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ENHANCED LEARNING: BLENDED, MIXED, STUDENT CENTERED CLASSROOMS

Educational reform is an ongoing process, most often a reaction to real or perceived deficiencies and challenges of each new generation. The response is often driven not only by the desired content of the curriculum, the goals, standards and expectations of what should learn, but also to a certain degree by the existing technologies that assist in bringing the content to the student. Language teaching or language learning over the past fifty years has seen some of these once hailed innovations either disappear or become so widely accepted that they are no longer noticed. The language laboratory/classroom of the 1960's with reel to reel cassette tapes, themselves a replacement for vinyl 78 rpm or 33 rpm records, was replaced by cassette players, but made almost irrelevant by the invention of the SONY Walkman, the language lab in your pocket. Compact discs and DVDs in turn replaced the cassette tapes and these have given way to mp3 digital files. In each case the content barely changed, becoming at best more convenient to access at specific points. The interaction with the audio and video material is similar: students listen to models and then repeat utterances or respond to an animate object.

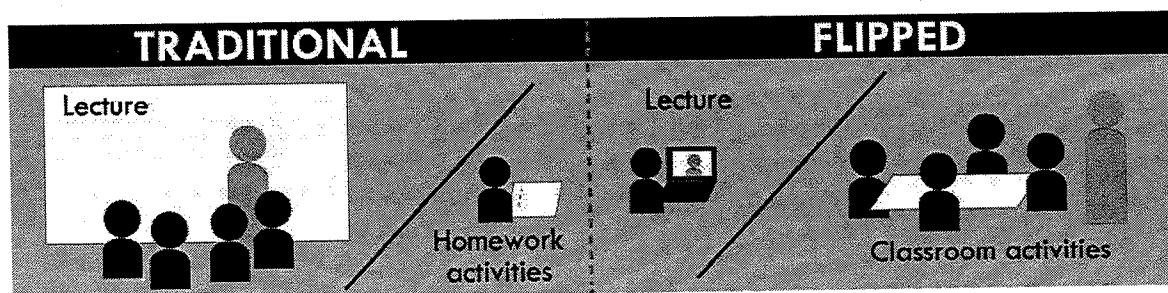
One maxim of education is that one learns to do what one practices doing.⁹ When repetition is the activity, the results in achieving real language proficiency are minimal at best with one proviso. Many such activities increase the time spent using the language. Since our classroom time with face-to-face interaction is highly limited (in many United States colleges and universities this can be as little as three hours per week over two 12-16 week semesters), the use of the language or computer lab can multiply the time on task by moving portions of the practice outside of the classroom. At Georgetown University in the 1960s we were required to spend to six hours a week inside a language laboratory where our presence was recorded and monitored by a graduate assistant. At Middlebury in the 1970s a similar system of clocking in was used to monitor the five hours a week outside of class in lab.

The 1980s saw an increased interest and application of CALI (Computer Assisted Language Instruction), or CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), and an increased use of video with the advent of satellite dishes that made it possible to watch and record live foreign news broadcasts. Middlebury and other colleges acquired large satellite receivers to capture programming intended for the Far East of the Soviet Union. This established the groundwork for the use of computers for instruction and learning. The opportunities available to our students today have been enhanced one hundred fold by the Internet, the World Wide Web, and ever more powerful devices. The latest iPhone has greater capabilities than desktop units of only a few years ago. The content or its presentation now includes video on *You Tube* and *Vimeo*, social networks such as *Facebook* and *kontakt.ru*, and virtual reality. Students and instructors have at their fingertips virtual libraries, museums, and news media.

This has all been accompanied at least in the United States by a new interest in using technology to create the so-called "Flipped Classroom." The "Flipped Classroom" has been given life by a Harvard professor, Eric Mazur, who has been touted for his innovative approach to education.¹⁰

⁹"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹⁰<http://mazur.harvard.edu/>.



In this model the traditional classroom lecture by the professor is replaced with students watching or previewing video recordings of the lecture leaving in class time for informed discussions and conceivably more substantive interaction with the professors.

Another alternative is online learning/instruction driven by Audacity, Coursera, the Khan Academy, and others; in fact there are so many that it is difficult to keep apace. These are often referred to as MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses)¹². Some of these instruments are seen as answers to the crisis in higher education, while for others they are viewed as challenges to the existing order, thereby being part of the problem not the solution. Can and will online learning replace traditional classroom instruction? Only someone with a very short horizon of experience or failure to consult the history of educational reform will fear the worst. I recall trying (I underline "trying") to learn Trigonometry in high school independently using an out of the box product. The material was presented then in binders in systematic fashion followed by drills and regular control exams. Such self-help individualized courses have existed throughout my education lifetime—now somewhat sixty years long. They can and often do provide an incentive for learning, or can be used as supplementary assignments. When they match the learning styles of the students they can, indeed, offer positive results, but then and now they pose little threat to replacing the classroom instructor.

The same can be said for traditional and non-traditional possibilities at our fingertips or those of our students. The preliminary results and research on student success indicate that only very small percentage of those who begin with programs such as *Udacity* succeed in completing the course successfully.¹³ It may simply be that the investment of student time and money serve not only as incentives for consistent work, but that the system of controls, regular testing and monitoring, and supervision are for most individuals required to be successful learners.

What seems to work, and this will come as no surprise to language teachers who have forever been interested in the success, i.e. learning of their students, is that multiple approaches that engage a student actively in the learning process are the key. I once wrote a paper describing the Salad Bar Approach to language learning, a sushi bar analogy for our Japanese hosts perhaps might be more appropriate.¹⁴ The offerings need be rich and varied, yet not require any single individual to partake of each of the offerings. Instead one should pick and choose those activities that best conform to one's own style and aptitudes. Yes, a guiding hand, a руководитель, an educator, "one who leads," is essential. But our role in the day of enhanced access to resources, especially authentic materials, and the video so beloved by our students, is to identify the essential pieces of the language puzzle and present them in comprehensive and comprehensible fashion.

While this may not come as news to us language teachers, a new name or label has appeared that recognizes the need for some delicate balance of activities and approaches: "blended" or "mixed." This is nowadays defined as a combination of online activities alongside the traditional classroom.

We would also do well to be honest from the beginning. Learning a second or third language

¹¹<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/flipping-the-classroom/>.

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course.

¹³<http://tressiemc.com/2013/11/19/the-audacity-thru-learns-a-lesson-and-students-pay/>.

¹⁴ Beyer, Thomas R. "Comprehensive and Inclusive: The Salad Bar Approach to Teaching Russian" in Diane Cuykendall and Ray Parrott ed., *Vision 2020*. (ACTR, AATSEEL: 1992), pp. 60-64.

is time consuming. The Defense Language Institute had determined that for a native American speaker of English the time needed to master Russian to so-called Intermediate knowledge is 1100 hours.¹⁵ In the typical American College classroom meeting from three to five hours per week for some 30 weeks in an academic year yields at best 150 hours in a year of study. Intensive programs offered in the summer do better because of increased contact time. And if the flipped classroom results in additional hours spent on the task, i.e. students review the materials on video such as a lecture before class, this is only a replacement for what was traditional homework of reading the text, learning the vocabulary or doing computer drills. Students simply did not associate all these activities as being part of a whole that establishes a "course." Many of us used extra evenings for films, or learned Russian songs in a choir, or memorized lines for a Russian play, or sponsored language tables where students lunch while speaking, thereby practicing the language.

At Middlebury we conducted a yearlong study on improving teaching and learning with special attention to the resources of Informational Technology.¹⁶ Most important was a shared commitment to the notion of "student centered learning." If there has been a paradigm shift in higher education it is the growing realization that "learning" and the "students" are at the core of what we hope to achieve. In English this has been somewhat jokingly referred to as moving from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side." But we recognized that there could be strong resistance to change of any sort. One of the key findings was that each subject, each discipline, each department has widely disparate goals and traditions that inform the instruction of any given instructor. While many would argue against lectures without discussion, others thought that lectures and active participation should be entirely separate activities. Some favored using Power Point and in class video; others strictly prohibited laptops and tablets in their classrooms. The one area we could agree upon was student "engagement." All recognized the necessity for a student to be actively involved with her or his own learning. This involvement should be constant and independent, supported by the instructional process. How this is achieved may be more an art than a science, a talent of gifted effective teachers, who can themselves modify their course and activities based upon the needs and capabilities of their students.

As I have observed and participated in the ongoing discussions concerning student learning, I have grown increasingly convinced that much that we hail as new is simply something old in a new format. If in the "Flipped Classroom" students watch videos before coming to class, did they not have in many cases "readings" assigned to prepare them for the class? While this is decidedly a visual versus verbal generation, there is little research indicating how a *You Tube* video might be superior to an audiotaped conversation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Thompson, Irene. "Language Learning Difficulty." (<http://aboutworldlanguages.com/language-difficulty>).

¹⁶ The report of that Task Force can be found here:

http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/423051/original/task_force_on_pedagogical_innovation_final.pdf. The College has also established a website with readings on educational reform at <http://sites.middlebury.edu/futures/>.

¹⁷ I experimented at Middlebury in my First Year Basic Russian Course. Students once listened to recorded texts first on audiocassettes, then on CDs and finally as mp3 files. To increase student participation I used the texts to make mini *You Tube* videos splicing in graphics and overlaying in I could also monitor how many students had watched the video and for how long.

esley, 1985.

*** North, M., & Rives, J. Virtual reality therapy in aid of public speaking. *International Journal of Virtual Reality*, 3:2-7. 2001.

**** Elwood, S. Digital Storytelling: Strategies Using Voice Thread. In D. Gibson & B. Dodge (Eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference*. 2010 (pp. 1075-1079).

***** JoAnne Van Tuyl, VoiceThread for learning Russian. Duke CIT. <http://cit.duke.edu.blog/2010/05/voicethread-for-learning-russian>

The best techniques are intended to maximize the time on task and the time in contact with the language. Language teachers, at least in my sixty-year memory and practice, have always interacted with students both inside and outside of the classroom. And yes, it is imperative that we stay informed of the latest technologies, use them appropriately, and embrace rather than reject change. To the extent that we can use engaging materials in our instruction to engage our students, the better prepared they will be for the exciting interaction that still takes place largely inside the tradition classroom with a master teacher.

1. "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics.
2. <http://mazur.harvard.edu/>.
3. <http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/flipping-the-classroom/>.
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course.
5. <http://tressiemc.com/2013/11/19/the-audacity-thru-learns-a-lesson-and-students-pay/>.
6. Beyer, Thomas R. "Comprehensive and Inclusive: The Salad Bar Approach to Teaching Russian" in Diane Cuykendall and Ray Parrott ed., Vision 2020. (ACTR, AATSEEL: 1992), pp. 60-64.
7. Thompson, Irene. "Language Learning Difficulty." (<http://aboutworldlanguages.com/language-difficulty>).
8. The report of that Task Force can be found here: http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/423051/original/task_force_on_pedagogical_innovation_final.pdf. The College has also established a website with readings on educational reform at <http://sites.middlebury.edu/futures/>.
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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ПРОЕКТНОЙ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ В РАМКАХ ПРОЕКТА "РУССКИЙ ЦЕНТР"

Abstract. In this article O. Bejenari, expert in education methods at the Russian Center of Milan University, shares a positive experience of work organization with students during RKI classes. This experience is demonstrated by the example of the lesson on the Day of Cosmonauts, in preparation of which were used experimental methods.

The materials of this article may be interesting to fellow experts from Russian Centers, RKI teachers and to all those people who are interested in effective modern methods of work.

Русские центры за рубежом – это международный культурный проект, осуществляемый Российским Фондом «Русский мир» [1:445] в партнёрстве с ведущими мировыми образовательно - просветительскими структурами. Как указано в уставе Фонда, Русские центры создаются в целях популяризации русского языка и культуры как важных элементов мировой цивилизации, а также в целях поддержки программ изучения русского языка за рубежом, развития межкультурного диалога и укрепления взаимопонимания между народами. Дея-