

Second Language Acquisition

An excerpt of the paper

Psycholinguistics: Approach-versus-Method (2005)

by E.M.M. Dols

An integrated approach

The affective filter hypothesis of [Krashen](#) (1988) as suggested in his Theory on Second Language Acquisition is essential in knowing it is there: for both, the teacher and the learner. Approaching the learner with input $i + 1$ is crucial, but one should also consider the relevance of the affective filter after the black box, and before output.

I understand and respect several theories on language acquisition, including Jane Willis' task-based learning approach and Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar where he states that about 99 percent of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material. I also respect Dr Gerogi Lozanov's early research. After all, 'Suggestopedia', paved the way for a holistic approach to teaching language.

However, I prefer an integrated approach to teaching English as a second language, based on orientation rather than a method; aligning and directing a course of action based on participatory curriculum design where constructive learning can take place through openness, trusting and connecting.

The following example provides a sequence of my approach at an intermediate vocational school in The Netherlands, addressing second year students:

When these learners first come into my English class, I introduce myself and tell them *who* I am and *why* I am here: the reason is after all personal. To know, to learn more about myself and to know about them by exchanging knowledge. I explain the meaning of my name and where I come from and ask them to write their name on a name card. Their first homework assignment is to find out the meaning of their own name, by searching the internet www.behindthename.com or by asking their parents. They present their findings in the following lesson.

I then ask them: "What does English Business Communication' mean to you?" Their first in-class assignment is to think of one word, one thought that comes to mind, when they are asked about this subject.

By dividing the blackboard in three columns (English/ Business/ Communication) each student has the opportunity to write his/her word on the board in the column, which aligns mostly or is strongly connected to their word. In a classroom of 30 students, the board usually presents 30 different and unique interpretations and points of view of this subject matter such as: internet, money, school, music, songs, international, David Beckham, teatime, sales, culture, Wall Street, management, message, multi-media, Jack the Ripper, Jackass, Al Bundy, England, Australia, movies and sending/receiving.

Next, the class clusters the words and we always seem to conclude, as a group: *although interpretation of the subject matter may differ, the result shows that subject matters overlap and the outcome is congruent in terms of communication.*

After we have established the (personal) meaning, the students are asked to define a goal in order to take a direction and add a purpose to the activities surrounding the subject matter: English Business Communication. They work in groups of four, and come up with a mission statement (within a specific time-frame) and a strategy for their class, on how to achieve the objective as a group by summarizing: who will do what, when, how and why. Students present their mission on a flip chart and again an overlap becomes apparent.

Finally, the students discuss and negotiate as a group what is feasible, acceptable, and realistic for everyone, including the facilitator. Needless to say, the students know their first objective is to succeed and achieve their required (desired) pass for the final term.

However, the end result also incorporates the individual as well as the group's motivation for acquiring English as a second language, which is becoming proficient in a global language and establishing a foundation for learning while evaluation remains continuous and transparent.

The 'right' approach, in my opinion, is one that will lead to releasing the learner's potential to grow. Intuitively, inducing the learner's innate power and the magic of remembering his or her purpose as a unique individual.

As the Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Éstes¹ says in her book *Women Who Run With Wolves*:

"It would be hard not to recognize that humans are very diverse culturally, psychologically, and otherwise. Such being so, it seems to me that it would be an error to think that any one is the way."

I believe that the starting point is 'being', 'knowing' that all personal knowledge is already stored within us <in the black box>; it is just a matter of coming out, provided the right stimulus is offered. When the 'imaginative wall', meaning any physical or emotional blockage towards the subject matter and/or the teacher is eliminated, language acquisition can take place and personal connotations and interpretations in the language at hand can become obvious while learning can become a personal yet congruent theme.

¹ Clarissa Pinkola Éstes is an award winning poet, senior Jungian psychoanalyst, and a cantadora (keeper of old stories in the Latino tradition). Her published works include *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, *The Faithful Gardener* and *The Gift of Story*; a *Wise Tale About What Is Enough*.