

UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES VERSUS WHAT WE WERE TAUGHT BEFORE

Introduction. Teaching has always been an occupation of the few, for it is never easy to accumulate knowledge and skills required to be a professional let alone become a mentor capable of passing it on to the new generation of students. However, as it now appears, learning no longer seems the hard part. People learn, all right; it's only when they want to. Paradoxically, teaching has become harder than learning in terms of effort extended. First of all, teaching understandably bears a lot of responsibility. Second of all, one of the main tasks of the educators now is to make people actively want to learn; otherwise, the job is not really complete. To accomplish that, teaching nowadays has to become unconventional which means entertaining and in line with the interests of younger generation. What would necessitate such a break from traditional methods of learning foreign languages that are characterized by extensive use of traditional methods such as learning by dry reading, doing uninspiring exercises from the book, and stifling classroom discipline?

Main part. The first thing that might qualify as an answer is that the technological revolution has made an immeasurable impact on how people perceive new information. Attention span of young people has dramatically shortened, which puts a lot of strain on the educators. And, let's face it, our brains are not inclined to receive any kind of information unless we are absolutely sure that what our receptors pick up is useful or, at the very least, interesting. Anything that doesn't fall into these two categories will be either ignored or forgotten as there is no apparent use for this information. A good parallel can be drawn between that biological process and how we use our computer memory; we delete anything that we have no good use for so that more useful information can be stored there instead. The way our brain works is no exception; it allows in only something that it deems worthy [1, p. 34].

So, based on this assumption that is proven by a number of studies conducted by the groups of students and their educators, we can surmise that what we teach should be clearly useful and interesting (by "interesting" I also mean entertaining). Do teenagers think books are interesting when they have smartphones and laptops close at hand with all sorts of entertainment one click away? How inspired are students when they don't see any reason to study English or any other foreign language, when they don't even know what they are doing it for as well as can't relate to anything or anyone having to do with this language? Sure, they might regret not learning it later in life, but isn't our goal as educators to help them relate to the subject we teach, to inspire them by showing them the richness and beauty of being able to communicate with people around the globe? It is our fault that someone doesn't show any "talent" and can't seem to pull two thoughts together in English, for their brain has been put on the defense with all that seemingly useless and boring information trying to get through to them. In addition, here is the unconventional truth that many educators absolutely need to hear — talent is overrated. Yup, talent is indeed overrated, let me repeat that.

Talent is overrated — why so? What could possibly be the reasoning behind this statement? A renowned author who has dedicated quite a number of books featuring studies conducted by respectful scientists whose name is Geoffrey Colvin considers talent to be a miniscule part of anyone's success. What constitutes the true essence of any skill that has been mastered to the highest level is the effort extended in order to become proficient. He believes that anyone who wants to reach the top in terms of becoming excellent at something must want to go above and beyond; they should set a clear goal and be inspired by who they will have become by the time they achieve it. As we can see, there is a lot of work to be done regarding this aspect of working with students [2, p. 9].

Some might object by saying: "Is this really a task that teachers should take upon themselves? Why not leave students to their own devices (pun intended — author) and continue to rely on the proven methods that are based solely on books?" In today's world, it's ridiculously easy to get distracted and choosing between watching a fun video on Youtube or listening to a favorite song and completing a dull assignment from the book will not be hard for a young person who craves validation from peers and entertainment.

Even though there are signs that old methods have been losing their effectiveness over the years, educators shouldn't fully discard them; they should modify them by adding new elements. First of all, those who teach foreign languages ought to be on the same wavelength with the students they teach. It means communication. Therefore, there is number one requirement that needs to be met in order to adapt teaching foreign languages, particularly English, to the demands of the ever-changing and technologically driven world (remember, young people's attention span is becoming even shorter). Once this requirement is met, old-fashioned books-oriented approach might be much more efficient.

This "number one requirement" is that English teachers should be required to communicate with their students — they must become relatable and be on the same wavelength with them. Teaching English based on authority won't do it, for it will only turn people off and make English appear like math or physics that are generally disliked by regular teenagers and young adults. Since English is a foreign language that is used for communication, educators should communicate with their students by showing them by example that it is an absolute must-have skill for a young adult. Students should associate English with such things as an idea exchange, exciting conversations, interesting stories, even a way to save someone else's life by talking to them and finding out what they need. It should in no way be associated with a teacher who is either boring or ill-tempered as well as overly demanding [1, p. 55].

Clearly, it does put a lot of strain on the teachers, for it isn't easy to pass their knowledge on to someone else, and now, on top of that, they have to try and ingratiate with their students. Well, if some educators think themselves above that, they should consider a career change because teaching English is all about communication with students. Young people keep getting more emotional in their conduct, their perception of the world around them is changing which results in them being in greater need for acceptance, inspiration and entertainment. Authoritative methods won't cut it anymore!

English teachers should become tech-savvy and adept at using social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, etc. English is the language that is primarily used there and those places might harbor a lot of interesting stuff, so it is strongly advised to have some experience using them. As a bonus, it enables the teacher to be well informed about what their students like and dislike, which might prove to be helpful in figuring out what works best for them. You can't teach without being able to capture your students' attention — so you need to click with them first in order to rub off your hopefully vast knowledge on them!

In order to maximize the effect of English teaching strategies, we would like to offer a couple of unconventional ways to teach not only English, but many other foreign languages! Let's take a peek at them:

1) Spaced learning strategy. Remember you read about the way brains work earlier in this article? There is another cool thing that we might take advantage of.

It's a technique that was developed based on research about how memories function by neuroscientist R. D. Fields [2, p. 174]. The idea is to spend short but consistent periods learning and then reviewing new material to optimize the brain's natural memory encoding process.

Experiments have already shown positive results. Spaced learning was used as the means of instruction for a national curriculum biology course and led to rapid long term memory encoding, according to researchers. Here is an example of the spaced learning strategy — how to show students the differences between “would” and “could” (table 1).

Table 1 — An example of the spaced learning strategy

Stage	Time	Action
Step 1	15 minutes	Explaining the official grammar rules using the whiteboard
Step 2	5 minutes	Taking a break to watch a video on, for example, motorcycles (it has nothing to do with grammar — just fun).
Step 3	15 minutes	Reviewing differences between “would” and “could” quickly. At the end of this step, taking a short quiz is in order.
Step 4	10 minutes	Playing an easy improvised game in English (also nothing to do with the grammar)
Step 5	15 minutes	Playing out a real-life situation using “would” and “could”. Your students might come up with what kind of situation they want to role-play.

2) Creating blogs in English as homework. Young people are generally fascinated with technology; especially they are fond of the new communicative opportunities they get when exchanging ideas or consuming various forms of entertainment on social platforms. It would be wise to capitalize on this growing trend.

Creating and growing your blog should be a long-term assignment. The blog should be kept in English and dedicated to the topic that a student himself or herself chooses. It will be graded on how good the grammar there is and how much engagement the student showed.

3) Video games that involve a great deal of dialogue and are, preferably, open-world games. Good examples of this type of games might be the likes of Dragon Age, Mafia, GTA, Cyber Punk 2077. Completing a video game quest that has a lot of talking with other video game characters can be viewed as an additional homework that very few will try to shun. Then a thorough discussion of the quest and how each student completed it is in order when in classroom.

Conclusion. As we can see, there are many ways to teach English as well as other foreign languages unconventionally based on what students find interesting and exciting. Unsurprisingly, unconventional methods of teaching have lately become the synonyms for “fun” and “interesting”. Thinking that it's students who have been becoming “less and less capable of learning” is just unreasonable, because there is a lot of evidence emerging to the contrary — newer generations keep getting increasingly smarter as well as more creative in everything they do.

What's getting harder, however, is keeping them entertained and inspired because technological breakthroughs not only gave us all the wonders that we possess today, but also affected the way we think by overloading our brains with large amounts of information — some of it is useful, some not so much. The point is, the attention span is getting shorter due to the fact that there are quite a number of distractions all around us, and young people are especially sensitive to this. So, our job as teachers is to make clear that English is not a distraction but an essential skill you can't go around without — whether it is communication or entertainment it's used for. And for that, we need to pique the students' interest first; this is why we need to get unconventional in teaching foreign languages.

References

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