

# Supporting students' learning in modern languages

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## The Field of Study: 'Student Learning' Research

- Active Learning
- Formative assessment / feedback
- Reflective Practice

This research has indicated some good teaching practices that support students' learning. My workshop is about how to integrate some of these ideas into the teaching of modern languages with the student playing an active and central role.

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## Supporting students' learning in modern languages

1. Helping students learn more effectively: Learning skills
2. Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process
3. Making sure students do more
4. Making learning part of a students' life

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### 1. Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills

#### Students learn vocabulary related to their own learning

- Learning styles questionnaires (appx 1):
  - They facilitate discussion about learning
  - They provide students with vocabulary and ideas which will enable them to express their own experiences and think about the learning process more critically
  - Questionnaires in English for beginners and in the target language for more advance students:  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/etl/questionnaires/ASSIST.pdf> Or  
<http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>, for a questionnaire in the target language of your choice
- Poster display (appx 2)
  - A group exercise that helps to bring out important issues and identify the needs of the whole group
- Learner's diary (appx 3)
  - A personal reflexion
  - Review with a second diary (second term/semester)

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1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

**Students review after learning**

- It doesn't take very long:
  - The 30/7 home review plan
- The more they process, they more the remember
  - Creative writing, ideas by Tony Buzan: *Use your head*, BBC, *Use your memory*, BBC (appx 4)
- Students need more strategies to revise what they have learned.
  - End of lesson review activity: 'the five minute paper' to help consolidating all the new things done during the session and to evaluate if the aims set up had been achieved (a valuable exercise for students and teacher alike)
  - Familiarise students with a wide range of methods to help them review: flash cards, poster display, glossary, stickers, internet...

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1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

**Students organise their time more effectively.**

They learn to manage their time by finding out how much time they have available and by planning ahead:

- Use of calendars..... They help students with language learning: days of the week, months, numbers, peers birthdays, academic subjects, daily routine... and, at the same time, students get to know when they operate best, if there are obstacles that interfere with their study plan/timetable, how to go about sorting them out
  - University academic year calendar
  - Term/semester calendar (appx 5)
  - Weekly calendar

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1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

**Students define their work**

- Break big tasks into small, specific, modest tasks:
  - facilitates their work
  - makes easier to check progress
  - and releases stress
- Having a close look at the textbook: how many lessons (an opportunity to talk about how much we are planning to cover); how long the lessons are; how they are structured: audio tasks/grammar exercises/vocabulary summaries; where to find the answers to exercises; glossary at the back...

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1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

**Students organise their space to study**

- Create an environment which is conducive to learning
  - Students are involved in discussing factors such as: the room where they study, the furniture, the light conditions, etc..., that can play an important role in creating the most conducive environment for studying  
At a beginner level this can be integrated with the topic of 'where you live'; at an intermediate level, it can be explored in a more exciting way: the idea of designing their own space to study. (appx 6)

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2. *Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process*

**Students identify the aims of the course/lesson/activity and how to achieve them**

- Students need to become familiar with concepts such as: learning aims, content, methodology and standards.
- Learning aims (appx 7)
  - To be discussed at the beginning of the academic year. For beginners this can be done in English, for other levels in the target language
  - To elaborate a list of course aims together and discuss it
  - To provide interactive activities that will help them to achieve those aims and encourage a deep approach to learning.
  - To set a date to check if the aims have been achieved
- Learning aims for a lesson not to be confused with teacher's lesson plan

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2. *Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process*

**Students practice evaluation and monitoring in the classroom**

- Give students the opportunity to have a say in the learning process and, at the same time, reflect and develop their critical thinking.
- Sometimes after an exercise, reflect as an individual or as a group on the reasons for doing a particular exercise, what was learned from it? Could it have been done differently? (appx 8)
- List the pros and cons of a specific exercise: oral, writing, reading, listening skills.
- Teacher plays several roles: organizer/moderator/advisor

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2. Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process

**Students develop self and peer assessment skills**

- Students correct their own work, and that of their peers
- It helps to identify strengths and weaknesses
- It gives students the opportunity to improve their work
- It is essential to provide students with:
  - a marking criteria that they understand and can apply
  - some guidelines to help them to improve their performance (action points)
  - students must resubmit their work
- Previous project : 'Las tres des' (despiste / desorden / desconocimiento). (appx 9)
- Feedback: use of video for presentation / oral work

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2. Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process

**Students know the assessment criteria**

- Students are familiarized with the assessment criteria and have access to samples of best performance.
  - Poor vocabulary/wide range of vocabulary/clear presentation/development of ideas...What does this all mean?
- Sample of assessment criteria to be given to students.

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3. Making sure students do more

**Students get more involve in routine tasks**

- It gives students a sense of belonging, of identity and of responsibility.
  - Assisting more in setting up and running equipment: (use of digital camera)
  - Organizing the layout of the classroom
  - Helping with handouts
  - Being familiar with the routines of lessons
    - responsibility for selecting new vocabulary/expressions to go on display on the whiteboard during the lesson
    - in-out homework folders
  - Teaching language to absent students

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3. Making sure students do more

**Students create activities / exams questions / games**

- It encourages a deep approach to learning and can be immensely motivating and positive
- It gives students an opportunity to design activities tailored to their learning style and to match the aims set up for a particular lesson or session
- The material can be shared in their class and by future students
  
- Advance students prepare activities for beginners
- Photographs of students during role-play can be used to stimulate other activities
- Class journal

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3. Making sure students do more

**Students- student dialogue**

- Students like learning from peers
- Peer work encourages involvement in learning
- It gives students new ideas and perspectives
  - Peer assessment/sharing homework/planning activities/sharing a project
  - Outside the classroom:
    - Email, an invaluable tool.
    - Questions-answers e-mail group.
    - Peer teaching: PASS (Peer Assistance Supplementary Scheme)

**Students- teacher dialogue**

- Encourages involvement in learning and motivates students
  - Homework with appropriate feedback
  - E-mail students
  - Questions-answers e-mail group

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4. Making learning part of students' life

**Students use target language in their daily lives**

Students make the language they are learning part of their life.

Simple things like:

- Write a shopping list in the target language
- Use an engagement calendar in the target language (meeting people/going out/appointments)
- Use stickers around the house/office...
- Posters with stickers
- Contact with international students: conversations / sharing accommodation, internet...
- Create materials in the target language: a brochure/video for tourists/students from the country of the target language
- Keep a diary
- Hobbies

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## 1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

Students learn vocabulary related to their learning

### Appendix 1

## learning styles questionnaires

In this particular context they are used to help students acquire new vocabulary and ideas related to learning (the deep and surface approaches to studying). The questionnaires have been designed for a slightly different purpose.

Specially selected parts are taken from well recognised learning style questionnaires covering these main areas:

- Organising time and workload
- Acquiring and using new knowledge
- Reviewing
- Motivation
- Reflective practice

Sample taken from: Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students (ASSIST)

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/etl/questionnaires/ASSIST.pdf>

- When I am reading I stop from time to time to reflect on what I am trying to learn from it
- I try to relate ideas I come across to those in other topics or other courses whenever possible
- I sometimes get 'hooked' on academic topics and I feel I would like to keep on studying them
- I usually plan out my week's work in advance, either on paper or in my head
- When working on an assignment, I am keeping in mind how best to impress the marker
- I don't find it at all difficult to motivate myself
- I think about what I want to get out of this course to keep my studying well focused
- I often have trouble in making sense of the things I have to remember
- I like to be told precisely what to do in essays or other assignments
- Often I lie awake worrying about work I think I won't be able to do
- Lecturers who encourage us to think for ourselves and show us how they themselves think

Sample taken from The VARK Questionnaire

<http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>

1. You are about to give directions to a person who is standing with you. She is staying in a hotel in town and wants to visit your house later. She has a rental car. I would:
  - Draw a map on paper
  - Tell her the directions
  - Write down the directions (without a map)
  - Collect her from the hotel in my car
2. You are not sure whether a word should be spelled 'dependent' or 'dependant'. I would:
  - Look it up in the dictionary
  - See the word in my mind and choose by the way it looks
  - Sound it out in my mind
  - Write both versions down on paper and choose one
3. You are about to learn to use a new program on a computer. I would:
  - Sit down at the keyboard and begin to experiment with the program's features
  - Read the manual which comes with the program
  - Telephone a friend and ask questions about it

*1. Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*  
Students learn vocabulary related to their learning

## **Appendix 2**

### **poster display**

- Give two sheets of A4 paper to students and a colour pen.
- Ask them to write in large capital letters one word or one short sentence on each sheet of paper describing something positive and something negative about their classroom learning experience.
- Students place them up on the wall.
- Students group them according to subject.
- Students identify strengths and weaknesses.
- The whole class comes up with strategies to deal with issues that need attention.
- A date is decided to review if such strategies are working.

*1. Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

Students learn vocabulary related to their learning

**Appendix 3**

**learner diary (1)**

Write a diary in Spanish (200/300 words) expressing how you feel in general about starting your first year at university and doing a new Spanish language course (Spanish for the first time).

Try to include all the positive feelings you might be experiencing and all plans and projects you may already have (excitement, confidence, new challenges, new friends, trips) and the negative ones (anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of not being able to organize your time/work effectively, missing family/friends). Are there any aspects of your approach to studying that you would like to change/improve? Have you thought of any steps that may help you to do so?

Is there any bad experience from the year before that you do not want to experience again? Is there something positive that you would like to do again?

What are your expectations/goals for this course? Have you got a plan?

Please write anything you consider relevant to your new academic life.

(To be handed in by.....)

**learner diary (2)**

Write a diary in Spanish (200/300 words) expressing how you feel after having completed a term/semester at university.

Please read your first diary

Are all the good feelings still there? Could you add any new ones? Have you overcome the negative ones?

Mention all your achievements, identify any improvements you need to make and the steps you might have already taken to achieve them.

Have your expectations of the course been met so far?

Please write anything you consider relevant to your academic life.

(To be handed in by.....)

# 1. Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills

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## Appendix 4

### USE YOUR MEMORY

#### RECALL AFTER LEARNING

Once you have made it easier for your recall to work well during a learning period, it is important for you to do the same thing for your recall after the learning period. The pattern of recall after learning contains two 'surprises': first, you retain more of what you have learned after a few minutes have passed since the end of your learning period; second, you lose 80 per cent of the detail you have learned within 24 hours of having learned it. (You can make use of this dramatic fall to help you 'take the coats off' your 'memory coat hangers' as discussed in chapter 6.) The rise is beneficial, so you want to make use of it; the decline can be disastrous, so you usually need to make sure that it does not happen. The method for both maintaining the rise and preventing the decline is Review by Repetition.

For example, if you had studied for one hour, your first review would take place after ten minutes and your second review would take place 24 hours later. From then on, your review should take place only when you feel the information is perhaps slipping away. On average, these reviews all occur over units of time that are based on calendar elements, i.e., days, weeks, months, years. So, you would review after one day, then after one week, then after one month, then after half a year, and so on.

Each review need take very little time.

It is useful to compare the minds of people who consistently review with the minds of those who do not. People who do not review are continually putting information in and letting that same

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### YOUR MEMORY'S RHYTHMS

information drain out. These people will constantly find it difficult to take in new information because the background knowledge they need to understand that new information will have gone. In such a case, learning will continually be difficult, recall will always be inadequate, and the whole process of learning, understanding and recall will be unpleasant and arduous.

People who do review will find that with the constantly available store of increasing information, new information will slot in more easily. This will create a positive cycle in which learning, understanding and recall assist one another, making the continuing process increasingly easy. Surprisingly, the more you learn the easier it is for you to learn more.

### USE YOUR MEMORY

In using these Principles you will be exercising the dynamic relationship between your left and right cortex and thereby increasing the overall power of your brain. Imagine, for example, that you have been asked to shop for the following items:

- a silver serving spoon
- six drinking glasses
- bananas
- pure soap
- eggs
- biological washing powder
- dental floss
- wholewheat bread
- tomatoes
- roses

Instead of scrambling around for little bits of paper (everyone has either done it himself or seen others desperately tumbling through their pockets for the missing slip) or trying to remember all the items by simple repetition and consequently forgetting at least two or three, you would simply apply the Memory Principles in the following way.

Imagine yourself walking out of your front door perfecting the most amazing balancing trick: in your mouth is the most enormous silver-coloured serving spoon, the handle-end of which you are holding between your teeth, as you taste and feel the metal in your mouth.

Carefully balanced in the ladle-end of the spoon are six exaggeratedly beautiful crystal glasses, through which the sunlight reflects brilliantly into your bedazzled eyes. As you look with delighted amazement at the glasses, you can also hear them deliberately tinkling on the silver spoon. Going outside into the street, you step on the most gigantic yellow and brown coloured banana, which skids with a swish from under you. Being a fantastic balancer, you barely manage not to fall and confidently place your other foot groundward only to find that you have stepped on a shimmering white bar of pure soap. This being too much for even a master, you fall backward and land seat down on a mound of eggs. As you sink into them, you can hear the cracking of the shells, see the yellow of the yolk and the white of the albumen, and feel the dampness soaking into your clothes. (See Colour Plate 1.)

Using your imaginative ability to exaggerate anything, you speed up time and imagine that, in a couple of seconds, you have gone back inside, undressed, washed your soiled clothes in a super biological washing powder, called pure soap, which allows pure, shimmering water to leave the washing machine, and then visualise

1. *Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

Students learn vocabulary related to their learning

**Appendix 5**

**CALENDARIO ACADÉMICO 2005/2006 - SEGUNDO SEMESTRE**

**FEBRERO 2006**

Domingo	5	12	19	26
Lunes	6	13	20	27
Martes	7	14	21	28
Miercoles	1	8	15	22
Jueves	2	9	16	23
Viernes	3	10	17	24
Sabado	4	11	18	25

**MARZO 2006**

Domingo	5	12	19	26	
Lunes	6	13	20	27	
Martes	7	14	21	28	
Miércoles	1	8	15	22	29
Jueves	2	9	16	23	30
Viernes	3	10	17	24	31
Sábado	4	11	18	25	

**ABRIL 2006**

Domingo	30	2	9	16	23
Lunes	3	10	17	24	
Martes	4	11	18	25	
Miércoles	5	12	19	26	
Jueves	6	13	20	27	
Viernes	7	14	21	28	
Sábado	1	8	15	22	29

**MAYO 2006**

Domingo	7	14	21	28	
Lunes	1	8	15	22	29
Martes	2	9	16	23	30
Miércoles	3	10	17	24	31
Jueves	4	11	18	25	
Viernes	5	12	19	26	
Sábado	6	13	20	27	

**Leyenda:**

- rojo: días de clase, exámenes español
- amarillo: otras clases/fechas de proyectos...
- verde: vacaciones/cumpleaños

*1. Helping students learn more effectively. Learning skills*

Students learn vocabulary related to their learning

**Appendix 6**

**my place of study**

Discuss with a peer all the items listed below and evaluate their importance in the context of creating a environment conducive to study

- Bedroom
- Study room
- Kitchen
- Living room
- Desk
- Shelves
- Chair
- Office chair
- Folders
- Computer
- Stationary
- Time of the day/night
- Natural Light
- Electrical light
- Room temperature
- Colour of the walls
- Noise
- Music
- Plants
- Other

Write all the recommendations you can think of to help people who spend lots of time studying.

Please use the imperative tense

- Create a suitable place to study within your own bedroom/kitchen...
- Buy the most comfortable and suitable office chair you can afford.
- Ventilate the room often.
- Have short breaks from the computer screen or reading to rest your eyes and exercises your legs.
- Use a suitable electrical light.
- Have your papers organise in folders and at hand.
- Choose the time of the day/night when you are most productive to do the most difficult tasks or those that require intense concentration.

Design or write a description of the ideal place to study

2. *Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process*  
Students identify the aims of the course/lesson/activity and how to achieve them

## Appendix 7

### my aims

#### To be able to:

- talk about myself
- express what I enjoy/like doing
- describe my family
- book a room in a hotel
- buy something for a friend's birthday and justify it
- explain to somebody where I am going to go on holidays
- give directions to somebody
- talk to somebody about what I have done recently
- make a telephone call
- compare England to Spain

#### To talk about yourself:

In the present tense: I am... / I am able.../ I want .../ I like...

In the future tense (I am going to... / I will ...)

In the past tense (I have done...)

- Age/Birthday
- Nationality
- Profession
- Personality
- Physical description
- Daily routine
- Likes and dislikes
- Hobbies

#### To talk about yourself: age/birthday

- I am 20 years old
- We are five brothers and sisters and I am the oldest!
- My birthday is 5<sup>th</sup> May, I like May!
- I am going to be 21 soon; I want to have a big party!
- I will be 21 in three months time!
- I have celebrated my birthday with my friends and family
- I cannot celebrate my birthday this year because I have not saved any money!

2. *Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process*  
Students practice evaluation and monitoring in the classroom

**Appendix 8**

**evaluation criteria for classroom activities**

The aim of this exercise is to:

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Time

at the beginning of the session      in the middle      at the end      other

Instructions/description

too complicated      lots of them      about right      not enough      other

Timing

lots of time      about right      not enough      no set time      other

Arrangement

individual      pairs      small group      class      other

Content

very dense      about right      easy/not enough      other

Grammar structures

too many      about right      easy      other

Listening exercise

too fast      about right      too slow      other

Room conditions

noisy      too hot      fine      other

Equipment

adequate      inadequate      other

Evaluation of activity/Suggestions

What I have gained from this exercise is...

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## 2. Encouraging students to take more responsibility in the learning process

Student develop self-assessment skills

### Appendix 9

#### 'las tres des'

Written work

##### Description

Students correct their own work.

Teacher uses the 'marking code' to point out errors and provides appropriate additional feedback (firstly mentioning all the good work done, then directing students to previous handouts or to the textbook to find out solutions to problems...)

Students identify the type of error according to the error analysis criteria.

Students correct as many errors as possible and improve their work following the feedback guidelines.

Students resubmit their work.

Teacher gives the work back mentioning all those improvements in relation to previous performance (giving an idea of how well students are progressing).

##### Error analysis criteria

Three main types of error:

*Despite*: lack of attention, not having done a final reading before handing it in (spelling mistakes, missing punctuation ...)

*Desorden*: incorrect use of grammar rules, interference between L1 and L2...

*Desconocimiento*: lack of knowledge, students cannot correct errors because they are beyond their level.

##### Simple marking code

_____	error
λ	Something missing
?	Unclear
//	Wrong order
θ	Not needed