



T E S O L

F R A N C E

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
TO SPEAKERS OF
OTHER LANGUAGES

t h e

JOURNAL

Bridging the Gap:

**Enseigner une
langue étrangère :**

**Theory and Practice in Second
Language Acquisition**

**Que faisons-nous ?
Pourquoi ?**

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Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Second Language Acquisition

*Enseigner une langue étrangère :
Que faisons-nous ? Pourquoi ?*

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TESOL France, an affiliate of TESOL International and of IATEFL, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in France. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and to strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL France organizes various events and a convention each year in Paris. Members receive *The News*, our newsletter, and *The Journal*, the academic journal of the association.

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Introduction

Sally Bosworth Gérôme, Editor

This issue of the TESOL France Journal has something for your every mood. Some articles are rather short so they could be read when you have little time on your hands. However, do not attempt to read Jeannette Littlemore's article when you come home from a long day at work and the kids are asking what is for dinner. It may seem long but it is well worth taking the necessary quality time to read it.

She explains that teaching involves allowing students to fulfill their potential, but this means that teachers must comprehend the different learning styles of their students. The discussion in this article is extremely helpful because it applies fascinating learning theory to ESL classroom practices. Jeannette Littlemore explains that holistic processing involves treating information as a whole and perceiving similarity, whereas analytic processing emphasizes the perception of difference and separateness. Individuals with a holistic cognitive style favor a process-oriented approach to learning, closed tasks, and group work, whereas analytic individuals favor the opposite learning approaches. Holistic students will try to draw broad comparisons between the target language and their native language, use the context to guess meanings of words, and avoid details. Analytically on the other hand, might focus on the differences between languages, work at the individual word level when reading, and use strategies that are aimed at achieving accuracy and precision. Analytic learners appear to have a distinct preference for studying alone and estimating their own language learning progress, whereas the holistic learners are significantly more likely to prefer speaking the language in class.

There seem to be cross-cultural differences in language learning preferences with Hispanics using "holistic" strategies such as predicting, inferring, avoiding details and working with others. Anglo-Americans, on the other hand, would tend to use "analytic" learning strategies aimed at achieving accuracy and precision.

Ian Tudor gives us a concrete example of these cross-cultural differences when he describes students in Sri Lanka who were uncomfortable when the classroom was set up in a circle for communication-based activities rather than in rows for more traditional teacher-centered grammatical activities. They had difficulties using a

course book that was so far removed from their civilization that they could not relate to the situations and characters. This example corresponds to recent research showing that individuals' interaction with the learning process is influenced by a wide range of factors, many of which may seem far removed from language learning. Teachers need to discover what language learning means to students in the full context of their lives by studying language learning in context, which in turn involves studying it "locally".

Pip Neville-Barton elaborates on this idea by taking us to New Zealand where she works with Asian immigrants. She shows us how program designers and teachers must take into consideration motivational factors, the acculturation process and the family situation of their learners. Everyone recognizes the importance of different kinds of motivation in the language learning process, but few have analyzed how it decreases when the learner suffers from the effects of one of the four successive stages of acculturation. Teaching methods used during the first stage of excitement and interest in the new culture should not be the same as the ones used in other stages. For example students who are in the second stage and experiencing culture shock with its associated negative feelings should not be forced to learn from their own mistakes. The progress in English language may depend on where students are on the acculturation pathway.

Although John Overton's contribution in collaboration with Tony Young is very different from Jeannette Littlemore's article, it does give some useful background on similar ideas. Tony Young has studied learning styles with both students and teachers and even conducted a learning style survey during the workshop he gave at the TESOL France colloquium. Many teachers are reluctant to jump to conclusions when faced with learning style surveys because they fear cultural stereotyping and do not always agree with the results. Students on the other hand have been very impressed with the results. Tony Young has found that when personal styles are more clearly defined, teachers can tailor their course more to students' needs and students can participate more actively in their learning process.

Whatever their learning style, students ultimately need to manage to speak the target language with as little effort as possible. Roslyn Young explains how the role of the teacher is not to inform the students or to give them rules, but to lead them into making their own discoveries through their own "awarenesses". Learning,

which can only happen through awareness, takes place in four stages: confrontation with the unknown, exploration of the unknown, practice and transfer. After passing through these stages, the target language or aspects of the target language become “automatized” and students are able to use it with little effort. The role of the teacher is to actively watch over what the students are producing to make quite sure that anything they say which is in the process of becoming “automatized” is exact. If it is not exact, it must immediately be brought to the student’s attention - this is the same as saying that it must be brought back to stage 2 - to avoid the fossilization of the mistake.

The students Chaz Pugliese deals with obviously did not have teachers who were aware of different learning styles and stages of learning. His case study argues in favor of applying learning style theory and multiple intelligence theory to the classroom. This naturally leads to a list of tips for teachers who have to deal with anxious students.

In order to complete his case study and alleviate the anxiety of his students, Chaz readily speaks to them in their native language. Mario Rinvoluturi combines native and target languages by proposing interesting activities that only this original author could come up with. He believes that a learner’s first language should be used as a bridge and not as a barrier.

Parts of the final article in this Journal are posted on my wall. It may be in a different register from usual journal articles but it is very helpful in its own way. This is the one you should read when you come home from a long day at work and the kids are asking what is for dinner.