years ago saying that the teaching of English as a foreign language will continue to 'be a child of fashion' until it becomes an autonomous discipline.   One is faced with a dilemma. On one hand this makes the field of foreign language teaching extremely interesting, giving room for new ideas, innovation and individual solutions, but at the same time creating an uncertainy for many teachers as to the most effective or even correct method of schoolroom instruction. In this study I take a closer look at some of the most used methods or approaches in classroom situations, summarizing their theoretical positions, carefully examining their claims and pointing out where I feel they are in adequate for today's classrooms. This research work will be limited to examining only three different approaches that contain the major trends in language teaching today. It is bound to be inadequate in fully showing the whole range of developments in the field of foreign language teaching for it is a discipline that is very complex and many faceted, so I have limited myself to a specific part of the whole topic.

Many of the methods that began in the 70's or 80's but are still partly used today are based on the same premises as then, which are 20 or 30 years old so that it could

be argued that they are out of date, but because they are still practiced in classrooms I have included them. Another problem in this research is that the current developments and theories may bring in new thoughts but they have no real teaching method as one sees with Chomsky's idea of a 'universal grammar' inherent in every human being, but giving no link as to how this can be applied in classrooms. Nonetheless, I hope to create a comprehensive picture of the field of foreign language teaching between these two extremes.

Summary and Analysis of Three Different Teaching Approaches in Foreign Language

The number of different approaches and methods to choose from is quite extensive, ranging from very structured traditional methods based on older methods of learning classical languages like Greek and Latin, to more modern alternative methods complete with soft chairs, Barock music and a relaxed atmosphere. Some teachers look at this proliferation of approaches and methods as a strength of our profession, innovation and invention showing a commitment in finding more efficient and effective ways of teaching, an overall positive development. For yet others, the wide variety of options available are not necessarily a help, they can also be extremely overwhelming and even confusing. I have chosen three approaches out of this vast field of opportunity. My choices are all largely used in classrooms today, although they cover a large span of time and are extremely different in principle. In the following section I will first give a short background of each approach, summarize each and then highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each for today's classroom situation consecutively.

The Grammar-Translation Method

As the status of Latin diminished, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century, and the teaching of the classical Latin texts with it, this type of teaching took on a new role. It became the model for modern foreign language study in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. This basically meant using a traditional text and by studying the text learning all the grammar rules by rote, the study of declensions and conjugations, translations and practice in writing sample sentences.Its principle characteristics have been preserved in the framework of many foreign language classrooms today. As Howatt (2004:152) says, the only real difference is that the traditional texts have been replaced with exemplificatory sentences.

The main characteristics as summarized from the literature, notably Howatt and

Widdowson (2004), Nunan (1988)

- exercises with sentences for translation into and out of the foreign language
- meticulous standards of accuracy
- grammar points in an organized sequence with exemplified sentences,learning deductively
- teacher oriented, teacher as the authority
- speaking and listening are not priorities
- reading comprehension by answering questions about the text
- bi-lingual word lists to be memorized
- creating or making sentences to show understanding of vocabulary
- compositions in target language

Although this method is one of the oldest, even having its roots in the first foreign

language lessons of the middle ages, one recognizes immediately many of the

practices of present day teaching, especially at the secondary level, and especially

those classes striving for higher academic qualifications.Howatt (2004:153) shows

how the establishment in the 1850's in England of a system of public examinations

controlled by the universities stifled any kind of reform and clearly determined the

direction of academic 'respectability' which meant keeping to the grammar-

translation method. This method has continued on into the twenty-first century, even

if it is not directly called the grammar-translation method.

The question as to why this method is still so popular amongst teachers is an

important one. It requires few specialized skills, and as Brown (1994:53) says,

it is easy to test, can be objectively assessed and is sometimes successful in

leading a student towards success in a second language. In other words, as Richards

(1986:4) so aptly puts it, it makes few demands on teachers.

Aside from this, what are the real advantages for the student and his learning?

According to Bowen(1994:82)the student can 'progressively extend and refine'

their ability to express themselves by increasing their control over grammar. It is a

scaffolding for building competence in the target language. Some teachers go so far as to say, in a one-sided way, that grammar is the most important thing in learning a language and without it you would not be able to speak or write.

Thornbury (1999:16,17) argues the most coherently for the teaching of grammar.
 He shows how a foreign language can seem like an enormous shapeless mass to a beginner, an insurmountable challenge. By organizing it into neat catagories it makes it digestable. He also suggests that this kind of disciplined learning where rules and order are highly valued is of particular value in large classes at the secondary level. It gives the teacher a structured system that can be taught in methodical steps. Another key point he says, is that through learning the patterns or rules of a language it offers the learner the means for potentially 'limitless linguistic creativity.' And finally, probably the best agrument he makes is that this method in 'pointing out features of the grammatical system is thus a form of consciousness-raising.' It may not lead to immediate knowledge, but it triggers a mental process that will in time bear fruit.

Looking at the other side of the coin, there are just as many, if not more advocates of eliminating grammar lessons. Beginning with the most known and probably most outspoken, Krashen (1984:30) states that conscious learning, and especially grammar has an extremely limited function. He says we have a 'monitor' within us that corrects us as we acquire the new language, so formal instruction in grammar is not necessary. Others have also vehemently showed their dislike for the grammar method. Richards and Rogers (1986:5) say that it does absolutely nothing for a student's communicative skills in a language, adding that this method is remem-bered by most people with distaste as a 'tedious experience' of learning long lists of vocabulary words and endless 'unusable' grammar rules. Another point is the use

of disconnected sentences in the drill exercises. Can language be based on a sequence of linguistic catagories or exemplified sentences for practice?

Another well-known linguist who critisizes this type of learning is Ellis (1997: 81) He believes that there are strong theoretical grounds to say that instruction will not have a long lasting effect, especially if the structure is something complex. He further says that learners have some kind of 'built-in syllabus' that regulates how and when they acquire particular grammatical structures. The realization has slowly exuded through the whole linguist field, that the language learning process is activated by an instinct and not through strict drilling procedures. Noam Chomsky(2002:9) changed the whole way of thinking about language acquisition when he argued that humans are 'hard-wired' to learn language, that they have a universal grammar that they are born with. He also suggests that attempts to subvert the natural order by sticking rigidly to text book accuracy in grammar are 'foredoomed'.

It was assumed in the past, and still to some extent today, that learning a language entailed mastering the building blocks of the language, it was looked at as product-oriented instead of a process. From my experiences in school and my own teaching, I agree with Rutherford (1987:159) that language learning is not a 'linear process', but rather more metamorphic. The learner is constantly 'reanalysing data' and 'reformulating hypotheses' , even in the case of learning grammar. Some focus on form is surely warranted, but the research in this field is inconclusive as to whether classroom instruction of grammar is really effective. It seems needless to say then that the teaching of grammar should be used as a 'resource rather than an end in itself'.(Thornbury 1999: 25) Through these different positions of different camps it is apparent that the opinions are strongly divided, and will continue to remain so.

The Natural Approach

The grammar-translation method provoked such antagonism that it produced a great wave of individual reformers. From the mid-nineteenth century a wave of opposition laid the foundations for new developments. This assignment is too limited to go into all of them, but to name some of these reformers is to show what a flood of experimentation took place.

There was Gouin, Vietor, Franke, Palmer, Sweet, Mackay and many more.

The name "Natural Method" is just one of many labels for methods having the same underlying philosophy. Such names as the direct method, the communicative approach, the conversation method are all in the same category. The main thought behind this method was that you cannot learn a language in a step-by-step manner, for it is an intuitive process for which the human being has a natural capacity and only needs the right circumstances to be awakened to life. The main propogaters of this method were Krashen and Terrell. (1983) Their method is derived primarily from a theory, with emphasis on the difference between acquisition, which refers to a natural assimilation of the language, and learning, which refers to the formal study of the language in a conscious process.The principles underpinning the approach are supposedly based on empirical research,   although there have been others who have heavily critcised Krashen's claims, even saying they can not be substantiated, see McLaughlin(1987), Gregg (1984), Skehan(1984)

The main principles are as follows

- classroom instruction exclusively in the target language
- the main goal is communication skills
- comprehension precedes production (comprehensible input flooding)
- production emerges slowly, learners are not forced to respond
- activities promote subconscious learning
- does away with explicit grammar instruction
- the affective filter is lowered

By looking at these principles in comparison with the grammar-translation method one sees that they are built on very different premises. This discussion between the protagonists of the grammatical form on the one hand and the adherents of the communicative form on the other has been the centre of attention for some years now. For a period of time the communicative camp won the upperhand when a demand for learning the spoken language grew . Also the concern with the needs of the learner led to a different attitude about methodolgy and the didactics of teaching foreign languages. The members of the reform movement tried to develop principles of teaching out of naturalistic ways of learning a language, similar to how one would learn a first language.

This method has been widely discussed and hotly debated. Here some of the main points of discussion as summarized by Larsen-Freeman (1986). The delay of oral production and waiting for the pupil's language abilities to emerge of its own is a major critique point. What if a student's speech never emerges as it is supposed to? Also the concept of comprehensible input is difficult to really pin down, it is not clear which structures the learners should be given. The natural approach seems designed for personal communictive skills but unlikely to be adequate for a more academic level of learning. Another weakness is the assertation that learning takes place in a social vacuum, and that aspects of the learning environment (the classroom) are irrelevant to what the learners learn. This is of course very different from the actual truth of what happens in most classrooms. Widdowson (1987:71) also criticises that the activities carried out in a natural approach attempt to replicate 'real' communication, but such a 'dress-rehearsal' methodolgy has the inherent danger of not being transferable to actual situations. If this method is carried out exclusively in a classroom, and not just as one part of the lesson, it could be very

exhausting for the teacher as he would have no textbook to fall back on or other materials for his use. Very much relies on the teacher and the atmosphere he creates during the lesson time through speaking, describing, performing, like a 'one-man-show'.   He would also have to be a native speaker or have native-like fluency.

On the other hand though, after the one-sided, extremely intellectual grammar-translation method, one could say that for the learners of the foreign language this is probably preferable, although not necessarily less strenuous. The students must stay in the foreign language throughout the lessons, as the goal is to think and speak in the language as soon as possible. This method also gives the students a more active role in their learning, they are more like partners to the teachers in the learning situation. The atmosphere is much more relaxed than in a structured grammar lesson, helping students to feel more at ease and possibly having an effect on their assimilation of the language. According to Franke(1884) a language should be taught in a monolingual approach in a classroom, rather than focusing on grammar, and that teachers should encourage natural and spontaneous use of the target language. Although he said this so long ago, this was the basic foundation also of the Natural Method. This clearly has advantages, being flooded with the target language, the only difficulty might be in the beginning phases until one has a certain foundation to build on. A good amount of input is a fundamental component to 'picking up' a foreign language. A language is after all, about communication primarily.

This input, if seen in a positive light, could be the chance of a teacher, who is capable,to put his or her whole being into their teaching. He or she would have the undivided attention of their students, and now every gesture, every movement, every word is important. One could use this, play with it and create learning situations that one would never be able to in a more restricted syllabus.

The question does arise though as to whether a certain amount of structured conscious learning is necessary to really comprehend and build up a conscious knowledge of a second language.

The Waldorf Method

Rudolf Steiner eighty-six years ago had the idea of having two foreign languages beginning in the first class. Through his study of the nature of man he came to the conclusion that young children learn languages much easier than at later periods. Steiner (1920:53) He slowly developed suggestions for teachers out of his observations. After looking at two methods that were rather unilateral, I would like to now focus on a third approach, and I must emphasize the word "approach", for Ruldolf Steiner did not establish an exact method, nor a curriculum, that the teachers should follow. He gave many hints, and much advice, but left very much open for the teacher to develop themselves, and expected them to be creative, as von Kügelgen(1978:9) says in his introduction to the curriculum for Waldorf schools.

Often teachers would like to have a recipe, an exact plan to carry out, but so easy it is not, especially in teaching foreign languages. This can also sometimes be seen as a weak point of the Waldorf schools. Many teachers interpret the advice of Steiner in a way that can lead to dogmatism, or other abberations such as fossilisation. If one reads closely and correctly, Steiner expected the teachers to really do practical research, and through careful observation of the pupils, and his hints about pedagogical situations to come to their own conclusions and methods.

Steiner (1923:175) criticises the thinking of educators and reseachers who abandon a method based entirely on grammar and syntax, realising it as too mechanical and external, and then resort to exactly the opposite, meaning all the communicative methods of teaching languages where there is no or hardly any grammar. He says how irrational this is and how the teacher should not read in some book the rules for teaching, but should look at the human being himself. He gave a whole series of lectures about the nature of the human being and his development of consciousness

according to the stage in his life. Steiner (1919) teachers must learn to 'read' the human being and his needs, the other pedagogical literature being only a support for his own observations and knowledge of the human being. His whole approach was different. He thought we should not ask what the human being needs to learn, but rather for what is the human being predisposed and how can we help him develop these capabilities. Furthermore, as Zimmerman (2000:11) says in his introduction to Denjean's book about foreign language in Waldorf schools, the ideal of the Waldorf pedagogy is to unite the theoretical and practical side of teaching. These are all very high ideals, and Bisaz (1958: 15) points out that we are far from reaching these aims and that further resolute efforts are necessary to even come a little closer.

Let's take a look at the main principles that are the fundamental building blocks for a Waldorf school.

The fundamental principles:

- based on an understanding of the human being and their changing consciousness, according to the age, what a child/pupil needs
- immersion of the pupils with authentic language and not simplified language, using only the foreign language (especially in the first years)
- two foreign languages taught from the 1-12th classes
- cultivation of the poetic, aesthetic side of the language
- little theoretical explicit grammar, used more for conscious understanding of what the pupils have already learnt
- inductive learning of grammar rules, finding the rule through looking at many examples
- reading and literature study with good quality books(classical literature, no superficial novels or banal topics)
- encouraging fomulation of individual written work in the foreign language as soon as possible.
- encouragement of conversation in the foreign language amongst the pupils
- bi-lingual vocabulary learning is not usually propogated
- text books are also not generally used
- stimulating/assisting a growing feeling for the language/ a language instinct
- some level groups in the upper school, otherwise no pressure nor marks

- openness and interest in all areas of happenings in the world, relevant themes and authentic real life language.

Trying to formulate the foundation principles of the Waldorf schools' foreign language teaching is no easy task. The above points I have summarized from Kiersch(1992) from his book about teaching foreign languages in Waldorf schools. As one can see, many of the points are very vague, and not explicitly developed out into a specific method. First looking at the positive side of this kind of approach, it clearly gives the teacher a lot of free room to develop his own ideas and his own lessons but at the same time forces him to do practice research. This can be a wonderful opportunity, to enter into a deeper relationship with pupils, building up a whole world of learning together. This is not textbook learning, but pedgagogical idealism at its highest, expecting, and even demanding much from the teacher. You do not have a lot of guidelines to go by, you must be active yourself, you must find out what your pupils need and how you can best supply these needs or support these specific pupils. The fact that one can work so artistically, so deeply with a language, plunging into the genius of the language, the specific qualities of this specific language, the spirit of the language, trying to take the pupils along with your own enthusiasm, creating a feeling for the language, can be very strenuous, but also very rewarding, especially when one sees the rewards years later at the upper school level. By the upper school level the pupils do often have a very good feeling for the language, making the work a joy. You can work with literary texts on a much deeper level, you can expect written essays of good depth and quality and the pupils are capable of understanding most guests that visit the class from foreign countries.

On the other hand, when this all sounds so idealistic, why is the Waldorf approach almost never mentioned in any research projects, or books about foreign languages? We are generally ignored or mentioned only at the side. What is based on

very high ideals, maybe even way ahead of its time, is often more difficult to carry out than is supposed. For a teacher it is a double burden, not only do you have to develop your own lessons and curriculum (based on few hints from Steiner), you also have to study and have knowledge of the human being and the different phases he goes through so you can teach appropriately. What you would teach in a 10th class and your approach would be completely different a year later in an 11th class. Added to this, every class is different, so you can not use the same plan or same material you may have used for the same age group a year ago. You may use parts of it, but still have to live into each new class newly and create a new plan for each class. This takes a lot of time and work, not making it easy for new teachers and is probably a big reason why the turn over in foreign language teachers is very great. Because there is no set curriculum it also makes it difficult for teachers who would wish to follow an easy path of following the steps, without having to be too innovative them-selves. This puts a lot of pressure on teachers, you must be very versatile, you must be permeated with the language and you must be innovative, besides the normal load of preparation and correction. There is an added pressure being in a Waldorf school because you are expected to have an idealistic approach and yet at the same time from parents pragmatic success. At the same time you,as teacher, have no way of pressuring your pupils, as we do not give marks until the upper school. You have to support and enthuse the pupils out of your own pedagogic persuasion and talent. The question arises as to whether one can fulfill these expectations, and if not, if it would not be better to resort to textbooks and vocaulary lists.

Conclusion

Our choice of methods ought to be determined by our understanding of the real nature of languages, and also some deeper knowledge of how languages are even acquired or learnt. As Grundy (1989: 4) so vehemently claims, and I agree with him, most of the methods that exist are not fundamentally different in the sense that they all tend to be contrained by the nature of institutional language teaching. They also tend to be subject-centred instead of learner-centred, taking for granted that a language is acquisition of knowledge, rather than something much greater, much more complicated and more difficult to define. The practice of dividing skills into catagories such as speaking, listening, writing, reading and use of English (grammar) is also an artificial method of trying to break a language down into learnable parts that exist only in theory and limit classroom possibilities. This all adds up to claim that language learning should be much more centred around the learner and his/her needs, and be essentially experimental. Language learning is a process and not just production, as Rawson (2002:2) says in his article about language as a formative force. Language is a way of orienting ourselves and is 'closely bound up with our sense of self. 'Savignon (1983) words it a little differently, but the essence is the same. There is no one ideal method of teaching suited to all the different learning situations, the most effective ways are those that involve the learner more in the experience of learning. On the one hand we should be very aware of what others have written, incorporating the things that work for us into our programme, and on the other hand the teacher needs greater flexibility, greater independence to work out of his own experience and what he through his own observations and constant contact

with his pupils thinks to be appropriate. Richard-Amato(1996:280) sums it up well by saying that foreign language teaching must combine theory and practice into a programme that works, drawing from different methods to meet the needs of the pupils and the situation. Every situation is different, learning a foreign language is not uniform and predictable as Ellis(1985:4) says, there is no single way in which learners acquire a second language, it is a product of many factors.

We will surely not run out of work, and there will surely be plenty of opportunties to experiment and be innovative with, opportunties to do practice research and develop our professional expertise.

From what has been said until now it has become clear that no one method is the answer, and possibly not even a combination of methods, but our enquiry must be directed towards basic underlying factors which support effective teaching. Teachers need competences and attitudes of innovation but also practical help. Teaching must be individualized, and at the same time universal axioms of language teaching must be worked out as guideleines to be applied as the situation arises. Nunan (1988:ix) states that if language teaching is to be genuinely professional it requires experimentation and reflection on the part of the practioners.

I will end my conclusion with a word from the ITT NC (Initial Teachers Training National Curriculum) for teacher trainees in qualifying for QTS(Qualified Teacher Status),

> Teaching has always been a demanding profession, requiring of its members enthusiasm, dedication and commitment. In addition it is common sense that teachers need to know not only what they teach but also how to teach it most effectively. (Williamson et al: 2001)

Implications for Future Work

Being aware of the compromise that one makes as a language teacher, in carrying out often very pragmatic goals, yet knowing on the other hand that a living language is something much different than what is taught in our classrooms, one seeks to remedy the situation as much as possible through allowing all levels of language perception to be integrated into the lesson. Lutzker (2002:22) explains how language has a manifold presence, 'comprising overlapping and ever-changing levels of movement and meaning.' He further claims that there is a 'specific human sense organ for language existing in the physiological and neurological capability of linguistic-kinesic movement.' This is a whole new realm of thought, taking the whole language debate on a new path, slightly different than that of Chomsky's theory of a language instinct, inherent in every human being, or Pinker's idea that the ingredients of language are words and rules. The question still remains for a teacher how these hypothesises can be applied to classroom situations. Staying modest, the focus must remain on the question of how to find the most effective ways of successfully using the classroom language lessons without falling into banalities and on the other hand embodying the real spirit of the living language.

Many new foreign language teachers, no matter how well-trained, do not feel they have the right tools for such a complex responsibility. Abbott Richard-Amato (1996: xii) sums it up rather well when she says that teaching goes far beyond organizing a syllabus, deciding on your pedagogical strategy or even executing your programme. Much more, it means facilitating learning, creating a dialectical relationship with the pupils, involving others in the decision making process, flowing with the needs of the pupils and primarily trying to bridge the gap between the theorectical and the practical.

There are many factors involved in learning a language, and just as many in teaching it, as Brumfit (2001: 71f) says, it will take more 'sustained discussion' and much to do before we can consider language work in formal education 'well-founded'. He goes on to say that besides analysing the ideas that have already been written in a wide range of books, there should be much broader evaluation and empirical research projects to enable us to make 'robust statements' about what is and is not sound knowledge and that we need a steady flow of well-trained and committed researchers (teachers) 'who genuinely keep abreast with ideas on language teaching, and who desperately want to understand its processes and procedures'. With this last statement I enter into my research and reflection on practice in learning and teaching a second language in a classroom situation, determined to get a better understanding of the 'processes and procedures'.

The risk of reflecting and analysing foreign language teaching and learning is that one tends to examine only what can be obviously seen and rigorously measured, restricting research to a certain area of teaching that stays on a banal level, leaving out the whole complex, real world that teachers are confronted with, the dishevelled spontaneous, unmeasurable world that is much more important in the life of a teacher. One of the risks of tackling this complex area of learning, this area which is full of imponderables, is the possiblity of not staying objective. Every teacher has his or her preferences, his or her experiences which have formed their ideas, so most of our judgements are not value-free but reflect our beliefs, 'the uniqueness of our individual experiences colours the uniqueness of our individual understanding. ' Brumfit (2001: 5) Therefore the research must be very carefully reflected if it is to be relevant for broader application.

Authenticity in language lessons is also something that will need further research .

Is it necessary? Can and does one learn a language anyway? Does authenticity

facilitate learning? This can be portrayed in many ways, but to name a few rather

obvious ones; through mimic and gesture, singing English, Irish or other folk songs,

correct pronunciation and intonation, idioms, including guests in the lessons, looking

at the land and its traditions, politics, education system etc. I personally feel a

language teacher has to be aware of this level and incorporate it into their lessons.

A closer look at lessons; Questions you might ask yourself as a foreign language teacher:

- Are my pupils always so concentrated, participating and interested in what I am doing?
- Do they have clear goals, and are the goals appropriate?
- Are my lessons too "teacher-centred"? Do they work autonomously enough?
- Am I able to portray the "spirit" of the language?
- Do I create an atmosphere of enthusiasm and learning?
- Am I in a rut with my lessons? Am I innovative enough?
- Am I able to help the individual enough?

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principles of teaching:

1. The attitude you have about teaching and your way of looking

   at pupils is one of the single biggest influence on the outcome of   lessons and

   how well the pupils learn

   .

2. The pupils have to have clear objectives and goals as to what We (they)

   are trying to reach, possibly also why we are trying to reach these specific

   goals.

This might sound a little too pragmatic, but it does not exclude an element of creativity, of trying to get a closer feeling for the language.

3. Pupils at a secondary level must be more active in their learning which means a step away from teacher-centred learning. When pupils are not only more conscious of what they are learning and why they are learning it but also managing their own work they are much more motivated to learn .

4. The practice of encouragement and celebration is very important in learning a language. It is hard enough as it is and a person needs to feel that they are making progress, even if it is little steps of success, try to praise good work, share it with the class and let the person know they did a good job. This generally leads to new positive steps for the person, one step leading to another, creating a positive and motivating attitude.

5. Work done should get a prompt feedback and correction, showing that the teacher takes each individual's work seriously and cares. Studies done in this area, like Roberts (1955: 180) say that we must reassess the value of error correction, further, that accuracy is the result of comprehensible input, but of course it depends on how you do the correction and what the pupils do with it afterwards. If they use your correction to re-write essays and become conscious about their errors, then it can be seen as more positive than negative.

6. Evaluation is also important, that a pupil knows where he or she stands. Here the European Language Portfolio is a big help. This is a Europe-wide

respected system of evaluating pupils and showing as clear as it is possible

where they stand, providing efficient comparison of language qualifications.

(Council of Europe 2002:2).

It starts with level A1 for absolute beginners and goes up to C2 for bi-

linguals, showing in the five different areas of learning what you should be able

to do. This is extremely beneficial to have clarity from an outside institution

being a more objective assessment authority.

7. It is also very important to have enough variety in lessons so that it never

becomes boring, Son try to cover these five areas and at the same time ,try to

bring in guests and constantly think of ways to keep the work "authentic" and not

just drill patterns and exercises that are foreign to what a young person might

confront in a "real-life" situation.

Possible Problems in Foreign Language Teaching

A controversial area of learning is the direct learning of grammar and

all its rules. The results of students do not support the idea that itenhances the

learning of the target language

A classical example is, despite having gone over such a simple

rule as the "s" in the third person singular in the present simple, the pupils tend to

keep omitting it. We shouldn't throw out all grammar lessons, but they should

be there only to make conscious what the pupils already know through their

 acquiring of the language. Even though there have been many studies done on

this, showing the peripheral effect of grammar (Krashen 1992, 1993,1999) we tend to

still continue on in teaching grammar quite directly. For a small group of pupils this

might accomplish something, but for the majority it is mostly a waste of time.

Learning for an exam and knowing the answers then is something totally different than language acquisition.

In the area of speaking it is often a question of how to go about it with such huge groups and what themes are appropriate for this level and age group? It often helps to let pupils prepare themes that they are interested in, sometimes letting them even lead the discussion. You would be amazed how well they are able to do this and also at their openess and depth in these discussions with each other. They usually choose themes that they have something to say about, things that authentically effect them in some way, so it motivates them to enter into the discussion, it is not just a theme the teacher has chosen to do an exercise or practise speaking with.

One of the main problems is to be able to do justice to each individual and his or her learning progress. Even if you monitor each pupil as closely as possible, there is much room for improvement here, being so little time and so many pupils.

Looking at the future

It is no simple matter trying to find an effective classroom situation, and effective approach to foreign language learning, and there is no one specific "best" way. The approaches are as individual as each teacher and each situation, maybe some more effective than others, but each doing his or her best. Again I quote from Brumfit because he words it so well.

> "But we shall betray the richness, creativity, and diversity of our subject matter
> if we imply that definitive solutions to practical problems are easy to arrive at,
> or that human motivation and behaviour can be reduced to a limited set of
> predictable dimensions. As speakers, as thinkers, as learners, as teachers
> as researchers, we edge our way to tentative understanding." Brumfit (2001:187)

My Conclusion:

The most effective language teaching is a combination of different factors. There is no single recipe, no ideal teaching material, no universal teaching method suited to all situations, and we cannot spoon-feed someone our ideas or theories, each teacher must still find his or her way, experimenting and discovering what works best. But at the same time a teacher cannot be left to discover everything for him or herself, there are certain tools and techniques that can be passed on helping to provide a basis for sound teaching.   The following ideas have been crystallised out, certain basic principles that I have found to work for myself and think they can be of help for others as well. I present them here as follows for wider discussion, and use.

Foundation Principles for Classroom Practice

1. Learning Atmosphere/Teacher's Attitude:

This is the number one most important factor for learning. If pupils feel relaxed they are more likely to learn. It is suggested by research (Lewis 1993:29) that the teacher's attitude is the 'single most important influence' in the overall success of pupils' learning. Learning a foreign language can be very stressful for many pupils and a teacher can make a big difference by being positive, supporting and understanding. Even a smile, a calm relaxed attitude can help pupils to come out of their reserves and feel reassured that they can learn. We must remember that the pupils are highly capable but when struggling with acquisition, sometimes feeling like 'babbling infants' Brown (1994: 22) At the heart of all learning is that a person believes is his or herself and the ability to learn and reach certain objectives and the teacher as facilitator of learning must help the pupils to gain this belief. His primary

job is not just delivering information but helping pupils discover and use their own abilities.

2. Setting Goals:

Goals will vary according to the constraints of an institution and the obligations set for a teacher, but are very important that pupils have a clear plan of what they will be learning and ideally they should be appropriate for the learners' needs and centred around the learner. Often goals will be product-oriented where the pupil will know he or she has reached the set goals, but they may as well be process-oriented, which are more difficult to assess or to say if one has reached them. The main thing is to have objectives that the pupils can understand and aspire towards, giving them incentive to reach something, rather than a vague conception of their learning.

3. Autonomous Learning/Motivation/Challenge:

Autonomous learning goes hand in hand with setting goals. If pupils set their own goals, manage their own learning, they become much more conscious of the whole learning process and are aware that they are responsible for the outcome. Especially at the secondary level, pupils need to be given more responsibility for their learning. It has been shown to have a positive effect on the amount of work done and also the intensity of the applying themselves to the task. (Stöckli-Rains 2004 : 14) At the same time a certain amount of taught time is still advisable. There are many pupils who feel they need a teacher's strong guidance in order to learn and have not yet developed a "taste" for managing their own work.

4. Use of the Target language:

I think it is commendable to stay in the target language as much as possible. This will

be the major input for the pupils, so it's important that they hear as much as possible of a natural use of the language. At the same time one must be careful not to be too extreme, where it is necessary or advantageous one should revert to the pupils' native language. One must always use common sense according to the situation and what one feels will best facilitate the learning process.

5. Content of the Lesson/Meaningful Learning/Variation:

This might also vary quite a lot according to the institution. In some instances where a teacher is required to use a certain text book it is difficult to have much freedom in this area, although one can still try to work innovatively and imaginatively within the framework of the given syllabus. The major point is to not just teach a language as knowledge to be gained, subject-centred and based on units that can be ticked off as they are finished, but rather a more holistic enterprise, comprising different com-petences to be aquired. Taking into consideration the five competences of reading, speaking, writing, listening/understanding and the use of English (or any other language) one should try to find exercises that can involve the individual, interest him and as authentically as possible engage him in activity towards acquisition of the language. Overanalysing language and looking too much at its forms and direct learning of rules tends to impede learning in most cases rather than fostering progress. Meaningful learning will lead towards better long-term retention than learning by rote. Brown (1994:18) A process of subconsciously acquiring a language takes place, also called 'automatic processing', a subtle process which can not even be so closely monitered, but which leads to long-term success.

6. Authenticity:

Some language teachers might see this point as superfluous, especially if you look at

a language as divided down into sections, building blocks to be learnt in order to know the language. Recent research, however, shows that language teaching is much more complex than just having a clear structure, and good exercises to be successful Brown (1980). I have found that to really develop a "feeling" for the sense of the language, one needs to be confronted with the cultural background, its idioms and idiosyncrasies, with "real" situations, exercises and texts that represent the authentic language. 'Whenever you teach a language you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking feeling and acting' as Brown (1994: 25) says. Every language has its specific "genius" of the language, that special something that makes it different, makes it characteristic and unique, something you can't necessarily pick up with dry articifial exercises. One must be thoroughly permeated oneself with the language to be able to get this across

to the pupils. It is the whole intonantion, the use of words and much more, something intangeable, yet important. Authentic can also mean using good texts that are not chosen just for the sake of doing an exercise, but of interest to young people, up to date and maybe even inspiring. One can show the connection between language and culture, the sociolinguistic aspects.

7. Correction/Evaluation/Assessment

Teachers must exercise some tolerance for learners' mistakes and not immediately correct everything, or at least not make a pupil feel discouraged or stupid. Mistakes are not necessarily "bad" but show a learning process, one must correct with kind-ness and understanding, if at all, otherwise you may frustrate the pupil not to make further attempts at speaking or writing. Everyone needs to know where they stand now and again, so a certain feedback is important for the learner's growth. The pupils can even do a self-evaluation and then compare it with the teacher's op-

inion. Too much testing and too many exams are also not motivating, nor do they always clearly show where a learner stands. One must be very careful what testing methods one uses and critically reflect on their effectiveness. Here it must also be said that one should take the time to give each individual feedback, and not just the group. This is very important for the individual's progress and his or being taken seriosly, showing respect and concern.

8. Praise/Celebration

 Immediate verbal praise helps support pupils in their confidence, but shouldn't be overdone either! Celebration of good work done or progress made is also important for the encouragement of pupils in a learning situation where they may well feel fragile, defenseless and have inhibitions that they normally wouldn't have. We must find ways of helping pupils tune into their potential, face challenges and become self-confident, and a good starting point is positive feedback.

Overall Conclusion

It seems that foreign language learning has generally moved away from "methodology"as such, has graduated from such restrictive concepts for classroom practice and gone on to a whole language approach, speaking of competences instead of skills, giving more attention to pupils needs, encouraging learner-centred work, getting away from rote learning and boring drills and tasks, but the field is large and diverse, and there are many different schools and teachers, and probably as many different variations of foreign language classes.

Language teaching is paradoxal and involves a certain risk, something we have to live with, being aware of it, and partly coming to terms with it. Especially in a classroom situation there are certain pragmatic compromises to be made, no matter

how ideally we think. The discrepancy also remains between natural acquisition and classroom learning with some of the pragmatic categories that we have to work with and other "inauthenic"situations.

It only remains to be said that the eight pillars that I have laid down, are only principles or guidelines to be aware of, axioms of foreign language teaching that give a general foundation, but they do not go into detail of planning or teaching. The major responsibility of finding a suitable and effective lesson for each class still belongs in the hands of each individual teacher and one cannot expect any easy answers or recipes, for the whole theme is much more complex than that. If pupils learn a language, if they are motivated, very much rests on the shoulders of teachers, they mould the conditions in which pupils learn, they structure the lessons and they expose them to the language, so their responsibility cannot be underestimated. It is to be expected that many teachers, teachers who take their work seriously, will want to delve further into this interesting but elusive theme, researching and experimenting further.

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Appendix 1

Glossary of Terminology Used Specifically in Language Acquisition

acculturation: social and psychological factors govern the extent to which L2 learners aquire and adapt the second language.

applied linguistics: the study of foreign language learning and teaching, and also of language in relation to practical problems

audiolingual method: language teaching which emphasizes speaking and listening before reading and writing. Uses dialogues and drills and discourages use of the mother tongue.

behaviourist theory: views all learning as the formation of habits through environmental stimulation. Behaviour should be studied in terms of physical process only.

bottom-up: making use of information which is principally already present, also used for professional competence developed through practice and experience.

chunking: the division of utterances into parts, as a part of learning, instead of learning individual words

communicative approach: emphasizes the goal of communicative competence in language learning

comprehension approach: this is not a specific method of teaching but believes learners should have well developed comprehension skills before they are expected to produce either orally or in writing.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

fossilization: the cessation of learning before reaching competence in the target language. Stagnating at a certain level.

immersion: having school instruction in a foreign language. Being totally surrounded by the the foreign language, also in doing an exchange with another country.

input flooding: supplying learners with plentiful positive information or specific linguistics features

kinesics: the study of non-vocal phenomena such as facial expressions, head or eye movements, and gestures, which may support shades of meaning of what someone is trying to say.

LAD: language acquisition device (according to Chomsky)

L1/L2 learners: first language/second language learners

lexicology: the study of the vocabulary items of language, also meanings and relations

psycholinguistics: study of interrelationship between the use of language and speaker's and hearer's minds
: the support that teachers/instructors give learners in various ways before they are able to work autonomously.

top-down: how one analyses and processes language, making use of previous knowledge, usually meaning linguistics and psychology. Knowledge handed down by experts to practitioners.

UG (Universal Grammar): according to Chomsky a plan common to all grammars of all languages, a universal grammar that tells us how to distill the syntactic patterns out of the speech of parents