

f) *Role of experience* – Finally, in their need to be self-directing and in their orientation towards solving life's problems, adults need to connect learning their lifetime of experience and be acknowledged for it. This is another reason why adults crave discussion time, where they can share experiences (conference presenters take note). In fact, the need to share experience is related to schema theory, and belies a major difference from the way children learn. Learning in children centers on accretion (making new schema), while learning in adults centers on tuning and restructuring (revising and replacing schema). Talking about one's experiences, then, is more than just ego massage, the act itself is a means to tune and restructure. Since replacing existing schema is far more painful than acquiring new ones, adults need to share and collaborate in the process. Replacing old schema, or mental models, is also why adults are mistakenly characterized as being slower at learning, or even unable to learn (in both cases, the research says otherwise). Therefore, since adults must challenge and evaluate their existing mental models, adult educators prefer to accommodate reflective learning.

So that is why adults wilt in the traditional teacher-centered classroom, where the teacher tells them what they must know, tells them how they must learn it, and then subjects them to discrete item tests. And yet, few EFL teachers are even aware that a different pedagogy even exists. If those English teachers had access just one or two minor adult education methods, it might make a world of difference. Using learning contracts instead of tests, self-generated instead of textbook-determined topics, discussion instead of dialog recital, and individualized rather than teacher-assigned projects might turn their classes from drudgery into forums of shared growth.

In fact, here are some wonderful ideas for changing your traditional English lessons into lessons for adults...

...but wait a minute. Why listen to my puny ideas when we have this wonderful Think Tank lined up behind me, raring to bit into this issue? And so I ask you, my fellow pundits, give us succor in your creativity and genius!

It has been estimated that there are over 400,000 teachers of adults in North America alone, and my Web search last night came up with 42 Adult Education doctoral programs in the United States. From this rich ground, and urged on by years of adults in college classes that had 50-100% dropout rates, we have formed some basic theories of how adults learn. Almost everyone in this field agrees that the characteristics outlined by Malcolm Knowles provide the best picture, so here they are, although I have changed the order:

- a) *Readiness to learn* – Lifespan theory holds that we pass through different stages in life with different sets of challenges in each. Adults become ready to learn when their life situation causes that the related learning to be necessary. Newlyweds study interpersonal communication and gender issues.; retirees study healthcare. Educators who integrate their learners' life situations are more effective.
- b) *Orientation to Learning* – Since adults seek learning to solve the problems thrown at them by life, they are task-centered in their orientation towards learning. They want to see how their studies will apply to their lives: tasks they need to perform, problems they need to solve. Whenever possible, learning should be oriented towards solving real problems in real life situations. For example, adults are much more likely to sign up for a course called “Writing Better Business Letters” than “Composition I.” In addition, since they study for specific goals, they prefer practical, hands-on training to study of theory.
- c) *Motivation to learn* – It follows then, that adults are motivated by personal payoff and intrinsic value. While they still seek and respond to external motivators, such as test scores, internal priorities are far more important, Self-esteem, a desire to get a better job, or the quality of life, are common reasons adults study.
- d) *Need to know* – Since adults seek learning as a means to solve problems, they need to know why they study something. Children, dependent personalities, will do what they are told, but adults, non-dependent personalities, resent situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills upon them. Adult educators often set up frames of study, and allow learners to modify them to their needs.
- e) *Self-directed learning* – Their need to maintain control over their learning brings us to the central concept of adult education: Basically, adults, who are self-directed in life, also prefer to be self-directed in their studies. They hate to be treated like children, and they learn better when assignments are flexibly organized around basic criteria to allow personalization. Generally, instructors should manage the processes, not the content. However, adults returning to the classroom are not always aware of their need to be self-directing, and often come in expecting to be treated like children. This attitude, though, is rarely beneficial. An adult instructor, then, must be ready facilitate their transition to self-directedness. Furthermore, being self-directed does not always mean that adults are self-motivated, or willing to engage in self-teaching, especially when they are studying an unfamiliar subject.

any environment. It is the low achievers we have to coddle. They tend to be much more sensitive to variables in their learning environment, such as teacher attitude, materials, means of assessment, and, da da da dum, their peers.

3) Motivation as a group phenomenon

In Science Speak, motivation is usually framed as an individual phenomenon or at least a teacher-student thing. As we know, it is not. Our students, at that tender age when belonging is so important, seem to be more motivated by peers than by anyone else. This seems especially true with relational learners (as opposed to analytical), who tend to learn better in pairs, and are more motivated by teacher-student and student-student relationships. Unless you are at a top university, most of your students are probably relational learners, which is why pair-work, community language learning, and personalization (i.e., self-disclosure) work so well. Another interesting finding, and one I have noticed in my own classes, is that students who know each other are more likely to be motivated. That fits the Maslow thing, because they are less worried about being accepted or rejected (social need). That is why I like to take my students out to a restaurant within the first few weeks, to build camaraderie and remove classmate anxiety.

In fact, all three of the points above might explain why I like humanistic methods so well. Humanism, often maligned by those who have analytical high achievers, performing in the self-actualization mode, means basically, making the learners feel good about themselves. Humanism may or may not motivate your students to learn more English, but I guarantee it will motivate all of you to be better human beings.

[Why must we Teach Adults Differently? – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank](#)

You see them from time to time, and they always seem out of place: the housewife in your Tandai class; the businessman sitting next to you on the train, trying to muster the courage to talk to you; your friend's private "grandma class," curious, quaint, and always armed with something to eat. Adult English students seem odd, the anomaly, but educational data says that future belongs to them. Japan has just entered an adult education boom that might soon make the average age of a Japanese college student the same as in America, 29!

It is sad, though. Despite all we have learned about teaching adults from the twenty-year adult education boom in the West, the know how has not reached these shores, and same problems are cropping up again, here in Japan. In fact, the single greatest finding by Adult Education academics, a field virtually unknown here, is that adults don't learn the same way children do, and yet, they are being integrated into traditional English classrooms with no considerations of their differences. They are given the same schedules, told to use the same texts, and assessed by the same tests, and many don't come back after the first year. After all, the research shows they excel in learner-facilitator environments rather than teacher-student ones; they thrive as non-dependent learners, they need reasons, and they need to tell their stories.

How can we empower and motivate students? – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

“Empower and motivate.” I’m not really sure what the first word means and I know a lot, or a little, or nothing, about the latter. While on sabbatical a couple years ago, I read everything I could on motivation. Unfortunately, the experience was, if I may say, rather demotivating. Despite poring over dozens of models and plowing through a ream of books and articles, the secret golden kernel of how to motivate my students did not appear. A few interesting points did stick in my mind though, which might be of value to you.

First of all, research on motivation has gone a lot further than the old days. For years, any discussion on motivation in language teaching was pretty much nailed down to arguing over Gardner and Lambert’s theory, whether students studied because of integrative motivation (wanting to live abroad), or instrumental motivation (wanting a raise). In the nineties, researchers started to realize that learners might want both and looked elsewhere for models. Psychology, especially social and constructivist psychology, proved to be the source. Motivation began to be seen in a constructivist framework, as a group phenomenon, related to learning styles, indicative of autonomy, and bound to self-image. Williams and Burden’s Psychology for Language Teachers has a nice little chapter on the subject (that had I found earlier, world have saved me that sabbatical), but here are a few observations I have made, tongue in cheek, on the theories:

1) Maslow rises again

Motivation is motion towards a goal. In the same way recent theories of language acquisition identify *language needs* as a factor of acquisition (if your brain somehow figures out you need certain words to live, you’ll learn them, which is why hardly anyone English in Japan, Korea, or Saudi Arabia can), *life needs* are a factor of motivation. We are motivated to satisfy needs. Maslow identified four levels of needs, *physical needs* at the bottom, then *safety needs*, *social needs*, and *self-actualization needs* (to better oneself) at the top. McCloskey threw *need for autonomy* in there too, just above *social needs*, probably because he had a couple of teenagers. Anyway, we can only address one need at a time, and the lower the need, the more powerful it is. So guess where English is? Right up at the top. Therefore, if any of your students that are hungry (physical need), scared you’ll call on them (safety need), wanting a friend (social need), or pissed off at being told what to do all the time (autonomous need), they are not likely to be motivated to study (self-actualization need). Of course, if you start hitting them, thereby moving their primary need down to the physical level, they’ll at least pretend to study.

2) Intrinsic arm-wrestles Extrinsic

Self-efficacy, the perception of one’s own competence, is now seen as the big dude of motivation. But does that mean you should grandma them with praise, or be-in-your-face, get-them-by-the-balls-and-their-hearts-and-minds–will-follow, drill sergeant them in order to motivate? It depends (and on more than just gender or what school system you were ejected from). Recent research suggests that high achievers, those with high self-efficacy, are usually driven by a strong inner desire to learn and tend to succeed in

developing children into self-sufficient, independent adults, what they are really doing is the opposite. Inadvertently, we teach our charges that they have no right to choose what to learn, no right to oppose us except in a cordoned off domain of narrow intellectualism, and no right to decide when to show up, where to sit, when to talk, or what to do. Does this hidden curriculum make self-sufficient individuals? Of course not.

Walk into someone's classroom sometime and just watch it for awhile. Forget all the techniques you were taught as a part of classroom management, and look at that situation as a group of people interacting. Pretend that everyone is the same age and social status, and what you see will seem absurd. One person standing in the front forcing the others to respond chorally to some mantra that has no meaning in that particular environment. Maybe we have to do it, because it is the most efficient way of teaching a large number of people, but we should be aware of what we are doing and feel the pain of it.

Two academic fields – Humanistic Education and Adult Education – have given me alternative techniques to use in the classroom. The educational approaches Chris talks about are a part of Educational Humanism and they have shown good results. Adult Education is similar, since it was found that adults, as non-dependent learners, and basically, well, as adults, won't put up with being treated like children for very long. So here are a few techniques I have found useful for my college classes:

1) Imagine that everyone before you is older than you are and treat them accordingly. I never, ever scold anymore. If someone comes late, that is their business, and even if I take off points, it is not my right to ask why they are late. If someone is making noise in class, I *ask* them to be quiet because *I* am having trouble, not because they *should* be quiet. If a student doesn't turn in homework on time, I do not ask why, that is their business, I ask when they can get it to me, and hold them to it. I avoid taking off points for lateness. Learning is learning whenever it occurs.

2) Set strict requirements for the course in terms of competencies and baseline attendance, but not in terms of behavior. I try to help them achieve those standards, but I do not try to force them to. If Yuko falls asleep in class, then that is her business, and she obviously has reasons for doing so that I am not privy to.

3) Let learners set their goals whenever possible. You might have them try out a couple textbooks and choose one, or determine class policies, or decide on project topics. I rarely test anymore, and use projects instead, and sometimes, learning contracts.

4) Practice "Absolute Positive Regard." Assume that everyone of them is a worthy person striving to be whole, even if that striving does not fit your agenda.

This attitude of non-control, or really less control, works wonders sometimes, and although it generally results in less homework being done, less study for the test, it helps build self-controlling adults, and that matters more.

The problem is, then, how to use poetry in the classroom (Jazz Chants excepted), but I imagine other members of the think tank can handle this problem better than I.

Democracy in the Classroom, Response to Chris Hunt – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

What Chris has written hits home.

I teach in a women's college that tends to enroll the students that can't get into anywhere else, and some of them are the best people I've ever met. And yet, every time I meet a new class, I cannot help but feel like I am there to treat damaged animals. I walk in. Tension. Smiles. Silence. Who are you? Teach me something interesting about yourself. More silence. Shall we sing a song together? Trepidation. This situation is so typical of the Japanese classroom that we have started to look at it as normal, rather than as a symptom. However, funerals, military drills, and dentist's offices aside, human beings do not normally act like this when they get together. It is natural for people to connect, share, feel good about themselves, and do it loudly. It is not natural for them to sit quietly in a seat, feel afraid of looking foolish, and not trusting their abilities. So how did college students get this way?

They act like this, and feel this way, of course, because of what we have done to them. We have treated them inhumanly and so they have become un-human, unnatural.

Thank goodness.

After all, "natural" is not all that great for the complex institutions we live in. We would all suffer if people lost their values of obligation, punctuality, and deference, but as Chris points out, maybe we go too far. We are still acculturating people to live in a feudal hierarchy, where roles are fixed, than in the fluid democracies of today, where roles are self-shaped. After all, when it comes time to hire, the companies look for people with values of obligation, punctuality, and deference, but not the quiet, fearful, flaccid ones we are shaping.

"What we have done to them" I say, but is this criticism too harsh? There are also fun, spontaneous, laughing classes as well, aren't there? Yes, of course, but even in a great class, if you talk to your students about it, they will give you the curious comment that "it doesn't seem like a class at all," because most of their educational experience is based on a much narrower, bleaker form of teaching: "assign and assess." I decide what you must know, when you must know it by, and if you do not comply, I'll fail you in life. Learning then, for the most part, is defensive learning.

Our notion of curriculum is faulty. We teach facts and skills, and we try hard to choose facts and skills that will be useful to them in life. Yet, there is so much more that we teach that we are not even aware of, and usually has to do with attitudes. Eisner calls it the "hidden curriculum." Although school mission statements all over the world espouse

“When people who are not used to having their ideas granted any public credibility find that they are being listened to carefully and seriously, this is an astoundingly powerful experience. It can precipitate major changes in their self-images...and personal lives.”

Curtis Kelly
Heian Jogakuin University

Poetry – A Nautilus Machine for the Brain – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

I don't use poetry in the classroom, but recently I have been thinking about it a lot. It does things to our brains other modes of communication do not.

I remember reading a Gary Snyder book of poetry a few years ago. After a few pages, my head hurt. It was as if a whole new different section of my brain were getting exercised after years of lying dormant. It didn't seem to be the cognitive side of my brain that was working, but then again, maybe it was. Gary's metaphors, allusions and twisted meanings pierced deep into my consciousness and drew out every language processing apparatus I had. It was like listening to a visa officer explain something critically important to me in formal Japanese. Every linguistic fiber tensed and strained. I barely made meaning.

Now that we are making leaps and bounds in understanding how the brain works, this experience has led me to new speculations as to what poetry does. There is evidence that forcing the brain to process deeply, whether through problem-solving or music (see one of my previous Think tank pieces on the “Mozart factor”), not only builds stronger brains, but also maximizes our language processing abilities. Mozart makes us think deeply to process his meaning, and thereby stimulates the parts of our brain that process meaning in language. Actually, all parts of our brains, huge banks of multiprocessors, are constantly active, but Mozart, or Snyder, or the TOEIC reading exam, make all these little thinkers face one single problem. They prime us for deep thought.

We also know that in language learning, deep processing leads to deep internalization. Kids figuring out what “cow” means on their own will retain the word longer than if it were translated for them and they repeated it a few times. It makes sense then that poetry too – intense problem-solving ala linguistica – leads to deep processing, and thus deep internalization.

Another factor related to poetry in language learning is its musicality. We know that words attached to melodies are learned more quickly, especially with children (remember how you learned the alphabet?). Since poetry is Mozart in language (rhythm, alliteration, timbre), it follows that we should internalize the text of a poem more deeply too.

people decide who to marry or what religion to believe in. Please! Leave it to us experts!

Giving learners “choices” is the basis of creating autonomous learners (which, by the way, is part of a recent Monbusho directive). In fact, in my field, Adult Education, there is a whole pedagogy based on learner autonomy called “andragogy.” At its heart is the notion that children are by nature, dependent, teacher-directed learners, whereas adults are independent, self-directed learners. It was developed by Malcolm Knowles during the adult education boom in the West when it was found that programs for adults were experiencing horrendous dropout rates, of about 50 percent. Teachers were using the same test-driven, teacher-directive pedagogies that have been in use since 1100 a.d. (and still reign in Japan), and their adult students were dissatisfied.

Adults tend to be autonomous, self-directed learners with specific, life-centered reasons for engaging in study. Therefore, the traditional model of a knowing teachers pouring their own experience-based knowledge into the empty vessels of their students’ heads does not, and cannot, apply to adults. Nor does the motivational approach of defensive learning: “Pass this test or I’ll fail you.” Adults, facing tasks according to their own sociological situations, are motivated to learn in order to succeed at these tasks.

Therefore, an appropriate pedagogy for adults includes group discussion and problem-solving rather than lecturing, and allowing learners rather than the instructor to determine and satisfy their own learning needs.

Just a minute! “Allowing learners rather than the instructor to determine and satisfy their own learning needs?” Nice in theory, but in practice, it sounds like a horror movie for teachers. But this is just because we are still caught in the teacher-centered pedagogy for children. There are methods that support learner autonomy, such as learning contracts, which I am increasingly using in my own college classes. In a learning contract, the student determines what must be learned, how, by when, and what proof will be given to show mastery. The instructor becomes more of a learning “manager” – or as we like to say, “facilitator” – than “teacher.” Likewise, our pupils become “learners” rather than “students.”

It works. I know. I am currently engaged in satisfying the requirements of a learning contract myself. My facilitator is an internet expert in Wisconsin, and without even a peep from him, I am doing far more serious study than I have ever done before.

Therefore, from the perspective of Adult Education, giving students “choice” in their studies is not just something “nice” to do for them, it is mandatory. It is the basis of the only pedagogy that works for adults. In fact, the theories behind this pedagogy can explain the increasing level of malaise in today’s college and high school classrooms. Whereas an eighteen-year old was still a “child” twenty years ago, adulthood come a lot more quickly to the youth of this millennium, and with it, that all-consuming need for self-direction.

Give learners a choice? Absolutely. It is immoral not to. The notion that one person has the right to determine what another must know is absurd. On a more positive note, though, their making choices serves our ultimate mission, the building of better human beings. As Brookfield writes in The Skillful Teacher (1990, p.95):

Multisensory Learning Utilizes our Brains as Multiprocessors – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

In the previous Think Tank, I discussed how songs build better brains, and music leads to faster language learning. Use of song is part of the elementary education directive, and every elementary teacher knows that the more senses you bring into language input, the deeper the learning. The theory is that the more ways information is cued for retrieval – through movement, sound, vision, touch and even smell – the easier it is to recall later.

Smell? Indeed, smell appears to be the most powerful sense in relation to memory. In one study, a teacher burned jasmine incense sticks while teaching. He gave tests later with half of his students in a normal classroom and half in a room with incense burning. The latter group got higher scores (and they probably felt better too).

As Francis Crick and others have pointed out, multisensory input works because the human brain is a multi-processor. To limit input to one channel, especially the linear, structured, predictable way we tend to serve up school learning, is robbing the brain of its natural potential. No wonder so many of our students seem bored, frustrated, and underachieving. Brains are, in fact must be, active all the time. Even visually, they register over 36,000 cues per hour, while at the same time running our respiratory, circulatory, emotional and other systems. As Robert Sylwester describes it, a brain is not just a gathering of separate soloists, it is a jazz quartet. Different musicians play different instruments, but they all improvise on a single theme in order to make a unified song.

Learning too, occurs in a complex, non-linear, cooperative fashion, as our brains process multi-modal and multi-path experiences. Eric Jensen writes that some researchers believe that there is very little learning the brain the brain can do best in an orderly, sequential fashion, such as just hearing or reading about a subject. We are equipped with massive parallel processors, so we handle complex subjects better with rich, multisensory input. Consider. How did you become such a good teacher? By just reading books? Of course not. The sounds, sights, feelings, movements and even the smells of the hands-on classroom experience were crucial in that learning endeavor.

Therefore, the answer to the question of what role senses play in learning is “every role,” and maybe our educational reductionism is why some of our students are doing so poorly: their brains are too varied and powerful. After all, why would anyone use a jazz quartet to conjugate verbs?

Should learners be given choices? Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

Give learners choices? What a notion. Education is after all, “filling a bucket,” not “lighting a fire,” and letting learners decide what they need to know is like, well, letting

brain modifies itself according to usage. For example, people doing sports grow new synapses in the cerebellar cortex, which might “borrow” cells from neighboring areas. Although we can’t make a pill that will teach us French overnight, we can provide children with an “enriched environment” that can cause a postulated 40 points difference in IQ, and these kinds of environments should be provided to all children, not just gifted one.

Enrichment for brain stimulation means doing something new, and the single best way to grow a brain is through challenging problem solving. Whether students find answers or not, complex, challenging questions forge new dendritic connections that lead to even more connections. Arts work too, and do more than make a child “cultured.” Exposure to arts builds creativity, concentration, problem solving, self-efficacy, coordination, and self-discipline.

As for music, contrary to the belief that it is a right brain activity, it appears now that it engages the entire brain. Eric Jensen points out that it is particularly useful as a tool for arousal, a primer for the brain, and as a carrier of words. As a carrier, the melody acts as a vehicle for words. That is why students learn words in songs so much more quickly than without. Remember how you learned the alphabet?. Our brains are already specialized to build blocks of music, and when we do, the words come in too, as if they are attached to the notes.

So finally, as if validating the claims of suggestopedia founder Georgi Lozanov, researchers are finding more and more connections between music and language acquisition. Lamb and Gregory (1993) found a high correlation between pitch discrimination and reading skills. Mohanty and Hejmadi (1992) found that musical dance training increased creativity. The reason might lie in the rate and pattern that brain cells fire, which are basically the same for music appreciation and abstract reasoning. As for singing, our topic of the month, Kalmar studies found children who sing had better abstract conceptual thinking, stronger motor development, coordination, creativity, and verbal abilities. Other studies found singing led to better reading and language abilities.

Therefore, using songs in the classroom has a greater value than just being fun. It creates a state of learning readiness, it fires up the brain at a faster rate (students who listen to Mozart before a test score better), and it sensitizes the brain towards the acquisition of words. Sing out happy. Sing out strong.

[What role do the senses play in language learning?](#)

ELT News Think Tank Articles - Curtis Kelly 2000-2004

How Songs Build Better Brains

How can we empower and motivate students?

What role do the senses play in language learning?

Should learners be given choices?

Poetry – A Nautilus Machine for the Brain

Democracy in the Classroom, Response to Chris Hunt

How can we empower and motivate students?

Why must we Teach Adults Differently?

How Songs Build Better Brains – Curtis Kelly, ELT News Think Tank

In the high school and college classroom, songs are a nice little sideline English activity, but in the elementary classroom, let's face it, they are the heart and soul. Search for the word "song" on this site and you'll come up with dozens of hits, and almost all in "Kid's World." Helene Uchida says music "fills up a room with warmth." Aleda Krause, Greg Cossu, Mario Herrera, and David Paul consider them a necessary daily component, and Douglas Corin goes as far to write: "a children's teacher who excludes music from her class is putting some students at a disadvantage." Indeed, all across Japan, you'll hear shogakusei booming out Bingo, Old MacDonald, Head, Shoulders, Knees, and other junior top ten songs, a phenomenon Richard Graham has built a career on. But why are songs so popular? What is it about singing that works so well with children? And why does the power of song start to decline when children enter the sixth grade?

Herrera points out that songs are a part of a child's world to start with. McLaughlin postulates that songs lead to acquisition because they repeat the same patterns. Krause mentions that they are useful as a right brain activity after intensive left brain work. Chang & Greenough note the importance of multisensory effects. Haviland and Kramer posit that since emotions enhance acquisition, songs have an impact. But maybe the real answer, as far as any answer is real, comes to us from brain studies, a field of research that has is answering more and more questions about language every day.

To put it simply, solid evidence exists that songs build better brains.

In the late sixties, Marion Diamond discovered that brain has amazing malleability and changed the way we think about our brains. With even minor environmental stimulation, within a day or two, the brain grows new dendrite connections. In enriched environments, brains develop with thicker contexts, more dendritic branching, and larger cells. More recently, it has been discovered that the brain has synaptic plasticity: the