In This Issue...

Interactive Homework: Creating Connections Between Home and School

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How can the awareness of foreign language programs in elementary schools be increased among parents? Interactive homework – the involvement of parents and child – may be one solution.

Introduction

Developing, funding, and maintaining elementary foreign language programs are complex tasks which routinely confront educators seeking to broaden the curriculum in the area of world languages and cultures.[1] Once a program of study is established, however, it is important to ensure that support is maintained, interest and enthusiasm are kept alive, and information regarding the contents of the elementary foreign language program is regularly communicated to everyone involved.[2] McLoughlin Carter (1993) states that to ensure future support of foreign language in the elementary school (FLES), teachers must engage in public awareness activities, tasks often deemed by teachers as unrelated to instruction and classroom learning. McLoughlin Carter (1993, p. 389) urges that

> we must force our programs into the awareness of our primary constituents – the students and parents whom we serve.

Rosenbusch (1991) further argues that parental support is crucial for second language programs and suggests that parental involvement can mobilize parents into program advocates.

Evidence of the powerful role that parents play in second language advocacy can be seen in the American organization Advocates for Language Learning (ALL) and the Canadian organization Canadian Parents for French (CPF). ALL was founded in 1983 by Madeline Ehrlich, a Culver City, California parent of three immersion students, because she "began to envision an educational environment where every child would have the opportunity to learn a second language as part of the regular school program" (Erlich, 1987:98-99). CPF, founded in 1977 by parents in Ottawa, has played a significant role in the advancement of French immersion schooling across Canada (Sloan, 1989). Both continue to flourish.

Not all parents are equally convinced of the importance of foreign language education. McLoughlin Carter (1993) outlines four public awareness activities foreign language educators may consider when trying to convince communities that their programs are as important

The language graduate who never reads a professional journal and participates only minimally, if at all, in professional meetings, will stagnate.
There is an onus on the profession in all areas to upgrade and keep abreast of current developments in the field.
Peter Heffernan

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as other more time-honored subjects. She suggests

- Parent-Teacher Association programs,
- articles in local newspapers,
- vocabulary newsletters, and
- displays of student work.

The purpose of this article is to explore one additional means of increasing parental awareness of FLES programs – the use of interactive homework assignments. We will present a rationale for the use of homework that involves the parent[3] and child, report on an interactive homework project in a Japanese FLES program (Donato, Antonek and Tucker, 1994; Tucker, Donato and Antonek, 1994, Antonek, Donato and Tucker, 1995), discuss parental reactions to these interactive assignments, and provide guidelines for constructing interactive homework assignments for the foreign language class.

Considering the "Home" in Homework

Although a routine practice in school, homework is often assigned with little thought regarding its function, role, or connection with classroom instruction. A brief review of the most commonly used methodology textbooks in foreign language instruction (Curtain and Pesola, 1994; Nunan, 1991; Oller, 1993; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Richard-Amato, 1988; and Schrum and Glisan 1994) reveals that the issue of homework is never presented or discussed. Why this issue has not been treated more fully in the professional literature is not the purpose of this article. In our investigation of the role and function of homework we question the tacit assumption that homework is exclusively the activity of an individual or merely an opportunity for independent practice. We have been led to explore the role of homework as a powerful and valuable tool and now recommend that systematic guidance be provided to teachers concerning its multiple purposes.

We maintain that the role of homework may be viewed differently from solitary activity of the learner or independent practice opportunities. Assignments a child brings into the home create a vital link between the classroom and outside world and should also be understood for their potential to inform and raise awareness about language instruction in the classroom. We argue that homework implicitly communicates information to parents about two important aspects of the child and the school.

- If attentive to home assignments, parents learn directly about the contents of the curriculum. While observing children completing assignments, the parent can gain access to what the child is being taught, the mode of presentation, and the child's level of mastery with the particular skill or concept. Children who take homework assignments seriously and appear to enjoy and take pride in their work inspire confidence about the school and teacher in parents and demonstrate to them that their children are most likely equally enthusiastic about their classroom learning. Conversely, parents can experience negative feelings or skepticism toward course content and the effectiveness of instruction while observing their children completing assignments that are tedious, needlessly complicated, or for which the child is unprepared.

- Further, assignments communicate directly to parents how the child feels about a particular task. A child's differential enthusiasm, eagerness, or lack of interest across subject areas tells the parent how the child reacts affectively to school activities, in general, and to a specific subject area, in particular.

In short, apart from homework's primary goal as a tool to increase learning opportunities and develop responsible students, it also can have a hidden function – to link the classroom with the home and to communicate implicitly to the parent what children know and can do, their level of mastery and comfort with the information, and their feelings about the subject area.

We suggest, therefore, that homework functions on three inter-related levels:

1. Homework communicates to the parent what and how well the child is learning in the classroom, the child's affective reaction to this learning, and the contents and scope of the curriculum. For this reason, it is curious that no attention whatsoever has been paid to the potential roles of homework in even the most current language teaching methodology textbooks.

2. Second, Homework facilitates classroom learning if it is linked to what the child can realistically carry out in the absence of the teacher and other students, and if the child has been prepared to complete the assignment independent of the myriad forms of assistance a classroom can provide. Homework can also be conceptualized as incorporating other forms of assistance found in the home and community and thus reinforce or extend the child's learning outside the boundaries of the classroom.

3. Homework mediates the relationship of school and home. Homework is an implicit public awareness mechanism which at the same time informs parents of the curriculum and the child's progress and level of engagement. In considering its mediational role, we feel that teachers would be well advised to consider carefully the communicative value of homework and its impact on parents who monitor their children completing assignments in the home. We maintain that well conceived homework has the potential to increase awareness and support for a program through the implicit messages it sends concerning a child's schooling. This message can be either negative or positive and for this reason homework is an important element of schooling and a topic worthy of our attention.

The Concept of Interactive Homework

Homework can build a bridge between the classroom and the home and can serve as an instrument of awareness and ultimately advocacy and support for foreign language programs. If this is so, how can homework be re-conceptualized to benefit both child and parent? Rather than view homework as an independent activity to be completed by the child, assignments can be designed to involve the parent in ways that benefit the child and inform the parent directly about what the child is learning in the classroom. The concept of interactive homework has recently been reported by Epstein (1993) at The Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at the Johns Hopkins University where interactive homework assignments in math, science, English language arts, and health have been written and piloted. Referred to as "Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork" (TIPS), the process includes talking with students about homework in the classroom, asking them to describe the type of homework they like best, and inviting them to tell how their parents help them with their schoolwork at home (Epstein, 1993, p. 73). Central to the TIPS process is the interactive homework assignment which invites parents to work with their child on something they are learning in the classroom. In the discussion that follows, we will extend the concept of interactive homework to the foreign language classroom and present our work on incorporating interactive homework in the context of a Japanese FLES program. Additionally, we believe that interactive homework is well suited to foreign language learning where

- opportunities for functional practice and interaction (Ellis, 1988; Long, 1981; Swain, 1985),

- the need to reflect on language (Brooks and Donato, 1994; Donato, 1994; Swain, 1994), and

- the importance of assessing one's own linguistic achievements (Donato and McCormick, 1994)

are central to the language learning process.

Epstein (1993) states that recent studies indicate that the home directly influences students' skills and achievements but that parents need guidance from schools on how best

to assist their children. This assistance is all the more necessary in the case of subject areas where parents do not possess the necessary background or have the requisite knowledge to help their children at home. Foreign language represents a case in point since many parents may have never studied the language or the culture being taught to their children. Foreign language is also set apart from other subjects in that parents may not be able to learn along with their children without sufficient guidance concerning pronunciation, rudimentary knowledge of structure, or cultural information. This need for knowledge of a foreign language is all the more necessary in cases where parents have never studied the language in question. Unlike other subjects where parents may be able to inform themselves on the topic of study, parents have few resources to rely on to help them understand the language their children are acquiring. A further problem is the cumulative nature of language learning. Learning a language requires remembering vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Parents may find it difficult to retain information from one assignment to the next. If they do remember aspects of the language represented across interactive assignments, this knowledge is, at best, fragmentary. However, given the apparent difficulty of actively incorporating the parent into the foreign language learning activity of their children, we believe that creative planning and thoughtful implementation of interactive assignments can result in the spread of information about foreign language curriculum to parents, parental support for foreign language programs, and the promotion of positive attitudes in children and increased learning.

Interactive Homework and the Japanese FLES Program

After the first year of a three year pilot program (1992-1995) to introduce a Japanese FLES program in grades K-5 at the Falk Laboratory School of the University of Pittsburgh, our team of researchers collected data on the language development of students and the attitudes of parents, teachers, and

children concerning this innovative program. Analysis of questionnaires distributed to the parents of the children participating in the program revealed two important findings. First, parents were concerned that they were not well enough informed about what their children were learning and the type of instruction they were receiving. Second, it was apparent that parents had no basis for accurately assessing their children's progress in Japanese. This second finding was manifested when we queried parents regarding how they perceived their children's achievement in Japanese. Comments ranged from extreme satisfaction and enthusiasm for the child's ability to carry out a small but appropriate number of language functions for a 75 minute a week FLES program to skepticism regarding the limited range of topics a child could handle. Curiously, we found that often parents would react differentially toward exactly the same behaviors exhibited by the child. For example, one parent expressed satisfaction that her child could count, name colors, and engage in a few greeting protocols. Conversely, another parent citing almost the same language abilities questioned whether this skill was a sufficient return for the time invested in learning Japanese. We concluded that due to their lack of information about the curriculum, parents needed to be directly connected to the activities of the classroom. This conclusion prompted us to explore the use of homework that would involve the parent in observing and assisting the child's use of Japanese. The goal of these assignments was, therefore, to help the child review classwork in the home and to make parents aware of the contents of the Japanese curriculum and the skills their children were developing in the classroom.

Interactive homework assignments were developed by the Japanese teacher, Ms. Mari O'Connell. As previously mentioned, the first task was to address the problem of providing the necessary resources for parents to work with children on a topic about which the vast majority of them had no knowledge. It was decided that vocabulary and culture would be the focus of each interac-

tive assignment and that parents would be supplied with a guide to help them in pronouncing words with their children. Tasks included sharing vocabulary with parents or teaching the parent a few words or expressions in Japanese. Brief cultural information in English, previously discussed in class, was also included. Simple line drawings were used to cue vocabulary practice or to illustrate cultural notes (see Appendix).

After some initial experimentation with format and length during the first semester, we decided upon a one-sided, 8 1/2 x 14" interactive homework sheet presented every other week during the second semester. The interactive homework assignments were generally consistent in format in an effort to minimize time expended on learning how to do each new assignment.

Section 1 of each homework sheet began with a title introducing the topic of the homework such as personal information, courtesy expressions, school subjects, classroom objects and greetings. Following the title was a statement to the family indicating that the homework topic reflected class work and curricular objectives (e.g., "In class we are studying how to greet different people in Japanese. In this homework assignment I will show you how I can say hello and goodbye to different people in Japanese."), a notice of the due date, and a space for the child's signature.

Section 2 featured from one to four language functions thus alerting the parent to what the child should be able to say in Japanese. This section provided all of the phrases necessary for carrying out the language functions in the homework. In this way, parents were provided with a helpful reference tool to use while working with the child. The Japanese examples were written in a modified form of roomaji to assist the parent with pronunciation. We had hoped that this presentation would alleviate pronunciation difficulties. In many ways it proved useful but as one parent noted "Victor (her son) corrects my pronunciation. He speaks so beautifully... but I don't remember the pronunciation from one time to the next." We will return to the

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Section 1: *Homework Topic*

Japanese: Greetings

Dear Family,
In Japanese class we have learned how to greet people. This activity will let me show you how I do it. This assignment is due _____

Sincerely, _____
Student's signature

Section 2: *Useful Expressions*

In Japanese I am able to say and respond greetings and courtesy expression properly.

O.high.yo!   "Good morning!"
Cone.knee.chi.wa!   "Hello, Good afternoon!"
Cone.ban.wa!   "Good evening!"
Sa.yo.(o).na.la!   "Good bye!"

Are.lee.ga.toe!   "Thank you!"
Dough.e.ta.she.ma.she.tay.   "You are welcome."

ao.men.na.sigh.   "I am sorry."
Ee.des.yo!   "It's OK!"

Section 3: *Let's Warm Up*

To your parent, how do you...
greet him or her in the morning? afternnon? evening?
greet him or her when you go apart?
thank him or her? or respond when he or she says "thank you"?
apologize? or respond when he or she says "I'm sorry"?

Section 4: *Now Try This*

Teach your parent how to greet in Japanese!

Section 5: *Practice Section*

With your parent, exchange greetings and courtesy expressions.
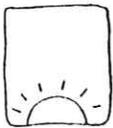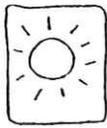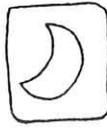
1. AM   2. early PM   3. Evening   4. Gift   5. Oops!   6. Bye!

Section 6: *Cultural Information*

The tradition of bowing in Japan is a
common gesture used in introductions,
greetings, partings, apologizing, and thanking.
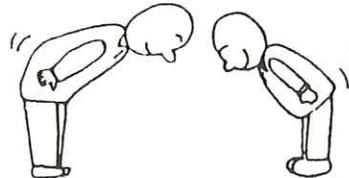
Section 7: *Home to School Communication: Parent Observation*

Student's name _____ Class _____ Date _____
How well do you think your child performed this skill?
1. _____ Child seems to perform this skill well.
2. _____ Please check work. Child needs some help on this.
3. _____ Please note (other comments below):

_____
Parent's signature

problem of pronunciation under guidelines for creating interactive homework.

Section 3, entitled "Let's warm up," asked the students to display their knowledge to their parent by carrying out 3-5 language functions (e.g., "Tell your parents how you would greet them in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. Apologize to your parents.").

In Section 4, the students would teach their parents how to carry out the language functions in the homework. Section 5 provided an opportunity for the parents and children to interact by communicating in Japanese (e.g., "With your parents, exchange greetings and courtesy expressions."). Section 6 presented cultural information relevant to the interactive homework topic.

The last section contained a response form for the parent to sign and provide feedback on the child's performance. Parents were asked to detach this last section and return it to the teacher. The response form was kept simple to allow parents simply to check off whether the child performed the task well or still needed additional practice. A space for other comments completed the interactive homework sheet. Students were encouraged to keep the interactive homework sheets to use for future reference.

The interactive homework was short and printed on a single page, followed a regular format, linked to the curriculum, included language resources to help the parent work with the child, included a cultural component, contained simple, direct instructions, provided for practice and interaction, and allowed the parent to respond concerning their child's performance and progress.

Parental Reactions to Interactive FL Homework

Parental reactions to the interactive homework assignments were sought on two different occasions – at the middle and end of the academic year. Mid-year questionnaires revealed that the length of the assignments and the child's level of comfort in completing the homework was problematic. In response to this observation, future assignments were shortened and only material that all children could be

expected to complete without the assistance of the teacher was included, i.e., material that was adequately covered in class and was relatively familiar. It was hoped that this familiarity with the material would allow the children to showcase their ability rather than their frustration, which is often the case when assignments are given prematurely or without regard for pre-requisite skills and knowledge needed to work independently or with a parent. To shorten the assignments, language function practice was decreased and there were more activities at the word-level (e.g. "Say the names of the 12 body parts to your parents."). Cultural information was omitted; however, soon after this decision had been made, several parents voiced concerns that the cultural information was one of the most interesting aspects of the interactive homework. For this reason, cultural information was reinstated.

Of the parents who responded to the items regarding the interactive homework on the end-of-year parent survey, 33% stated that both they and their children enjoyed completing the homework together. Forty-two percent of the parents noted, however, that the assignments were frustrating for them and their children. Twenty-five percent of the parents observed that the first round of assignments were too long but since they had been shortened they enjoyed working with their children on Japanese homework. We found these responses encouraging since over half the parents (58%) stated that they and their children enjoyed completing the revised assignments.

We were also interested in determining how consistently parents participated in interactive Japanese homework with their children. Thirty-eight percent of the parents reported having completed all the assignments and 20% estimated that they had completed almost half of the interactive homework. Forty-two percent reported that very few or none of the assignments were undertaken with their children most likely because of the frustrations expressed in the previous question. It is striking that the same percentage of parents who expressed satisfac-

tion with the interactive homework also represents the percentage of parents who report actually "doing homework" with children. That is, these parents' judgments seem to be based on practice and behavioral commitment rather than on merely providing a socially and educationally appropriate answer.

When asked whether interactive homework should continue, a high percentage (76%) of the parents responded affirmatively. The remaining parents (24%) who responded negatively need some qualification however, since this number included several parents of kindergarten students to whom homework is never given in other subject areas. In some cases, parents of kindergarten children felt that homework was not appropriate at all for any subject at this level of schooling. As one parent stated "kindergarten children have too many other things to do after school. They should not be assigned homework." Therefore, the interactive nature of the assignment may not have produced the recommendation to discontinue the project but a belief that kindergarten is not a time for bringing formal academic work into the home.

Anecdotal comments of the parents taken from the end-of-year questionnaires also shed light on the use and function of interactive homework, the characteristics of effective assignments, and their potential to inform and raise awareness about the contents of the curriculum. One parent stated that he liked the interactive assignments because "I'd have an idea of what was going on in class." The majority of the narrative comments centered on the pronunciation issue. Several parents requested that tapes be sent home even at a nominal fee. Another parent observed that her "two children argued over pronunciation and who would teach it." She added "I am bad at languages and found it frustrating to be grilled about it by my children." For this parent, audio tapes keyed to the assignments would have certainly helped to relieve frustration at interactive homework time.

Other comments reflected the need for a consistent format and clear objectives and directions. "Interactive homework should con-

tinue if it is made clearer concerning its purpose - to explore? to meet set goals? to assess progress?" All these questions deserve our attention if building interactions between parent and child in the home is to become a reality. Length of assignment also surfaced as a concern –

> "Homework should be very short and more frequent (weekly) and they should focus on just one thing a week."

Finally, for a few parents, receiving the assignments was problematic.

> "I never received assignments due to my child's not making them available without me asking for them."

Clearly this problem can be solved if parents are informed in advance concerning dates of interactive homework distribution. All the above comments were extremely helpful in refining our homework project. We were also encouraged by the comments of some parents who enthusiastically added

> "I learned some Japanese too!"

Recommendations and Guidelines for Creating Interactive Homework Assignments

Based on our experience, we offer the following recommendations and guidelines for the construction of interactive homework assignments for the foreign language class. In this section, we will make recommendations concerning the use of interactive homework and will then conclude with a reference checklist to use in designing interactive homework assignments.

Information

The first step in initiating an interactive homework project is to inform all participants on the nature of the project. Epstein (1993) emphasizes the importance of sending a letter of introduction to the parents describing the frequency, goals, objectives, and procedures of the interactive homework assignments. In turn, parents should be encouraged to provide their observations, comments, or questions to the teacher (Epstein 1993, p. 74). Including a response form at the end of each assignments allows the teacher to monitor the degree of participation in the project and provides the parent with a direct way to communicate with the classroom teacher.

Homework format

As previously discussed consistency is critical. Although covering different material, each assignment should follow a similar format. (e.g., title, note to parent signed by child, objectives, language material used in assignment, child-parent interaction activity, cultural information, response form for parent). This predictable pattern of homework activity will help the parent to focus on the content of the assignments rather than the procedures for its completion. The format should be "user-friendly" by avoiding technical language, complicated or wordy directions, illegible printing and a dense or "busy" layout. In deciding on a format, it is equally important to consider the length of the assignment. It is unrealistic to expect parent and child to spend long periods of time on homework for a single subject. We have found that short 10 minute assignments work best and are viewed by parents as feasible and realistic rather than oppressive and inconvenient. Epstein (1993) also suggests that interactive homework be kept to one-page and be reproduced on colored paper for easy identification by the parent and child.[4]

Language resources

Make every effort to assist the parent to assist the child. Foreign language represents a subject area different from others whose contents are taught through a language already known to the parent. Provide clear, easy to use pronunciation guides. This year we are sending parents audio tapes of Japanese stories and songs and parents are responding quite favorably to this tool. Additionally, parents can not be expected to learn the language along with their child. Although parents will develop some knowledge of the language through their interactions with their children, an interactive assignment sent home twice a month will simply not provide the necessary input for a parent to make significant language gains. More-over, parents will not have the continual language exposure and practice necessary for second language acquisition. Therefore, ensure that each assignment is self-contained. Make no assumption that information used in an assignment during the first week of the month will be retained by the parent for use in an assignment during week three of the same month. Each assignment needs to provide the necessary resources to be completed independent of all others.

One way to ensure parent-child interaction at homework time and avoid the problem of the parent who, for whatever reason, believes he or she is incapable of helping in a foreign language is to include activities that can be conducted in the home language of the parent and child. Children can share cultural information with their parents or tell their parents their favorite part of a story they have heard in the foreign language class. This interaction can be conducted in the first language and can serve a useful purpose in introducing the study of the foreign language into the everyday discourse of the family.

Consider the child

Like the parent who requires resources for assisting and interacting with the child, the child also needs to be prepared to enter into the interaction with the parent. Among its multiple purposes, one aim of the interactive homework is its public awareness role to inform, inspire confidence and build enthusiasm for the accomplishments of the child and the foreign language program. The teacher needs, therefore, to consider the level of preparedness of the child for a particular homework assignment. Assignments should be written with the children in mind to allow them to showcase their abilities and developing knowledge. Little positive impact will come from assignments that consistently yield child-parent frustration or leave parents with the impression that their children are confused and learning little from the instruction of the teacher. One innovative aspect of interactive homework is that the children become the spokespersons for the FLES program and have the potential to teach the parents.

Therefore, like teachers, they need to have the background knowledge and confidence to instruct. Considering the learners and what they can realistically do on their own without teacher support should motivate and drive the contents of the interactive homework assignment.

In deciding at which grade level foreign language homework should begin, the FLES teacher should consider school policy regarding homework. As found in our program, offering foreign language homework in kindergarten when it was not given in other subjects was a contentious issue.

Consider the contents

What can be included in an interactive assignment? We are still experimenting with the contents of interactive homework but our experience has shown that work on vocabulary and simple language functions works well and directly informs the parent of what the child is learning in the classroom. Children may demonstrate to the parent a language function they have learned and teach the parents a few phrases to allow them to engage in a brief 2-4 line dialogue with them. Pictures on the homework sheet can be used to cue vocabulary. Parents can use these images to help children practice and remember new words and expressions. We have also discovered that cultural information is greatly appreciated by parents. Sample activities might include a discussion about a target culture's holidays, a retelling of a legend or folktale, a discussion around a piece of realia, or information concerning daily cultural practices such as schooling, shopping, meals, and family life. As previously discussed, cultural information can be discussed in the child's home language thus avoiding the problem of the parent's lack of proficiency in the target language.

In the spirit of the TIPS project (Epstein, 1993), the contents of the assignments may also connect directly with the home. That is, rather than try to duplicate the classroom in the home, the home itself may be used as a learning environment. Activities that involve the child and parent in information-gathering or observations of persons, objects, and events in the home are excellent ways to take advantage of the unique contribution the home can make in a child's learning. For example, following a lesson on transportation, children may be asked to interview the parent to gather information on the modes of transportation found in their home or neighborhood (car, bike, motorcycle, roller-skates, sled, truck, wagon, etc.). After a lesson on rooms of the house, a child may be asked to take a parent on a tour of his own home by identifying as many rooms as possible in the target language. This information can then be used in class for additional projects. Comparisons of a child's home with homes found in the target culture can also be carried out in collaboration with a parent. An illustration of the interior of a house in Japan or Mexico, for example, can be used as a point of departure for a discussion of housing differences. In this case, it will be equally interesting for parents to learn about the dwellings of others in a culture unlike their own. In all the examples above, the important point is that the children make use of their immediate environment by connecting some aspect of the home with school, thus strengthening learning and extending the curriculum beyond the walls of the classroom.

The ideal scenario would be for the FLES teacher to consider grade and language level when developing interactive homework assignments. However, in a program like ours, where the staffing option is the language-specialist model – one FLES teacher for all children K-5, multiple versions of interactive homework may not be logistically realistic. Among our parents and students, there were no complaints regarding all students receiving the same homework. Conversely, parental feedback indicated that siblings, enrolled in the same program, were able to participate on the homework together, an unanticipated interaction.

Consider the parent

In the best case scenario, an interactive homework project will result in unanimous, enthusiastic participation on the part of the parents. But as educators we would be naive to assume that parental support for a child's study exists uniformly in all homes. It is not the intention of the authors to pass judgment on parents who, for whatever reason, do not participate in helping a child with home assignments or monitoring their completion. Professional obligations, travel, health, educational background of the parent, work schedules, etc. all bear on the parent's ability or willingness to complete assignments with a child. However, we think that two issues are raised by the case of a non-participating parent.

- First, children cannot be held responsible for completion of an interactive assignment in cases where the parent refuses or is unable to participate. Unlike independent homework assignments where the onus is entirely upon the child for their completion, the interactive homework requires the participation of two individuals. Teachers need to be sensitive therefore to the feelings of the child whose parents, for whatever reason, have not participated in the assignment. In discussing interactive homework in class, care needs to be taken not to call attention to or embarrass those children who have nothing to turn in to the teacher due to parental non-involvement. Where parents refuse to interact around homework, the child is truly powerless to fulfill course requirements or to promote positive educational exchanges in the home.

- Second, we believe that the knowledge the teacher has of parental involvement in interactive homework can contribute positively to her better understanding of the child, individual differences in the classroom, and possible reasons for the child's achievement or lack of it. Just as interactive homework has the potential to inform parents about school, it can serve equally as a source of critical information about the support a child receives for schooling in the home. Thus interactive homework creates a bi-directional exchange of information from teacher to parent and from parent to teacher. We believe, however, that information concerning interactive

homework shared in newsletters, parent night meetings, and communications from the teacher to the parent can alleviate some of the problems of non-participation by showing parents the importance of home support and the value of the project.

Checklist for Constructing an Interactive Homework Assignment

The following checklist is intended as a reference when writing interactive homework assignments.

Procedural considerations

☐ 1. Has a letter been sent to parents explaining the goals and purposes of the interactive homework?

☐ 2. Are parents aware of the dates of distribution and return of interactive homework?

☐ 3. Are the objectives clearly stated on the interactive homework sheet?

☐ 4. Are directions clear and brief? Have they been piloted on a few individuals before distribution to parents?

☐ 5. Has a brief statement introducing the assignment been written from the point of view of the child and signed by her?

☐ 6. Is a parental response form included at the end of the assignment?

Formatting considerations

☐ 7. Is the physical layout of the homework clear and easy to follow?

☐ 8. Is the interactive homework on a single page?

☐ 9. Is format consistent across assignments?

Content considerations

☐ 10. Have parents been given the necessary background information to help the child (pronunciation guides, glosses, etc.)?

☐ 11. Is the homework self-contained?

☐ 12. Has care been taken to include only that content with which the child is most famil-iar and capable of completing at home?

☐ 13. Is the assignment representative of what the child can do?

☐ 14. Can the homework be successfully completed in a short time?

☐ 15. Do the activities promote interaction?

☐ 16. Does the assignment include activities involving the home?

☐ 17. Has cultural information been included?

Self-assessment

☐ 18. Do you feel the assignment is a good reflection of your competence as a teacher?

Conclusion

This report focuses on the seldom-explored topic of creating and strengthening connections between home and school through the use of interactive homework assignments in the foreign language program. Three factors triggered our interest in this topic: the complete absence of any discussion of homework in contemporary methodology texts, a desire to provide parents of children in a Japanese FLES program with information about their children's program and with a basis for assessing their children's progress, and a belief that the establishment or strengthening of a home - school partnership would significantly enrich the child's educational experience.

We have adapted, piloted, and revised the TIPS model developed by Epstein (1993) for use in the foreign language classroom. During the 1993-1994 school year, we found that a majority of parents completed and appreciated the interactive homework, but that they had a number of suggestions to offer for improving the form and content of assignments. Based upon our experience last year, and parental, student, and teacher feedback, we have revised the form and content of the assignments for this year, developed some supplementary material for parents, and devised a set guidelines and a checklist for others who may wish to develop their own assignments.

We particularly wish to encourage others who develop similar materials to ensure that the assignments encourage the children to showcase their abilities, and that they establish, extend, and solidify linkages between the home and the school. Some will argue that this is difficult to do when the parent does not speak and has not studied the target language; we disagree. We believe that our data indicate that such parents welcome a teacher's initiatives which help them to understand, to participate in, and to support their children's learning experiences. The use of interactive homework assignments, then, provides a valuable tool for enriching the partnership between home and school that has seemingly been ignored.

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Notes

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2. Thanks to Claire Donato, age 8, for the child's perspective on the non-participating parent.

3. We will use he word "parent" to include caretakers who play a significant role in the life of children assuming primary responsibility for their upbringing, and emotional, physical, and educational needs. The word "parent" is intended to encompass all individuals present in the home who have the daily responsibility of nurturing and caring for children.

4. For sample interactive homework assignments in mathematics, science, English language arts, and health, see *Instructor* (1993, 1994).

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"Quotable Quotes..."

On Language Learning

In the last few years a new view of language acquisition has resulted partly from research on second language teaching and partly from the immersion experience. It underlines the fact that a language cannot be learned by formal practice alone. Most of it is learnt best in the process of doing something else while using the language.

H. H. Stern
"And Cinderella may yet go to the Ball: A personal view of the past, present, and future of Core French," *Dialogue. A Newsletter published by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada*

On the Language Classroom

In many a language classroom there is almost nothing which would immediately identify it to the eye as a place where the "other language" lurks. Posters and other visual material on the walls not only render the learning environment more pleasant, but carry a subtle cultural message as well. This is admittedly easier for teachers who are located in one room for all their classes than it is for an itinerant teacher or one who circulates from room to room during the day. But even the latter can make some arrangement with the other teachers involved, to establish, in the room they use, some visual contact with the language.

William T. Mitchell
"Self-Assessment for the Language Teacher," *The Canadian Modern Language Review*

On Student Errors

Teachers should apply the old adage, "Practice makes perfect," in contrast to the tendency in the foreign language profession to say: "You've got to be perfect before you can practice." This means accepting errors as part of the learning process rather than making believe that they will not occur. Mistakes should be used to diagnose errors and prescribe remedial practice.

Frank M. Grittner
"What Language Teachers Should Do to Improve Instruction," *Information* reprinted in *Indiana Foreign Language Teachers' Association News*

On the Learning Environment

In the learning environment, there are at least four critical elements:

* the learner,
* the teacher,
* the "to-be-learned" and
* the strategies for learning.

For this environment to fulfill its function, these elements must serve, complement, and derive meaning from each other.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner
Teaching as a Subversive Activity

What Visual Aids Can and Cannot Do in Second Language Teaching

Hector Hammerly

Visual aids are powerfully appealing to both language teachers and students. Such aids have many advantages but also certain limitations. We should be especially leery of attempts to replace competent teachers' presentations with technological visual presentations, no matter how sophisticated the latter may be.

Introduction

Language teachers have used visual aids of some kind or another since ancient times. Since the publication of the first visually oriented second-language textbook, Comenius's *Orbis sensualium pictus* in 1648, visual aids have found a relatively large number of users. Indeed, by the late 1980's it would have been difficult to come across a language teacher who did not use at least one type of visual aid in his courses.

As Brown and Mollica (1988-1989:1) correctly pointed out,

> Visuals have been used as an aid to language and the transmission of information since pre-historic times. From the paintings and drawings found on the walls of cave-dwellers, through Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms to modern visual extravaganzas, man has consistently made visual representations of reality. Throughout history, the world has been increasingly transformed into an icon, a visual figurativization of internal and external reality. This is not surprising given the fact that sight is the strongest of the five senses.

Curiously, a rigorous definition of visual aids has never been agreed upon. Still, many in our profession consider them simply wonderful, more or less like motherhood, and neither see nor acknowledge their limitations and the practical consequences thereof.

This study attempts to deal with visual aids in language teaching with greater precision and to discuss both their advantages (which are many and have often been described) and limitations (perhaps not so numerous, but very important even though general silence surrounds them).

What Visual Aids Are (and What They Are Not)

What Visual Aids Are Not

Despite various claims and assumptions, visual aids are not the following:

1. Written Language

Whatever is a sample of written language, from one grapheme to the complete holdings of our National Library, is not a visual aid but language in its written form. We must be careful, therefore, not to succumb to the temptation certain French audiovisualist scholars have fallen into, of using the same terms (*lire, lisibilité,* etc.) for reading a text and viewing images, and thus blurring the distinctions between them.

For the same reason – the need to keep two very different activities carefully apart in our minds – it would be preferable to restrict the word "literacy" to the ability to decode written language (that is, "read" in the established meaning of the term) and to use instead a new term (perhaps "visual competence") for the visual aspects that the linguistic, iconographic and cultural codes have in common.[1]

2. Objects and Animals

Objects, likewise, are not visual aids, although pictures or models of objects may be visual aids. Thus, a pencil is not a visual aid. It is an object, specifically a tool used to write with. That it can be used to demonstrate the meaning of the French word *crayon,* for example, doesn't make it any less of an object. Only a picture of a pencil would be a visual aid in this case. The same thing can be said of other objects that are often brought into the classroom, such as realia - whether menus, mantillas or money.

This argument becomes clearer when we consider animals. It isn't the fact that an elephant is too large to bring into the classroom that exempts it from the designation "visual aid." However small and portable, an animal is not a visual aid but an animal; only a picture or model of an animal can be considered a visual aid.

3. People

Carried to its illogical extreme, the view that anything visible is a visual aid led certain audiovisualists to consider people "visual aids" and the teacher "the most important audio-visual aid" in the classroom (Corder 1966: 33), although with appropriate materials his role was supposed to be "secondary" (ibid., p. 79).

This attitude is similar to views of the teacher as a human tape recorder, a mere coordinator of the learning process, just a conversation stimulator, or a dispensable adjunct ("optional live software"?) to a computer, all teacher-demeaning views held over the years by some of the leaders of, respectively, the audiolingual, individualization, communication, and computerization movements.

Competent language teachers should reject any attempt to reduce their crucial role in the classroom, whatever movement or fad may be the source of such misguided attempts.

4. Activities

Things people do, from presiding over a session of Parliament to acting out a classroom skit, may have visual impact but are not visual aids.

5. Media

A consequence of limiting visual aids to nonverbal images and models is that the means for presenting them are not themselves visual aids.

A projector is a tool that enables us to show visual aids. Slides, films, blackboards, flannelgraphs and computer screens are media used to display visual aids; but it is the pictures the students see – whether projected, drawn with chalk, attached, or generated electronically - that may be visual aids.

6. Entertainment

Pictures presented, with or without sound, only or even primarily to entertain, are not visual aids. While audiovisual entertainment may result in incidental learning, its objective is not instructional and thus it often is unsuitable for the classroom.

An aid is something used purposefully to facilitate the doing of something, in our case, SL learning. While our visual aids should be interesting and, if possible, entertaining, their entertainment value is clearly a matter of secondary concern.

A Definition of "Visual Aids"

Having freed the overloaded boat from much unnecessary cargo, we can now define "visual aids" more rigorously as "drawings, photos, graphics or models of a nonverbal nature used to facilitate (second language) teaching/learning."

Of course, verbal material often accompanies visual aids, whether in written (cartoons, comic strips, etc.) or spoken (film, television, video, etc.) form. The reverse is also true: visual aids often play a supporting role to verbal material. In audiovisual presentations the primary communicative function almost constantly switches back and forth between the verbal and the visual.

"Authentic" vs. "Contrived" Audiovisuals

The current push to use "authentic" audiovisuals and to minimize the use of "contrived" ones is semantically misleading and misses the point of SL teaching/learning.

It is misleading in its choice of labels: Note how loaded with positive connotations is the word "authentic" and how negative are the connotations of "contrived."

Furthermore, this trend ignores the fact that we can use audiovisuals aimed at two different audiences, native speakers and SL learners. Just labelling them accordingly as "Audiovisuals-for-natives" and "Audiovisuals-for-SL-learners" would clarify matters; of course, only the latter are visual aids in our field.

Audiovisuals-for-natives are designed for viewers who are very fluent in the language and command a very large vocabulary. The viewers of audiovisuals-for-SL-learners, on the other hand, are not fluent and have precarious control of a limited vocabulary.

Thus it is hard to see how either type of audiovisual could be used effectively with the other type's audience. Natives would be extremely bored with audiovisuals-for-SL-learners, while SL learners find themselves lost and frustrated with nearly all audiovisuals-for-natives. In terms of the SL classroom, therefore, audiovisuals-for-natives should be called "Unadapted Audiovisuals" (the main connotation being "unsuitable," but there are several others) and audiovisuals-for-SL-learners should be called "Graded Audiovisuals," which could be "Learner-Designed" or "Adapted" in either case the main connotation being "suitable").

The push for so-called "authentic" (audio) visuals, like the push for "real" communication from Day One of the SL program, is very much part of the current communication movement. Since communicationists believe that all we need to do to ensure good results is to reproduce natural language acquisition conditions in the classroom, it follows that in their view everything, from visuals to classroom activities to the noncorrection of errors, must be "real" and "authentic."[2]

Visual and Verbal Input: Different, Noncontiguous Stimuli

It is by now well known that verbal and visual data are stored in different brain hemispheres (for about 95 per cent of the human race, verbal data storage and processing occur in the left hemisphere). Evidence of this is the finding that aphasiacs have greater difficulty in distinguishing between word meanings than between their referents (Stachowiak 1982).

Thus, neurally the pathways should be shorter -presumably being close to each other, in the same hemisphere - between a SL word and its closest native language (NL) equivalent than between either of them and their referent.

What this would do to the psychological claims underpinning the Direct Method (Franke 1884, Passy 1899, and many others), on which at least one use of visual aids is based, is not hard to imagine: the claim that the picture-SL word connection is shorter and more "direct" than the SL word-NL word connection is negated.

Their Relative Importance to Communication

It is often said that only a small percentage (between five and 15 per cent) of the meaning of communication acts is verbal and all the rest is nonverbal. While no doubt in some cases the nonverbal element is crucial, the claim seems a gross exaggeration to me.

An empirical game one can play to test the validity of the above assertion is to attend to audiovisual programs with, alternately, the audio and the video off. This "experiment" can easily be completed in one or two evenings of TV watching. See/listen for yourself. What you will notice is that the audio alone generally allows you to understand quite well what is going on, while with only the video on you are very often lost - this in a medium whose visual element is emphasized. The obvious conclusion: Words convey far more information than visuals.

Nearly three decades ago several studies have shown the greater importance of verbal input relative to visual input. While pictures may be more easily remembered than words, by secondary school verbal material is learned faster when presented verbally than pictorially. Two decades ago, Jenkins et al (1967) found that college sophomores tended to encode pictures verbally.

Their Effect on the Imagination

Apparently verbal stimuli evoke more "sense-impression" (sensory) associations than pictorial stimuli (Otto and Britton 1965), which perhaps is just another way of saying that sound alone can result in richer mental images (does anyone still remember The Shadow?) than sound plus video, or that with adequate verbal stimulation the students' imagination can produce more vivid images and maybe more memorable associations than with the latest, state-of-the-art video display.

To put it another way: Do we, through the too frequent use of visuals, limit the use of our students' imagination and discourage them from the effort of having to elaborate their own mental images? Given that self-generated images and associations may be remembered better than those provided, ready-made, like baby food, we may wonder whether our teaching suffers from an overreliance on visuals.

Their Effect on Comprehension

Pictures assist in the global comprehension of verbal material (Mueller 1980), especially if they are thematic and precede a text (Omaggio 1979). Naturally, the best global comprehension is attained when text and pictures are used (Kraif et al 1980), as shown by our little TV "experiment."

That visual support of comprehension is mostly thematic is seen in the fact that illustrations have been found to significantly enhance 11 year-old native English speakers' comprehension of abstract passages but not of concrete ones (Moore and Skinner 1985). This too has important implications for our use of visual aids in SL teaching.

Visual Aids: General Considerations

Types of Visual Aids

As defined above, visual aids include:

1. Drawings

These have the advantage over photographs that one can decide precisely how much detail to show and what to highlight. Drawings include, among other things, cartoons (and comics) and maps.

- Cartoons and comics have been thoroughly discussed in terms of SL teaching by Mollica (1976), Brown (1977), and Marsh (1978). "Captionable" cartoons can be varied in successive interpretations. I have found wordless cartoons particularly effective as speech generators. Comics with simple verbal material, such as Snoopy and his friends (available in many languages), and later more challenging ones like Tintin and Astéryx (to mention two in French), stimulate SL practice. Of course, cartoons and comics are subject to misunderstandings arising from cultural differences, so they should be handled judiciously.

- Maps, preferably with other aids, can be used effectively to "take a trip" through another region or country, to locate historical or current events, and so forth.

2. Photographs

Scanlan has shown how to use photographs in SL teaching (1976) and how to analyze them in order to, among other things, manipulate linguistic structures and improve language skills (1980). He is aware of the "likelihood" that the students mental verbalizations will be in the NL (1976: 416). One visual medium that combines photographs or drawings with verbal material is the advertisement. Scanlan (1978), Mollica (1979), and Simon (1980) have dealt in detail with the linguistic, communicative and cultural aspects of this.

Carefully chosen photographs, especially those that are a little ambiguous or have emotional appeal, can be excellent conversation stimuli. Mollica (1992a and 1992b) has led the way in the development of this type of SL materials.

3. Graphics

There are at least seven types of graphic visuals aids, as follows:

- Text modifiers such as diacritics or the use of one or a few letters with underlining, in a different size, style (bold, italic, etc.) or font have long been used as specific graphic signals.

- General graphic devices include lines, colours (a general visual signal used in particular by Gattegno in his Silent Way (1972)), and such other devices as circles, boxes (or, for that matter, any shape) and arrows, most of them, again, long part of our arsenal. The best discussion so far of "pedagogical graphics" may be Danesi's (1983).

- Charts also have a long history in SL teaching. Recently, the flowcharts used by computer programmers have been adapted for the teaching of SL syntax (Bryant 1983), though one wonders how readable they are for the average SL student.

- Plans of cities, streets, stores, houses, and rooms are useful, especially as points of reference to aid comprehension or as conversation stimuli.

- Articulatory graphics include face diagrams as well as special symbols that serve as articulatory pointers or reminders (Hammerly 1974-a).

- Electronically generated non-computer graphics, using such devices as the oscilloscope, can aid intonation, stress, and rhythm.

- Computer-generated graphics, which for some years have shown fine detail, can also help with stress, intonation, and rhythm – and with sound articulation.

4. Models

Two types of three-dimensional representations that are particularly useful in language teaching are models of the speech apparatus and models of places. Tree-dimensional models of the speech apparatus seem to help students visualize more realistically what is involved in the articulation of NL and SL sounds

Models of places like Berlin, the Champs Elysées, a supermarket, or a typical Mexican *casa* can facilitate vocabulary practice and conversation.

(Although models are normally included loosely under the term "realia," it should be remembered that this Latin word means "real things," which of course models are not.

Models are visual aids, real things are not.)

A Few Problems and Possible Solutions

1. Ambiguity

The nature of perceptual ambiguity has been discussed by many, an example being the article by Arndt and Pesch (1984). How to reduce pictorial ambiguity has been dealt with at some length by Corder (1966) and Wright (1976). But most verbal material cannot be represented pictorially, so visual aids are and will remain largely ambiguous and unreliable as conveyors of the meaning of *specific* words or sentences (see below). The hope that visuals capable of conveying all meanings unambiguously would someday be developed must be considered a "pipe dream." The scientifically based "revolutionary visual pedagogies" we were supposed to look forward to in the eighties (Brown 1983:870) did not materialize – except in the sense that the use of video and multimedia has increased. Truly revolutionary successful pedagogies would be primarily a matter of teachers and students interacting in more effective ways, and only secondarily a matter of applications of more sophisticated technology, for we must accept that visuals suffer from inherent limitations.

2. Cultural bias

It has been shown repeatedly and convincingly that people from different cultures interpret visuals differently. Pointing out the culturally relevant features of a visual – relevant from the point of view of both cultures, which calls for contrastive cultural analysis – is clearly the only solution to this problem.

3. Combination of separate visual and verbal material

This is done in various audiovisual media; dubbing is perhaps the best example. In the SL classroom, captions alone, captions plus visuals, or visuals alone can be shown as desired by using two visual sources. As a sort of reading activity, students can match pictures and captions, which could be on cards or, among other possibilities, on dentists' tongue depressors (Flynn and Trott 1972).

4. Adaptation

The general unsuitability of audio-visuals-for-native-speakers for the SL classroom has already been briefly discussed. If used, they should first be adapted to the characteristics of the SL learners involved (age in particular) and naturally to their degree of linguistic (grammatical and lexical) and communicative competence, and cultural awareness. For some such visuals systematic advance preparation of the students can compensate for lack of adaptation, but for most "authentic" visuals the amount of advance preparation needed is so great that they become useful only at a higher level of instruction.

5. Control

The idea of the student being increasingly self-reliant and primarily responsible for his own learning did not die in the late 70s. In fact, new technologies like the microcomputer, the VCR, and the videodisc player are making it easier, at least in theory, to place control of visuals in the hands of the learner.

However, other student-controlled technologies that have been around for many years, such as the individual 8mm film cartridge viewer, have hardly been exploited in SL teaching. Even student control of non-technological devices other than textbooks has been the exception rather than the rule in our profession, so it is difficult to tell, when, if ever, technologically advanced learner control of visuals will become a reality.

Visual Aids: Advantages and Limitations

General Advantages

1. Atmosphere

Visuals allow us to bring the SL world into the classroom. Every place frequented by our students should be rich in SL visuals, realia and music so as to create the atmosphere of a "cultural island."

2. Motivation

Visuals are an important one among the many factors that contribute to student motivation. Others include
(a) interesting and
(b) relevant content; and
(c) respect for SL learners' rights (Hammerly 1985: 211-20), such as the rights to be taught systematically, step by step; to understand what is going on in class; to be reinforced as needed; to be corrected promptly and appropriately; to have one's individual characteristics and needs taken into account; and to have input into the decision-making process.

Motivation, in short, results primarily from the evident opportunity to succeed in an interesting process of learning in which the learner has considerable input. Visuals can enhance motivation but I doubt very much that they can, by themselves, create it.

3. Focus of attention

A visual can draw the students' attention to most things we may want to emphasize. If visuals are simple, rather than cluttered with detail, attention can be focused on what is relevant (Corder 1966: 53). (But see General Limitation 2 below.)

4. Context

Visuals can provide virtually all situations with their most significant non-linguistic contexts.

5. Explanatory support

Visual aids can help explain features of SL structure.

6. General comprehension

Pictures have been shown to aid general comprehension by directing attention towards a theme (Omaggio 1979) or "probable semantic area" (Dethloff 1980).

7. Mnemonic support

Visuals help learners retain and recall
(a) the meaning of words, etc. (Winn 1982) and
(b) the sequences in which they have occurred.

8. Cultural Insights

Picturable cultural features are grasped better when seen than when described; for best results, however, they should be pointed out.

9. Conversation Stimuli

This is one of the most useful functions of visual aids.

General Limitations

1. The "Audiovisual Communication Dilemma"

Although greater redundancy in the text and greater correlation between text and pictures result in greater clarity, less error and less ambiguity, the amount of information transmitted is reduced accordingly (Deichsel 1980). Thus in SL teaching by increasing the amount of information conveyed pictorially we reduce the amount of information conveyed linguistically, and vice versa.

2. Focusing Attention away from Language

This applies to both language forms and comprehension, especially listening comprehension.

- Forms or patterns in any component of the language must be attended to first, particulary at the moment of their initial introduction. For example, to the extent that the attention of beginners is on visual aids and their meaning, it won't be on the teacher's articulation of sounds, and as a result the imitation of sounds is bound to suffer.

- Comprehension of the verbal message will likewise suffer from the excessive use of visuals and from the use of many specific visuals rather than a few general ones. Specific visuals may make it unnecessary for the students to put in a real effort to understand the language, since apparently *"to the extent that comprehension of a passage is based on visual aids it is not based on the linguistic message."* (Hammerly 1985: 127).

Perhaps we should not be surprised if, at the end of a program in which visual aids are used extensively, graduates cannot follow conversations by natives. What our students need most is training in listening comprehension based on hearing only, not on hearing largely aided by seeing.

3. Unreliability in Conveying Specific Meaning

Research supports the view that visual aids are at their weakest - are, in effect, unreliable – as conveyors and elicitors of the specific meanings of particular words or sentences.

- Words, even concrete ones, cannot be conveyed pictorially without ambiguity. An experiment (Hammerly 1974-b) revealed that even when the picture/word pairs were as concrete as *airplane, bird, deer, train,* and *tree,* university students with no knowledge of the words guessed their correct meaning only from 40 to 70 per cent of the time, while they were not sure ten to 40 per cent of the time, and they were wrong 25 to 50 per cent of the time (percentages don't add up to 100 because they varied with each of the five words).

- Sentences in dialogues do not fare much better. Dodson (1967: 8-9) found 30 university lecturers unable to guess the meaning of more than ten to 40 per cent of the sentences depicted in audiovisual lessons popular at the time. In research conducted from the mid-70s to the early 80s (Hammerly 1984) it was determined that experienced teachers of French could guess only an average of 54 per cent of the meaning/language conveyed by the ten frames in each of two filmstrips used in a fairly sophisticated French audiovisual textbook (Capelle and Capelle 1970).

The fact that visuals cannot be relied upon to convey the meaning of SL words or of SL sentences in context has also been noted by several other researchers (e.g., Cole 1967, 1976). Unfortunately, it seems that many SL teachers, who of course know the SL, are so dazzled by ingenious visuals that they fail to realize that the meaning is not clear to their students, who don't know the SL.

Corder, a strong audiovisualist, saw this problem. As he put it (1966: 50): "...we can never take it for granted that what we present is immediately recognized." A few pages later (58) he added: "...our pupils must never be put in the position of needing to ask: 'What is going on here?' " Yet this is precisely what happens, much of the time, when meaning is "conveyed" monolingually, with or without visual aids, at the beginning level: learning under such conditions becomes an ongoing, frustrating guessing game.

- Problems with the monolingual approach to conveying meaning have already been discussed in detail elsewhere (Hammerly 1982). Suffice it to say here that monolingual methods are inefficient ("very slow" (Corder 1966: 27)); often result in vague semantization; and do not prevent the formation of SL/NL associations anyway, even when not a single word in the NL is heard in class (Sweet (1899) already observed this, and Dodson (1967: 51) called it "the eureka experience"). Too, monolingual methods are less direct than bilingual ones.

While it is understandable that the lack of multilingual materials makes a monolingual approach (usually with heavy use of visuals) necessary with linguistically heterogeneous classes such as those in ESL, even there such an approach is neither desirable nor unavoidable. When all the students in a SL class speak the same NL, a monolingual approach is no longer justifiable, either on theoretical or practical grounds; even when the teacher cannot speak the NL of the students, it is possible to arrange to convey meaning in it initially.

It is not the initial monolingual SL presentation of meaning with the aid of visuals that prevents the establishment of incorrect SL/NL associations; this can be accomplished best, instead, by actively and overtly discouraging one-to-one word "translation" (which is often mistranslation) and by relying instead on contextual equivalents, with pointers as needed. Only this -not pictures - will ensure the prompt and precise conveyance of SL meaning.

How meaning is initially introduced seems to have little to do with its subsequent internalization (Preibusch and Zander 1971). Internalization, consolidation, and ex-

pansion of meaning are a function of meaningful practice in the second language. A monolingual guessing game aided by visuals is still a guessing game, not, as some assert, communication.

The weight of available empirical evidence and of reason support the hypothesis that meaning is best conveyed by means of triads composed of

(a) contextualized SL words and sentences plus
(b) visual aids plus
(c) contextualized NL equivalents.

Using visuals enhances retention and recall, and using the NL ensures comprehension.

Principled bilingual teaching in the SL classroom, which is another way of putting it, should yield the best results. This means using the NL as little as possible (certainly not to generate SL sentences) and as much as necessary (e.g., for the initial conveyance of meaning). I realize that this recommendation, which contradicts what many SL teachers believe, runs against the long-standing Direct Method tradition of Europe, and especially of France.

But principled bilingual SL teaching also has long roots, going at least as far back as the late nineteenth century. Few today seem aware that the precursor of the much-distorted and now largely rejected Audiolingual Method was bilingual, not monolingual. It followed the Sweet (1899)-Palmer (1917, 1922)-structural linguists' (1940s) route, and by the late 50s its results (which I was able to observe) were very good indeed. Even in Europe, bilingual SL teaching has made some headway, especially in Great Britain, with the work of Dodson (1967), and in Germany, taking the lead form Butzkamm (1973).

Principled bilingual SL teaching may use visual aids in many ways but it is not a reincarnation of the Grammar-Translation Method: it is also the very opposite of the "trial and error" approach to SL learning.

4. Unreliability in eliciting specific meaning

The predictability of language, even given a list of specific situations (which in itself is very arbitrary) and specific pictures, is low. The expectation of certain members of our profession, such as Corder and Wright, that someday the language which goes with specific visuals could be predicted "with a high degree of certainty" (Corder 1966: 46) will not be realized.

The best proof of this comes from SL testing. After much research, Pimsleur concluded that "even the clearest pictures tend to elicit a variety of utterances, rather than only the one we want." (1966: 198).

5. Cost

Although there has been a substantial reduction in cost over the years, most visuals and audiovisuals are still fairly expensive, some extremely so. The cost-effectiveness factor cannot be ignored.

Visual or Teacher Presentations

In recent years, video presentations are being promoted as being more effective than teacher presentations (e.g. Hanley et al., 1995; Herron et al., 1995). This reminds me of the audiovisual practice, many years ago, of having the teacher present a filmstrip accompanied by an audiocassette rather than say anything herself. Furthermore, because these audiovisual presentations – whether via video or filmstrip/audiocassette – are Direct Method monolingual presentations done strictly in the SL, they become a very difficult and, for many students, a frustrating guessing game.

This promotion of presentations via video seems to be another attempt – there have been several – to replace the teacher, or at least some of her important functions, with technology. However, there will always be many things a competent teacher can do that technology, visual or otherwise, cannot.

Although this article is not meant to discuss in detail how to use visual aids, the strong trend to use videos for presentations calls for the following practical suggestions:

While the best initial step in presenting new material might well be the viewing of a very short video, this should be immediately followed by a much slower review of the video, with the teacher observing the class carefully and stopping the tape after every sentence or two for random individual repetition and occasional choral echoing, accompanied as needed by deep correction, by any bilingual clarification of sounds, structures or meaning the students may request or require, and by interaction through questions and answers, role playing, retelling, and so forth.

Visual or multimedia technology will never be able to do well any of the things just listed, for they all require the use of an intelligent, competent and *adaptable* mind – which machines do not and *cannot* have. While technologically aided self-instruction supplemented with graded conversation with a native speaker may be the best way to proceed when a competent teacher is not available, best results in the SL classroom will always be obtained by a competent, caring teacher *aided* – and at no time replaced – by visual technologies.

Conclusion

More could be written about, among other things, specific applications of visual aids to the teaching of SL components, skills, cultural awareness, and literary appreciation, what the various (audio) visual media are, their relative advantages and disadvantages and how to use them in the SL program. But time and space are always in short suply. My hope is that through these pages the reader has become more aware of what, precisely, "visual aids" are and what they can and cannot do, and that he or she will have the the opportunity (or the courage, if need be) to put this extended awareness into practice.

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Notes

1. Brown [1983: 873-7] has proposed a semiotically structured model of "visual literacy" in terms of these three codes; my point is that the term "literacy" should be reserved for the written linguistic code. (An ever stronger argument can be made against the use of terms such as "computer literacy.")

2. Natural language acquisition conditions cannot be reproduced in the classroom, as both the learners and the environment differ in major unavoidable ways. The linguistic results of communicative/acquisitionist/ naturalistic language "teaching" are poor. After 13 years (about 7000 hours) of French "immersion" (it isn't) graduates make very frequent errors of the most basic nature [Pellerin and Hammerly, 1986; Hammerly *et al.,* 1994; Hammerly 1995a and 1995b]. Will communicative language "teaching" ever get a better chance to show what it can do? Does it deserve it?

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Literacy Experiences for Diverse Groups of Children

Joyce B. Castle

How do teachers address the complexity involved in promoting literacy in children with vastly different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds? This article suggests how this might be accomplished by first highlighting the research findings and subsequently suggesting a number of inclusive classroom activities for use with young children.

Literacy learning is intrinsically linked to language development in general, for as children are learning to understand and speak a language, they are also acquiring many of the skills needed to read and write the language. From this perspective, literacy learning becomes a sociocultural process, one involving social and cultural interactions both at home and in school (Heath, 1983; Moll, 1992; Taylor, 1983). The home plays a significant role, for it is in this context that the child's first interactive experiences with language occur, and this accounts for much of what the child learns about the forms and functions of language (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). But language learning goes beyond this to include "conscious knowledge gained through teaching" (Gee, 1989, p.20), and this makes the role of instruction in school equally important in literacy development.

Given that children learn literacy in these two ways, it follows that maximum learning occurs when the conditions and contexts for language use in both home and school are mutually supportive. As such, teachers have the responsibility to connect the literacy activities in their classrooms to the natural home experiences of their students. This can prove difficult to do, for in our increasingly diverse society, children are entering school with vastly differing social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as widely varied prior experiences with language.

Research Findings

Over the last few decades much of the research on literacy development has promoted the notion that young children emerge into literacy as a result of meaningful home experiences that allow them to construct their own understandings about reading and writing. Experiences reported to promote this development include being read to regularly (Wells, 1986), labelling drawings and art work (Ferreiro, 1986), writing shopping lists and finding the products in the store (Taylor, 1983), and responding to environmental print such as signs or billboards (Goodman, 1984). As a consequence, many schools have included these sorts of activities in their early literacy programs to connect with home environments and foster literacy acquisition.

There is little doubt that such experiences are vital to literacy development, and that they belong in classroom programs. But more recent research has established that while such experiences are necessary, they are not sufficient. The one glaring problem according to Pellegrini (1991) is that such activities are representative only of the mainstream culture, i.e., middle class North America, and that other "nonmainstream culture families" (p.382) engage in different literacy activities based on different beliefs and values. Mason (1992) reports, for example, that while storybook reading is believed to be a path to literacy in the Western world, this practice is virtually nonexistent in other cultures. Research in the U.S.A. also reports

distinctions: Heath (1983) describes substantial differences between working class and middle class children's literacy experiences, and Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham (1993) report that low literate parents in very poor conditions devise different literacy events for their children.

In our diverse society, then, young children come to school having experienced literacy in different ways, and this can interfere greatly with their ability to understand literacy as it is presented in school. Teachers tend to be part of the dominant culture themselves, and the way they represent literacy can conflict with the way the child has experienced it. Schmidt (1995) describes how even the informal social interactions established by the classroom teacher can hamper literacy learning in minority children. Problems are believed to occur with such children because at the same time that they are attempting to learn literacy, they must cope with two cultures and reconcile differences between home and school (Cummins, 1986). And even when such children do begin to read and write in school, the home culture continues to affect their success or failure in school (Reyhner and Garcia, 1989).

This brief overview of research findings makes it clear that the challenge facing today's teachers is real indeed. There is a great need to ensure that children are not required to sacrifice their identity for school success (Hoffman, 1989).

Suggested Classroom Experiences

Recognizing that differences exist in how literacy is presented and learned at home and in school is not enough; teachers must go further and adjust their teaching to account for this lack of congruence. This requires teachers not only to build on the literacy experiences that particular students bring with them, but also to incorporate into the program literacy experiences that are inclusive and make language meaningful and relevant to all the children. Some suggestions for achieving these ends are outlined here under five headings.

Physical environment

The physical environment in the classroom should reflect the linguistic, racial and ethnic diversity of the children's families. This diversity could be represented with signs and posters affirming each family's uniqueness in the larger community in terms of language, customs and contributions. This diversity could also be reflected in the various play and work areas in the room. In the writing/art centre, for example, multicultural crayons could be available to demonstrate the many shades of skin color, and the children's completed drawings of themselves could be accompanied by detailed written descriptions dictated by the children themselves. Samples of other writing from various cultures could also be on display here to illustrate that not all written formats look the same. As well, samples of writing from each child's home could be present to illustrate the different functions writing serves in these children's homes. A message board could also exist where children post messages they have written themselves, either at home or at school. To ensure that teachers are more than respondents alone in such an endeavour, they could also post their own written messages and read them to the children as yet another model.

Kinesthetic Connections

All children use body movement to learn about the world around them, and teachers can use particular movement activities to help diverse groups of students acquire early literacy concepts. Teachers can tap the children's kinesthetic sense and have them physically experience the meanings of new words or sentences by using their bodies to represent actions words and descriptive phrases, or to match characters and action words. Also, teachers can allow the children to experience the rhythm of written material by clapping or moving to the tempo. Children rather instinctively act out movement and sound to convey meaning, and this can be harnessed by having them represent their own stories this way and also the stories of others presented in class. As they are involved in using this kinesthetic

sense, teachers can also repeat the words or phrases so that the child hears them, and also print the words or phrases so that the child sees them. By involving three senses at once, language learning and literacy are greatly enhanced.

> *The literature that is used should reflect the various children's cultures and interests in order to add meaning to their learning and enrich the classroom community. Evidence of racism and sexism is not acceptable, nor is any form of stereotypical representation of particular groups.*

Oral Language

Since oral language is the basis for all language learning, this serves as the bridge to reading and writing. Show and Tell or sharing time can be used as occasions for all of the children to express themselves verbally around topics or experiences that are familiar and relevant to them. At these times children talk in front of the rest of the group about a favourite object they have brought to school or about a meaningful experience they have had. The manner in which the children use oral language at such times reflects the ways in which language is used in the context of their homes, and their usage should be recognized and also accepted in the school context. The Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1970) can later be used to create written text using the children's language (the children dictate words and sentences, and the teacher writes these down and uses them as the reading material). It is the children's own experiences here, as well as their own stories or songs or rhymes that serve as the topic of the dictation. The vocabulary and syntax of their particular language and community are retained in this way, and learning becomes more relevant. Big books can be made and displayed from these written texts, and as well, smaller versions of the texts could be used for follow up practice both at school and at home. This allows the parents to partake in

reading activities using material that is familiar to both them and their child.

Appropriate Literature

Given the established value of reading regularly to children, there is every reason to include this practice in the classroom program. But not all books are created equal, and not all literature is appropriate for use in promoting literacy in diverse settings. The literature that is used should reflect the various children's cultures and interests in order to add meaning to their learning and enrich the classroom community. Evidence of racism and sexism is not acceptable, nor is any form of stereotypical representation of particular groups. And finally, the stories and illustrations should also represent the values we wish to pass on. These criteria can usually be met by using the best literature. "Literature at its best, and children's literature in particular, transcends the surface distinctions of cultural difference and embodies universal human concerns" (Holdaway, 1979, p. 17). School or community librarians are helpful allies in this regard, for they have the knowledge and easy access to the best books written for children in all cultures.

Functional Literacy Activities

Functional uses of reading and writing are generally a part of every home. Young children see their parents reading T.V. Guides, reading daily mail, writing shopping lists, creating menus, signing cheques, etc. Such activities vary across cultures, however, and not all children will have seen reading and writing being used to serve the same functions. Experiences associated with

each student's background can be brought into the classroom to make learning easier and more relevant. For example, flyers from various food/grocery stores could be brought in, and children could use these to find their own family's food selections. Master lists could then be made by the teacher, (using an LEA approach) which include some foods from each child's group of foods. The children could then write their own grocery list, go to the Store Centre in the classroom, purchase their products, and pay for these in the manner in which their parents do this.

Conclusion

Literacy learning is social, and is based on function, purpose and need. This learning occurs both in and out of school, and if both the home and school environments can be made mutually supportive, reading and writing will develop in the child more readily.

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Planning for Successful Teaching: Questioning in the Language Classroom

Merle Richards

Although most general teaching strategies apply in the language class, there are also special considerations in language learning that require us to adapt those strategies if we are to maximize students' language development (Mitchell, 1988). Questioning skills represent one such area.

Questioning is often considered the basic skill of teaching. Morgan and Saxton (1991) cite three main functions of questioning: to "tap into what is already known build a context for shared understanding; and challenge students to think critically and creatively for themselves" (p. x). In the regular first-language class, teachers strive to question and to teach questioning skills that will enable students to reach these goals. Relying on the learners' basic language fluency, they build language and concepts to "stretch" the students' intellectual and emotional capacity, taking for granted that their pupils will attend to the meanings and content of the discussion rather than to the grammar and pronunciation.

But what if that basic fluency is lacking? Language teachers, especially those with adult or adolescent students, know that learners often say, "I could say that in my own language", or "I just can't find the words in English". One student told me that English has no humour, because when she translated jokes from her own language, they just weren't funny anymore! That is, she couldn't show in English the spirit and wit that she could convey in her own language, because she wasn't fluent enough to play with English in the same way. In Smith's (1988) terms, she had the "deep structures" (meanings), with their sources in her life and culture, but not the "surface structures" (forms of expression) in which to clothe her thoughts and feelings in English.

Similar difficulties arise when learners want to address serious topics, such as ethics, social values, and the problems of being not-yet-bilingual - but which, being so, they can't explain. They need support for both the creative and intellectual functioning in the target language, and their teachers can use questions to provide it.

Types of Questions

Several educators have devised ways of classifying teachers' questions (for example, Saxon and Morgan, 1991; Tonjes and Zintz, 1992). Most of them focus on the kind of mental activity the questions are supposed to elicit. In the second language class, this is a special consideration: the learners need variety and complexity to maintain interest, but they also need a lower cognitive level than would be appropriate in their first language. This is because much of their attention is diverted from the meanings to the surface structures. In the weaker language, it takes mental effort to figure out sentence form, word order and pronunciations - effort that in the strong language is directed mainly to meanings and finding the "mot juste".

> *Questioning is often considered the basic skill of teaching.*

Even when the forms are familiar, non-fluent learners can seldom express the complex thoughts they can formulate in their first language, although a good language teacher knows that their comprehension is usually greater than their expressive capacity. Therefore, when building listening and reading skills, the teacher pitches questions, statements, and explanations at a cognitive level that is probably below their intellectual capacity but is just above the level of the students' own talk.

Although the Bloom Taxonomy is the best known, the classification system developed by Guilford (1968) to determine levels of thinking is easier to apply in the language class. It has been adapted to help teachers check the levels of their questions and pupil responses, so that a variety of skills can be used (Aschner et al, 1965). This system helps the language teacher to include "thinking questions" at a cognitive level that the students can cope with.

a) **Factual questions** (cognitive-memory) are those used most often. Teachers use them to check that pupils have learned content, understood their reading, acquired vocabulary, etc. Such questions form the basis for most language lessons.

   On the other hand, if most questions are merely low-level drills and repetitions, interest soon wanes. "What is this?" questions are excellent for the first few classes, but after that, learners want "real conversation". Factual questions related to interesting content or learners' experience can fill their need.

   For example,

   - Who is the main character in the story?
   - What does a miller do?
   - What did the Little Red Hen say when no one would help her?

b) **Convergent questions** require reasoning toward a right answer. Morgan and Saxon (1991) and Mollica (1994) are correct in grouping Convergent with "closed" or ""narrow" questions. However, they can support logical thinking processes, and are used to guide pupils through the steps to a right answer.

   For example,

   - Why did the Little Red Hen take the grain to the miller?
   - If you wear a snowsuit when it snows, when would you wear a sunsuit? a rainsuit? a swimsuit? a space suit?
   - Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen... What number do you think would come next?

- Could you put your shoes on before your socks?
- Compare the way we celebrate weddings today and in the past.
- What must you do to subtract 7 from 11?

  In the language class, convergent questions also help the teacher understand what idea a student is trying to express and to model an acceptable form.

  For example,
- Okay, you said that loyalty to friends is important. Does that mean doing what your friends want rather than what you want?

c) **Divergent questions** suggest a more creative response. Any justifiable answer may be accepted. For example,

- What are some other ways this story could have ended?
- How may we keep this heritage custom here in Canada?
- How else might we say this?
- How else might we solve this problem?
- What might you do if you see that your friend is headed for trouble?

d) **Evaluative questions** are those which demand a judgement or opinion. They require reasoning about characteristics and values: For example,

- Was the Little Red Hen justified in not sharing?
- Which story did you prefer?
- What made that story better than the other one?
- How did it make you feel about the villain?
- Which shows greater loyalty: to report your friend who is selling drugs, or to keep quiet and say nothing?

Scaffolding

The language teacher may have to structure the responses for the students. An easy way to do this is to break the question into parts that the pupils can choose, or to give an answer of your own which they may repeat or modify: "I was really angry with the villain. I wanted to tell her

off! How did you feel?" This supplies the words and forms, but allows students to choose their own thoughts and experiences.

Planning Questions

Mollica (1994) and Morgan and Saxon (1991) list types of questions, questions to avoid (stupid questions!), techniques, and reasons for questioning. In the language class, we also plan **key questions** that direct pupils toward the objectives and **backup questions** to assist those who have difficulty with the key questions. For example:

Key Question:

- When do we celebrate Thanksgiving?

Backups:

- What are we thankful for?
- What foods are abundant in the fall?
- What do we mean by "harvest"?

  Whatever plan or system you use, be flexible. Learners may come up with unexpected answers that are thoughtful and appropriate. Accept them, and when you can, use them to lead to further ideas.

Yet More Tips for Questioning

1. Ask your questions, then remain silent for 3-5 seconds before naming a pupil to respond. (This is hard to do!)
2. Try to call upon all pupils each day. When silence follows your question, don't just ask the pupil who raises a hand first: let the silence continue while the students have time to think. (This is even harder than #1.)
3. When questions require thought or reasoning, the students may not be able to express themselves adequately. Allow them to speak in their first language, then help them to say their idea in the target language.

   You may wish to write the expression on chart paper for future reference, especially if a writing task follows the discussion.
4. With advanced students, encourage use of the target language to develop concepts and under-

stand relationships. When students respond to higher-level questions, withhold judgement. Encourage pupils to elaborate or build upon their own and others' responses.

Don't say "Good!" or "I agree" in these cases: such statements bring closure to the exchange (you might say, "That's evidence for your opinion. Is there further evidence?").

5. Don't answer your own questions. Provide clues, probe, ask for clarification. In other words, help the pupils find their way to the answer.
6. If children never volunteer to answer, speak to them privately to determine why. If they are shy, you may feed them some answers or call upon them to repeat someone else's answer. (They may be worried about making a mistake in public.)
7. Teach pupils to ask many types of questions, rather than just responding. This both gives them a heuristic device in the target language and provides a different discourse role in the classroom.

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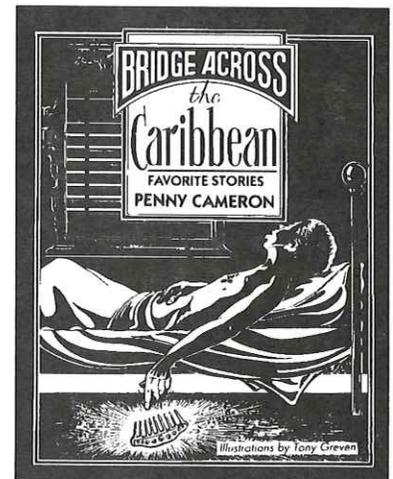
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