

Best Practices: A Critique of American Education and Research into Language Learning

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

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## **Abstract**

The following paper is an exploration of the research into discovery and meaning in the school setting. The foreign language classroom provides simply one example among other subjects, but the issue outlined in the following writings are remarkably transferable between all content areas in school: today's students struggle because there is no connection of content to students' own lives. Foreign language is an apt example of this problem due to the historically difficult nature of language learning in the US. This pair of papers deal with two seemingly different sides of the educational spectrum. One is a critique of the scholastic environment and academic system in place, written in both English and French. The second is a research review of second language acquisition and foreign language instruction, and a presentation of what I hope to bring to my own classroom as a teacher. John Dewey, Peter Gray, Stephen Krashen and others have spoken out for the past century about the need to improve education. I hope to continue their efforts in this paper, for the 21st century.

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## Process Analysis Statement

This project is the product of my journey in teaching. When I began this thesis, I was a French teaching major, planning and preparing to student teach the next semester. I was both thrilled and terrified to be in the classroom, a feeling universal for all preservice teachers I believe. I ended this project as a French major however, not being able to finish my teaching major, but I actually feel even more prepared to go forward in education. This project brought me into contact with ideas and visions of school I had never encountered before. Though the end product is different and smaller than how I originally imagined it, I feel incredibly successful and proud to show what teaching and education means to me after four years of university experience. I started this research using just articles and books that I could find on accent, pronunciation and the idea of content-based learning with STEM topics, which was my original proposal. After about a month or so of reading and trying to find something to say, I had nothing. I also felt that it was much too narrow to be of use or interest in the classroom, somehow I needed to find a bigger picture. So I started doing some regrouping and looked around the bookshelves for new inspiration. Instead, I found some old inspiration: John Dewey. Dewey's ideas from the 1920s are barely whispered in teacher training classes today, and I believe that's deliberate. His common sense emphasis on the practical and personal schooling is practically an attack on the modern education establishment. From Dewey, I read more and more about general issues in schooling today, using Edutopia's plethora of teaching articles and Peter Gray's highly controversial but none the less interesting blog. What was meant to be a brief introductory paragraph or two on the state of twenty-first century education turned into my first paper, A Critique of American Education. The rough draft of that, about fourteen pages was completed in

about two or three days. But I needed to still find a solution for foreign language teaching; after all, that was what I had envisioned doing for years. Unfortunately, my disillusion with modern education found in the research, along with some scheduling problems and the prospect of taking two-three classes while student teaching and working part-time caused a complete burnout on my part. I took a good three-four weeks break from touching the thesis in around October/November as I figured out where I could go with my teaching career and my project. I found a partial solution in Indianapolis, at the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers annual conference, where Stephen Krashen, a huge figure in second language acquisition research was actually speaking. His ideas and the networking that I did at the conference were truly rejuvenating, and I quickly was able to begin work on the second paper, brainstorming ideas for the classroom, for lessons and a whole new outlook on teaching. It didn't make the research easier, but I had the motivation and reassurance that others saw problems with modern schooling as well. At the same time that I found I could finish this project and envisioned how I wanted to go forward, I had to make the choice to drop my teaching major since student teaching was becoming increasingly more difficult to fit into my spring schedule. I had to pick up an extra class in the middle of the semester, but by winter break, the second paper was more or less complete. All that remained was the French translation and a thorough editing. However, after coming from to spring classes, I realized I didn't really have the full coherent paper I wanted because it lacked connection. The first paper was meant to be an introduction at most, but at seventeen pages long, I realized it would need to stand on its own, and instead this project would be a pair of papers, each demonstrating my understanding and discovery of a different element of schooling. I was granted permission to do this though, and then began translation of my critique

into French. Translation was much more excruciating and energy draining than I had expected but before break it was done, and I was able to focus on simply framing everything together. This thesis is not the idyllic perfection of educational research that I imagined, it was a messy and confusing process where I had to pick myself up and keep trying many times. Now that it's done, I am very hopeful that I can take the ideas and the basic foundation in research that are in these two papers and put them to use not only in future education, but in my future classroom, wherever that may be.

## **A Critique of American Education**

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### **The Need for Reform**

There has been a theory going around for several years that schooling is not an education. Nevertheless, hundreds of books are being published around the world and in the United States about how to school students best. Most of the ideas for this reform consist of how teachers need to present content more effectively and with more appeal to their students. They need to excite and entertain them. Then, according to these reformers, the problem will be fixed and students will love learning and love school. Peter Gray, a psychologist focused on child development and schooling, aptly critiques these authors and these solutions by examining students' own opinions and own experiences. He openly speaks out against the elephant present every day in every classroom in America : our students dislike school because they do not need what they are learning (Gray, 2016).

Among the traditionalists, the moderate reformers publishing books on student motivation, and the radical reformers who see the problem as beyond issues of instruction, lies the two principal methodologies, or paths so to speak, for educating children. Traditionalists and those who support the "Back to Basics" phenomena in schools believe this can be done with a fixed (systematic) plan while radical reformers tend believe true education comes through experience, a concept tentatively defined as: "observation and practical contact with facts or events" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Traditionalists who defend the current status quo in schools and in public education argue that students gain both instruction and experience; therefore, they

are undeniably well-educated. I would stand on the side of radical reform, which points out that all that students gain from the current system is simply the practical contact and observation of school itself. This means that students, after twelve + years, leave with a diploma and having genuinely been educated of only three things: the daily lessons prescribed by textbook companies, the school system structure, and the staff that occupied 17,280 hours of their formative years. After those twelve + years, parents, teachers, and commencement speakers proudly announce it is time for the real world. It's a well-meant phrase but at times it can also be a mildly snarky way to tell students that after graduation, after more than a decade, they will finally begin a real education. It rather seems like a horrifying joke perhaps students and graduates. But one they have certainly be aware of for several years. Pre-teen children but especially teenagers begin to realize fully that some kind of joke is being played on them as they progress through the system. Many believe that they have no other options for “success”, as defined by our systematically educated society.

Dr. Gray is perhaps a more severe critic compared to others who are also speaking out against modern education. He compares school to a prison setting. However, Dr. Gray is a critic whose research is extensive and who backs up his claims with a large realm of other research literature. There are many other academic and intellectual thinkers who are now agreeing with this assessment of schools, and more importantly, the data that is coming in is proving them right. In 2014, 53% of overall secondary school students in grades five-twelve felt engaged (Gallup, 2014). In 2016, the number went down to 49% (Gallup). In fact, a Gallup poll in 2016 showed that in grade five, 75% of students feel engaged at school (Brennemen, 2016), but by grade nine, only 41% of students are still engaged (Brennemen, 2016). That indicates no less



than 59% (!) of students having lost interest. If we rate schools as a whole, simply using the satisfaction rating of actual students, we would see the true crisis of education that exists, and not be fooled by the false “accountability” crisis engineered by educational and testing companies.

This lack of interest and engagement is *not* for lack of “entertainment training” in teacher preparation programs. In fact, teachers are one of the few consistently positive aspects of school, with 65% of secondary students viewing their teachers as positive role models, during the same scholastic years that engagement in the actual material is going down (Survey reveals what students really think, Hare). Perhaps this trend in engagement can be explained by the fact that by high school, and certainly by seventh grade when engagement drops, students realize what is and isn't worth learning. Those middle schoolers certainly aren't motivated to continue 4 more years of schooling that they see as unhelpful for their most pressing needs. It's time to stop turning a blind eye and address the education system as a whole directly, not just through the lenses of testing and standards.

It is ironic that the “hot topic” for education today is twenty-first century learning. In fact, there seems to be no end to the books and seminars and speakers and blogs about how to “update” education, but they all still miss the point. We are already in the midst of the twenty-first century. Surprisingly, educational needs in the past are not so different from today. Understanding oneself, one's family and community as well as their roles to support and be apart of society are the most pressing needs for preteens and teenagers. As is gaining the skills needed for work and for daily living. None of these needs and desires figure into the curriculum much. Therefore, it can be strongly asserted that current scholastic education fails to fulfill any of those needs.

## **A Crisis of Meaning in American Education**

Many reformers, those are moderate and those more radical, do agree that students need less book-learning and instead deserve hands-on learning. This idea stands behind the surge of problem-based, project-based (PBL), and inquiry-based initiatives that many educators themselves feel are a step in the correct modern direction. In science classes, most researchers have agreed that PBL has the potential to be very well adapted (Quint & Condiff, 2018). Yet the truth is, every topic or subject worth learning is worth a person's time only if it is learned primarily hands-on. Furthermore, it's interesting to note that the years where student engagement begins to slip the most is middle school. This is the period in schooling where content becomes specialized, but more importantly, where it becomes almost entirely book-and-assessment-based, and scarcely interactive (Calderon & Yu, 2017). For increasingly emotional, social and independent teenagers, this proves disastrous and could be part of the explanation for why motivation is so low for many students and why the current school set-up produces such an uncomfortable environment for them (Corwin, 2016). The school environment is one that's sterile and artificial, not permitting socialization, original thought or the abilities and natural passions of teenagers to be expressed. Their most pressing interests do not exist in the school where they spend forty hours of their week.

This theory of practical learning could also explain the increasing demand to bring back career and technical courses, such as culinary arts, welding, auto repair, early childhood education, family & consumer sciences, and engineering design programs like Project Lead The

Way (PLTW). Recently, the federal administration approved a large grant for increased funding of these kinds of courses (Meckler, 2018). This is a slightly more positive trend that should be encouraged, but not so much for the “career-ready” ideals that schools expound, but more importantly for the accessibility and the practicality that students in secondary grades often want most (Gray, 2016). However, core content classes such as the language arts, mathematics, history and the sciences won't be going away anytime in the future. They should serve as positive components to any education, but only if students are actually given the opportunity to learn these subjects through real-world investigation and use. Similarly, even though foreign language classes float around hesitantly as an elective due to the strong presence of Latino and Asian cultural centers in the US, along with the European historical influence that still exists in our culture, the demand for language courses remains. The fact that school budgeting cuts make languages and other electives, such as music and the arts, undersupplied is just another sign of foundational flaws in public education.

It's difficult for students who are given only textbooks, worksheets and pictures to see a need for any of the aforementioned classes using their assigned book chapter or the windowless classroom. By high school especially, the independence level and social components of teen life are only hindered by excessive focus and direction via books and powerpoints, no matter how exciting or colorful teachers make them (Gray, 2017). Even young children require play in order to use their full capacities and actually learn, a fact proven over again by several studies and one that also holds true for older children and teens as well. Looking at the statistics and studies, school is most certainly *not* a playful environment for either students or teachers today. It's one that bores students, growing farther away from what our children can and want to do.

John Dewey's progressivism theories and experimental schools were an extension of a rather intuitive concept that the education system seems to refuse to grasp since its inception: children *and* adults learn from a need, not by jazzing up facts for memorization (Dewey, 1915). The lesson planned may be an interesting topic to the teacher or intellectually pleasing, but ultimately, if the subject matter is not necessary or relevant to life for the student, it will be put aside, forgotten and replaced by information that is deemed necessary. Dewey's ideas arose in the 1900's and still, the scholastic establishment struggles to accept this, almost 100 years later. Still, we focus on improving the motivation for learning the material laid out in various curriculums.

Course content and information hasn't changed dramatically in the past fifty years, save for various scientific advancements, colorization, better graphics and historical updates, along with curricula writers' hesitant acknowledgement and inclusion of non-white peoples. Yet, the problem with student performance rates is treated as something to do with teachers or students themselves. One or the other. In reality, rather than putting more teachers through professional development seminars with complete strangers, about "engaging and managing students", perhaps it's time to look at the actual subject matter we have deemed so important and so interesting in the first place.

## II. CRITICAL ISSUES

### **Industrial Pedagogy**

Textbooks and content presentation have certainly evolved, been re-designed, colorized, made glossy, and had more pictures added. Now, we provide it online in many schools now, to

further increase its “relevance” to the tech-savvy generation. Meanwhile, students still find their courses boring and struggle with a smaller and smaller desire to focus and learn (Blake-Plock, 2010).

History is filled with certain periods of time where scientific investigation is severely lacking and social investigations seem to be of more interest. Today, there is the industrial era which continue, globally and with increasing ferocity, and where scientific advancements for the sake of profit and the sake of discovery itself have ignored the tremendously deadly human impacts. The industrial effects not only bear great weight on our way of life today, but also our way of thinking as well. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers are considered elite and some of the most intellectual professions. More significantly, they are some of the best paid professions. Science and technology improvements in general are viewed as the infallible ways to improve the world. These tools are also the most efficient way to distribute education as well, according to those who sell the new digital products (Fallon, 2017).

Unfortunately, more and more, people are seeing only scientific advancement without consideration of the human experience, turning life for the non-elite into an inhumane existence. Consider that many third world employees work in factories, mines, and agricultural occupations, making profits for twenty-first century companies, but in incredibly dangerous nineteenth century conditions. In Western and other wealthy countries, rather than having physically risky conditions, there is a lack of social and mental well-being plaguing many citizens and employees, on an epidemic scale, especially in the US. 18.3% of adults struggled with mental illness in 2017 (Blake, 2017). Science and technological pressures for development have not been a benign force on human history as of late.

No more can this trend towards investigation of science without consideration of humanity be seen more accurately than at the scholastic level. We consider places like Japan, Singapore and China to produce the best students, while in reality, we ignore the human cost of “more efficient learning” and a society that places all value on the numbers and rankings in education. Suicide and unhealthy levels of stress for teenagers is a serious problem in those countries, perhaps for the pressure a fully standardized education exerts on them (Gray, 2013). There is the same problem now in the US, a trend that did not use to exist. There is strong evidence that shows that adolescent suicide correlates precisely with the school calendar: when classes begin, the risk of suicide goes 95% higher for boys and 33% higher for girls, enough that we should be gravely concerned (Gray, 2018)

With all the crushing issues that plague society, there is very little real world experience left to be had in schools and consequently very little education to be gained by students attending standardized classes. In considering what can and what should be done, it may be beneficial that, for once, human instinct and experience be given a voice alongside all of the newest high-tech and “best practices” defining curriculum development today. This involves questioning many assumptions made in schools by pointing out what may be rather obvious but unfortunately, still needs to be noted and proven.

### **The Need for an Active Environment**

As of 2017, most Americans (75%) spend ten hours or less outside during the week, and half spend five hours or less outdoors weekly. (“U.S. study shows widening disconnect”, 2017). The indoor sedentary lifestyle for modern Americans starts at home, but instilled in school. The lack of movement allowed for students is a noticeable problem especially when classroom

behavior problems are examined. More importantly, the sedentary scholastic environment is also extremely unhealthy for all students. Most health habits are forged during teenage and early adult years. In our current system, we seem to believe that a daily routine of sitting with occasional walking is “normal” for human beings. Considering the immense number of harmful effects that a sedentary lifestyle has upon our lives, it most certainly *cannot* be considered normal and certainly should not be a lifestyle that we impose upon children and teens, to the point of punishing children for being active people and teens for being “squirrely”. Schools have strict rules and consequences for students who disobey and get out of their seats without permission or without an academic purpose in their movement. In light of the thousands of studies and medical imperatives to maintain an active *not* the sedentary lifestyle, it’s more alarming that this poor lifestyle is now prescribed to children as well, in the form of an 8 hour school day.

There are still children who live in an area safe enough to go outside and play for an hour or two. However, the fact that schools demand students spend twelve years or more learning to sit at a desk or table during their most active hours of the day instills a degree of complacency and comfort over time to this extremely sedentary routine. This is not a picture of education that anyone should encourage to continue. This is a prescription for constant boredom and future health concerns. Unfortunately, whatever physical activity that *is* allowed or encouraged in schools is for a grade, not fun, and involves competition in most instances. Schooling simply doesn’t take into account the fact that students require play-based activity to learn. Especially for younger students, but for older teens and adults as well, the need for active play versus passive academic instruction is immense, as well as more effective (Gray, 2015).

## Issues with Scholastic Content

A key idea repeated by reformers and echoed by studies is that students do not benefit by examining prescribed textbooks, worksheets, blackboards, smartboards *nor* computers for 8 hours a day. These media are tools. Teaching with the newest software and smartest technology, computer-based, ebook-based, or even blackboard-based instruction involves passive consumption by students within the limits, regulations, standards and time allotments given to each class and subject (Blake-Plock, 2010). Active children and self-aware teens really do have better things to do rather than just absorb whatever lesson is deemed to fall on this day. A look into these curriculum and text creation especially illuminates many of problems that modern instruction based on content and standards contains.

Educational companies such as textbook distributors, educational technology startups, and consultants use a rather confusing array of pictures and images to prove their validity as a company and attract customers. On one distributor's site, there's pictures of a boy running in a field of grass, a model of learning nowhere to be found in their lessons or actual products. Another has a student focused intently on his notebook while writing. On the covers for most textbooks, you'll see beautiful detailed images of an object or perhaps an artwork of some kind. Inside, the colors are brightly illuminated everywhere. In the modern era here in the US, we still believe in judging books by their covers. Educators, administrators and students assume that tasteful graphic design skills clearly indicates a high quality product to sell. There is scarce evidence to suggest that any of the current educational companies and their school "philosophies" are anything more than misleading propaganda about it's more boring content. The textbook industry is a business like any other, with administrators as customers, not students



themselves (Blake-Plock, 2010). These businesses have little of student interests and welfare in mind, similar to the top test creation companies: the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the College Board. The ETS created the GRE and TOEFL, while the College Board is in charge of the SAT and AP tests. Both of these companies turn a high profit for executives (even if listed as a non-profit) as do most companies involved in creating or influencing educational curriculum and products in any way.

Most major educational organizations today consist of board members, directors and CEOs having practically no experience in educational positions themselves. Perhaps a case in point would be Michelle Rhee, former DC chancellor of education and past CEO of StudentsFirst, and whose experience as an elementary school teacher are highly suspect. She taught for three years, with only one of them unsupervised due to her poor classroom management. Then there is David Coleman, main creator of Common Core standards and now CEO of the College Board. He earned a degree to be a high school English teacher, attended Oxford, and then after graduation promptly began work at one of the top consulting firms in the United States (Goldstein, 2012). He now determines key decisions for the largest college entrance exam in the nation. Most fellow board leaders of most new and old testing or curriculum companies similarly have zero experience in the classroom as teachers. Those who do, have exclusively worked in private or high-income public schools only. Prominent examples of this issue include enterprises such as Pearson Education, KIPP Schools, the ETS and even the Bill Gates Foundation K-12 Initiative. With little experience behind them, it's no surprise that these companies and "non-profit organizations", whose CEOs earn upwards of 150,000 dollars annually, like David Coleman does (Lewin, 2012), are like any other business: they manufacture

the need as much as they manufacture and design their books, tests, software and other supposedly necessary tools for the classroom. Not only are textbooks still poorly constructed in terms of coherency and clear commitment to student needs, they operate nowadays as mainly another arm of the testing and standards business machine (Ansary, 2004).

### III. CONCLUSION

Current instruction focuses on the transmission of facts, and only is effective if the student has subscribed to the idea that those facts are worth knowing. This is a system of propaganda that many students stop subscribing to during the years they spend in school. Current instruction in schools rarely invites understanding about the issues that students care about the most, mainly the social, emotional, environmental and cultural challenges that they face and deal with daily. If by chance a teacher does involve a topic of interest, it's only allowed to be a part of curriculum provided that "measurable outcomes" can be recorded, meaning if it's important on the latest test that's been designed. The truth is, students want to learn and make a difference in these areas of their lives, not complete page after page, lecture after lecture or chapter after chapter of a book focused on issues that often only the elite consider so important (and with only part of the truth). Many, if not all, teachers know this. The policymakers do not want to acknowledge this. These challenges are becoming greater for our students, as poverty and economic division rises, and the public education system will lose all of its ability to be taken seriously if it continues to worry about standards, new technology and assessment strategies, without taking the very recipients of these new initiatives, our students, seriously.

This criticism of content is not to say that pupils require no instruction or guidance to be given. Instead, the issue is that mass instruction has now become acceptable over the past 100 years, and been equated to mass learning for the populace. No doubt literacy and mathematical skills rate have been widely transmitted, more due to the pressures of society than some inherent perfection of elementary school lessons. Many, if not all, of teachers agree however, that understanding is the goal, not recitation. Still no true reform has been accomplished for the majority of American students.

## Une critique de l'enseignement américain

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### **L'exigence pour la réforme**

La théorie que l'enseignement n'est pas égale à l'éducation a existé depuis plusieurs années. Néanmoins, des centaines de livres continuent à être publiés globalement et dans les États-Unis au sujet d'instruction meilleure. La plupart des idées de réforme consiste de la nécessité pour les enseignants à présenter le contenu plus efficacement et avec plus de attrait. Ils doivent stimuler et divertir leurs élèves. Ainsi, selon ces réformateurs, le problème sera résolu et les élèves aimeront l'enseignement et leurs écoles. Peter Gray, un psychologue focalisé sur le développement infantile et l'enseignement, justement a critiqué ces auteurs et ces "solutions" en examinant les opinions des élèves et leurs propres expériences. Il parle ouvertement contre l'éléphant présente chaque jour dans chaque salle de classe dans les États-Unis: les élèves détestent l'école parce qu'ils n'ont pas de besoin de ce qu'est enseigné là (Gray, 2016).

Parmi les traditionalistes, les réformateurs modérés qui publient leurs livres au sujet de la motivation scolaire, et les réformateurs plus radicaux qui croient que le problème est plus profond que simplement l'instruction, apparaissent les deux démarches principales, ou chemins, pour instruire les élèves. Les traditionalistes croient que l'éducation peut être fait avec un plan systématique, fixé, alors que les réformateurs plus radicaux croient que la vraie éducation est un produit de l'expérience, un concept défini comme: "l'observation et le contact pratique des faits et des événements" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Les traditionalistes et les réformateurs modérés qui défend le status quo qui existe dans les écoles et l'enseignement publique préconisent que les élèves gagnent l'instruction et l'expérience, dont, ils sont tous très bien instruits. Je me resterais

sur le bord des réformateurs radicaux, qui montrent que tout que les élèves gagnent du système actuel est simplement l'observation et le contact pratique des écoles en soi. Ce veut dire que ces élèves, après douze années, s'en vont avec un diplôme et étant instruits sur seulement trois aspects: les leçons quotidiens prescrits par les entreprises des manuels et les personnels du gouvernement, la structure du système d'enseignement, et le personnel d'instruction, tout qui a occupé 17.280 heures de leurs années formatrices. Après ces douze années, les parents, les professeurs et les orateurs de marque tous annoncent fièrement qu'il fait temps d'entrer dans la vie réelle. C'est un adage sincère mais souvent il peut être aussi un moyen hautain à dire les diplômés du secondaire que après la graduation, après plus d'une décennie, ils commenceront une vraie éducation. Il paraît comme une blague effrayante peut-être aux élèves et aux diplômés. Une blague qu'ils ont étaient conscients pour plusieurs années. Les enfants et les adolescents particulièrement commence à comprendre pleinement que cette blague existe comme une vérité alors qu'ils traversent le système. Plusieurs de ces élèves commencent à croire qu'il n'y a plus d'options pour réussir, comme défini par la société instruit systématiquement.

Dr. Gray est possiblement un critique sévère comparé au autres qui protestent également le système d'enseignement moderne. Il fait la comparaison entre l'école et la prison. Pourtant, Dr. Gray est un détracteur possédant assez de recherche qui soutient ses affirmations avec une profonde sphère de littérature de recherche. Beaucoup de philosophes et intellectuels sont d'accord avec cette évaluation des écoles, et le plus important, les données sur la satisfaction des élèves qui arrivent justifier ces penseurs. En 2014, 53% de tous les élèves secondaires, années cinq-douze, se sentent intéressés (Gallup, 2014). En 2016, ce nombre a réduit à 49% (Gallup). En fait, un sondage de Gallup de 2016 montrait que dans l'année cinquième, 75% sont motivés,

mais dans l'année neuvième seulement 41% des élèves restent intéressés (Brennemen, 2016). Cela indique que 59% (!) des élèves ont perdu leur intérêt au début du lycée. Si on évalue les écoles dans l'ensemble, en utilisant les taux de satisfaction des élèves, on verra la vraie situation critique qui existe, et ne pas être dupe par la crise de «accountability» qui a été produite par les entreprises privées et le gouvernement.

Ce manque d'intérêt et d'implication n'était pas causé par un manque de «formation de divertir les élèves» dans la formation des enseignants. En fait, les professeurs et les enseignants sont une des aspects positifs dans le système; 65% des élèves secondaires voient leurs professeurs comme un modèle positif, pendant les mêmes années scolaires que l'implication des élèves par le contenu se baisse (Survey reveals what students really think, Hare). Peut-être cette tendance et cette contradiction d'engagement peut être expliquée par le fait que par la septième année, et certainement par le début du lycée, la plupart (presque 60%) des élèves possèdent assez de pensée indépendante pour réaliser ce que mérite et ce que ne mérite pas leur effort mental. Il faut le temps d'arrêter de fermer les yeux et s'adresser le système éducatif dans l'ensemble directement. Il ne sert rien de focaliser sur seulement les normes scolaires et les évaluations standardisées.

Le fait que «Twenty-First Century Learning» est le thème éducatif plus à la mode est assez ironique. Il n'y a pas de fin aux nombres de livres, colloques, conférenciers, et blogs au sujet de moderniser l'instruction, mais la plupart sont en erreur. On est déjà dans le milieu du siècle vingt et unième. Étonnamment, les besoins éducatifs d'aujourd'hui ne sont pas assez différents que le passé. Comprendre soi-même, sa famille et sa communauté en addition à sa rôle dans la société humaine sont quelques des besoins plus urgents et importants pour les élèves

adolescents. Également, comme est gagner les compétences pour la vie quotidienne et le travail. Aucun de ces besoin apparaît dans quantité dans le curriculum moderne. Donc, on peut affirmer que l'enseignement et l'instruction contemporaines a échoué à réaliser ces besoins.

### **Une crise de valeur dans l'enseignement américain**

Beaucoup des réformateurs, les modérés et les plus radicaux, sont d'accord que les élèves méritent plus d'instruction interactif et moins focalisé sur les manuels et les fichiers. Cette théorie est la raison pour l'afflux de «Project-Based», «Problem-Based» et «Inquiry-based» initiatives que plusieurs enseignants en soi croient que soient un pas dans la direction correcte. Dans les classes des sciences, la recherche a indiqué que l'instruction par projet possède la capacité à être très bien adapté (Quint & Condiffe, 2018). Cependant, c'est vrai aussi que chaque sujet et chaque compétence mérite l'effort de l'élève seulement si c'est appris pratiquement et concrètement. Par ailleurs, c'est essentiel à noter que les années scolaires où l'engagement des élèves se baisse le plus rapidement sont ceux du collège. Le collège est la période où l'instruction et le contenu devient plus spécialisé mais aussi plus focalisé exclusivement sur les manuels et les examens standardisés (Calderon & Yu, 2017). Le début du collège est le début d'éducation beaucoup moins interactive.

Pour les adolescents qui deviennent plus sensibles, plus sociaux et plus indépendants, ce développement devient catastrophique et peut-être fait partie de l'explication de pourquoi la motivation scolaire est tant faible. Cela expliquerait pourquoi l'environnement d'écoles est donc tant désagréable pour les élèves (Corwin, 2016). C'est un environnement stérile, artificiel qui ne permet la socialisation, la pensée originale ou les habiletés et les passions naturelles des

adolescents être exprimés. Leurs intérêts plus forts n'existent pas dans l'école où ils doivent passer quarante heures de leur semaine.

Cette thème d'instruction pratique peut-être peut expliquer la demande croissant de rapporter les classes de carrière et techniques, comme les arts culinaires, le soudage, la réparation automobile, l'éducation préscolaire, les sciences de familles et les programmes de conception technique, comme «Project Lead the Way». Récemment, l'administration fédérale a ratifié une allocation grande pour augmenter le financement de ces classes (Meckler, 2018). Cela est une tendance un peu plus positive qui doit être favorisée, mais pas pour seulement préparation à carrière. Ces types de classes sont importantes pour l'accessibilité et l'utilité que désirent souvent ces élèves secondaires (Gray, 2016). En revanche, les classes de contenu requis, comme l'anglais, l'histoire et les mathématiques ne s'en iront bientôt. Elles doivent servir comme aspect positives à toute sorte d'éducation, mais seulement si les élèves sont donnés l'opportunité d'apprendre ces sujets par l'enquête réel et usage du contenu. De la même façon, même avec les langues modernes classifiés comme électif, la demande pour eux restent, grâce à la présence forte des centres de la culture hispanique et asiennne, accompagné de l'influence européenne qui toujours existe dans la société des Etat-Unis. Le fait que les courtes de budgétisations des écoles provoque l'approvisionnement insuffisant de ces classes et autres comme l'art et la musique est une autre signe de failles fondamentaux dans le système éducatif.

C'est difficile pour les élèves à voir la nécessité pour ces classes susmentionnée par examiner un chapitre du manuel ou leur salle de classe sans fenêtres. Au début du lycée particulièrement, le niveau d'indépendance et les aspects sociaux de la vie adolescente sont seulement encombré par l'usage excessif des manuels et les diapos, n'importe pas comment



imaginatives ou colorés ils sont faits (Gray, 2017). Les enfants jeunes exigent le libre jeu pour utiliser leurs capacités complètes et apprendre vraiment. C'est un fait prouvé par la recherche plusieurs fois et un fait que se vérifie pour les adolescents aussi. L'école est assez certainement pas un environnement joueur, pour les élèves ni pour les enseignants aujourd'hui. C'est un contexte qui ennuie les élèves, et qui s'éloigne plus de ce que les enfants peuvent et veulent faire et apprendre.

Les théories de «Progressivism» de John Dewey et ses écoles expérimentales étaient une extension d'un concept assez intuitif que le système éducatif a refusé croire: les enfants et les adultes apprennent à cause de la nécessité (Dewey, 1915). On peut dire sans risque que seulement relever les faits pour mémorisation ne crée aucune nécessité. Les leçons planifiées sont peut-être intéressantes pour le professeur ou plaisantes intellectuellement, mais fondamentalement, si le contenu n'est ni nécessaire ni pertinent dans la vie des élèves, il serait mis à côté, oublié et puis remplacé par l'information qui est vraiment nécessaire. Les idées de Dewey émergeaient dans les années 1920's et toujours l'institution scolastique lutte à accepter ces concepts, presque 100 ans plus tard. On focalise toujours sur la motivation pour apprendre le contenu de tous les curriculums variés.

Le contenu des classes n'a pas tellement changé dans ces dernières 50 années, sauf pour les avancés scientifiques, les mises à jours historiques, accompagnée d'inclusion hésitante des peuples de couleur. Néanmoins, le problème de motivation et les résultats des élèves est traité comme une problème à cause des élèves en soi ou les enseignants. Soit l'un ou l'autre. En réalité, au lieu de soumettre plus d'enseignants aux séminaires de formation continué, organisé

par des officiels inconnus au sujet d'engager et motiver les élèves, peut-être qu'il est temps d'examiner le matériel scolaire qui a été estimé tant important et tant intéressant au début.

## II. QUESTIONS ESSENTIELLES

### **La pédagogie industrielle**

Les manuels et la présentation du contenu ont certainement évolué, ont été remaniés, plus colorisés, rendus plus brillants, avec de plus et plus d'images. Maintenant, le curriculum est disponible en ligne dans plusieurs écoles aujourd'hui pour augmenter sa pertinence à la génération «tech-savvy». Entre temps, les élèves toujours trouvent leurs classes ennuyantes et ils luttent avec une volonté de plus et plus réduite à se concentrer et comprendre (Blake-Plock, 2010).

L'histoire est pleine de périodes où la recherche scientifique manque, et les questions sociales semblent plus intéressantes. Aujourd'hui, on vit dans l'ère industrielle, qui continue actuellement, globalement et avec plus de férocité, où les avancées scientifiques avec le but des bénéfices et la découverte elle-même ont ignoré les impacts humains vraiment mortels. Les effets industriels sont pas seulement très pesante sur la vie quotidienne, mais sur la vie intellectuelle aussi. Les sciences, la technologie, l'ingénierie, et les mathématiques (STEM) sont les professions les mieux payés. Les sciences et le progrès de la technologie sont considérés en général comme les moyens les plus parfaits, sans faute, à améliorer le monde. Ces moyens sont aussi les plus efficaces pour distribuer l'instruction aussi, selon les entreprises qui vendent ces outils numériques (Fallon, 2017).

Malheureusement, de plus en plus des gens sont en train de voir les avancées technologiques sans aucune considération de l'expérience humaine, et transformant la vie pour ceux qui sont exclus des échelons d'élites à une existence inhumaine. Considérer que plusieurs employés dans les régions pauvres travaillent dans les usines, les mines et l'agriculture, faisant les profits pour les entreprises du vingt et unième siècle, mais dans les conditions mortelles du dix-neuvième siècle. Dans les pays occidentalisés et riches, il n'y a pas de conditions mortelles psychologiquement, mais il y a des vrais problèmes de santé mentale et émotionnelle, qui affligent les citoyens et les employés des pays occidentaux, maintenant cela est devenu presque une épidémie. 18.3% des adultes dans les Etats Unis ont souffert des maladies mentales en 2017 (Blake). Les tensions et le progrès scientifique n'avaient pas été des forces bénéfiques pour l'humanité récemment.

Les conséquences de ce phénomène, la recherche sans penser à l'état d'humanité, peuvent être vues plus intensément au niveau scolaire. On considère souvent que les pays comme la Chine, le Japon et le Singapour produisent les meilleurs élèves, mais en réalité, on ignore la coût de leur instruction «plus efficace, plus standardisée» et fondée sur la mémorisation dans une société qui valorise les nombres et les rangs comme les signes du succès. Le suicide et le stress ont été des problèmes sévères pour les élèves dans ces pays, peut-être pour la pression qui existe dans l'enseignement (Gray, 2013). Maintenant, on est en face de la même problème ici aux Etats Unis, il y a une tendance qui n'existait pas dans le passé. Il y a évidence forte que le suicide des adolescentes est corrélé précisément avec le calendrier scolaire: quand les classes commencent, le risque du suicide augmente 95% pour les garçons et 33% pour les filles, assez d'un changement pour être inquiet (Gray, 2018).

Avec les autres issues terribles qui affligent la société globale et locale, il n'existe plus de vraie expérience du monde que l'on peut trouver dans les écoles. Par conséquent, il y a peu d'avantages scolaires qu'on peut gagner en assistant aux classes standardisées actuelles. En considérant ce qui peut et doit être fait, il serait bénéfique de donner une voix à l'instinct et à l'expérience humaine, à côté des nouveaux progrès et les pratiques qui défilent et contraignent l'éducation et le curriculum aujourd'hui. Cela implique que questionner les hypothèses clés fait par l'administration scolaire est nécessaires pour montrent les issues qui peuvent être évidents mais importants à prouver.

### **L'exigence pour une environnement d'activité**

À partir de 2017, la plupart des Américains, 75%, passent dix heures et moins dehors chaque semaine et la moitié passent cinq heures et moins ("U.S. study shows widening disconnect", 2017). La mode de vie sédentaire qui est typique pour les Américains commence à la maison, mais est inculquée à l'école. Ce manque de liberté de mouvement pour les élèves est un problème, notamment quand les issues de comportement sont examinés. Le plus important, l'environnement sédentaire est tellement malsain pour tous. La plupart des habitudes de santé sont formées pendant les années adolescentes et jeunes adultes. Dans le système actuel, il semble qu'on croit qu'une routine quotidienne de s'asseoir avec seulement un peu de temps passé à pied à l'extérieur est normal pour les êtres humains. Avec le nombre immense d'effets mortels que provoque une mode de vie sédentaire, on ne peut pas la considérer normal. Surtout, elle ne doit pas être imposée sur les adolescents et les enfants, au point qu'on est puni pour être active ou agité. Actuellement, les écoles ont des règles assez strictes avec conséquences pour les élèves qui désobéissent et ne sont pas assis sans permission ou sans une raison académique. Etant donné

les milliards des études et des impératifs médicales qui disent de maintenir une vie active, pas sédentaire, c'est vraiment préoccupant à considérer que ce style de vie est proscrit aux enfants, en forme de la journée scolaire.

Il y a toujours des enfants qui vivent en région assez sauf, où ils peuvent jouer dehors pour plusieurs heures ou ceux enfants qui peuvent imiter des parents actifs. Néanmoins, le fait que les écoles exigent que les élèves passent douze années apprenant à rester assis au pupitre pendant les heures plus actives de la journée inculque un sens de complaisance et confort avec cette routine inactive. Ce n'est pas une image d'une éducation positive, ou une situation qu'on doit laisser continuer. C'est une ordonnance pour l'ennui constant et les issues médicales à l'avenir. Malheureusement, quelconque activité physique qui est permise où encouragée dans les écoles est faite pour une note, pas pour la joie du jeu, et souvent c'est une activité compétitive. L'enseignement ne se rend pas compte du fait que les élèves exigent des formes des jeux pour apprendre. Surtout, pour les jeunes enfants mais pour les adolescents et les adultes aussi; la nécessité du mouvement au contraire de l'instruction passive est immense (Gray, 2015).

### **Les issues du contenu scholastique**

Une idée clé, répété par les réformateurs et renforcée par le recherche, c'est que les élèves ne profitent pas d'examiner leurs manuels, les feuilles de travaux, les tableaux, les Smartboards ou les ordinateurs pendant 8 heures chaque jour. Ces médias sont outils seulement. Enseigner avec le nouveau logiciel et la technologie intelligente, fondé sur l'ordinateur, en ligne, ou au tableau implique une consommation passive par les élèves, dans les limites, les règles, les ordonnances et l'heure permis pour chaque classe ou sujet (Blake-Plock, 2010). Les enfants actifs et les adolescents qui ont conscience de soi n'intéressent pas du tout aux leçons qui sont

jugées être appropriées pour un certain jour de la semaine; ils ont des meilleurs et des choses à faire plus intéressant. Regarder la création du curriculum et des manuels illuminera la plupart des problèmes de l'instruction contemporaine, fondée sur le contenu et les règles.

Les entreprises éducatives, comme les distributeurs de textes, les start-ups de technologie éducative et les spécialistes tous utilisent une variété contradictoire d'images de commercialisation pour prouver leur validité comme entreprise et aussi pour attirer leurs clientes. Sur le site d'un distributeur, il y a une photo d'un garçon courant dans le champs, peut-être un modèle de l'éducation, mais un modèle introuvable dans leurs leçons ou leur curriculum vendu. Une autre entreprise a publié une image d'un élève qui se focalise sur son cahier et écrit avec une sourire. Sur les couvertures des manuels, on verra souvent des belles images détaillées d'un objet, une personne ou une oeuvre d'art. Dans le texte, tout est vivement illuminé. Dans l'ère moderne ici aux Etats-Unis, on continue à juger le contenu par la couverture. Les enseignants, l'administration et les élèves font la présomption que la compétence du graphisme indique assurément un produit de haute qualité. Il y a peu d'évidence qui suggère que ces compagnies et leurs philosophies individuelles ne sont rien d'autre que de la propagande pour leur contenu sans la moindre originalité. L'industrie des manuels est une affaire comme les autres, avec les officiels des écoles comme clients, pas les élèves eux-mêmes (Blake-Plock, 2010). Ces affaires ne considèrent pas beaucoup les intérêts et les nécessités des élèves indépendants, pareil aux entreprises de testing, comme Educational Testing Service (ETS) et College Board. L'ETS a créé le GRE et le TOEFL, et le College Board est responsable pour les examens pour l'entrée à l'université, comme le SAT et le AP. Ces deux affaires gagnent un assez grande profit pour leurs

directeurs (même si c'est un «non-profit») comme la majorité d'entreprises responsables du contenu et des produits d'enseignement.

Ensemble, la plupart des organisations d'enseignement actuellement consistent des membres d'administration, des directeurs et des PDGs qui ne possèdent presque aucune expérience dans les professions liées à l'éducation en soi. Un exemple très illuminant et aussi typique est cela de Michelle Rhee, une ancienne chancelière d'éducation de Washington, D.C. et l'ancienne PDG passé de StudentsFirst. Son expérience comme enseignant est tellement suspecte. Elle était maîtresse pour trois années, mais seulement une année sans supervision à cause de son incapacité de gérer sa classe. Puis, il y a l'exemple de David Coleman, auteur principal du Common Core et maintenant le PDG du College Board. Il a gagné le diplôme de l'université, il a la formation d'éducateur d'anglais, et après, a commencé un début à l'un des meilleurs sociétés de conseils aux Etats-Unis (Goldstein, 2012). Actuellement, il détermine des nouvelles décisions pour l'examen le plus important dans la nation, le SAT.

Pareillement la plupart des membres de conseils d'administration pour les entreprises du curriculum où des examens possèdent peu d'expérience dans une salle de class comme professeur. Ceux qui ont quelque expérience ont généralement enseigné dans les écoles privés ou dans les régions élites du pays. Des exemples de ce phénomène incluent les entreprises Pearson Education, KIPP Schools, Cengage et des autres organisations comme la Bill Gates Foundation. Avec le but étant lucratif mais sans expérience avec des élèves, il n'est pas surprenant de voir ces entreprises et ces affaires non lucratives qui fabriquent la nécessité pour leurs produits en tant qu'ils fabriquent leurs textes et leurs logiciels. Ils sont comme tous les autres commerces non-éducatifs. Il est aussi intéressant de noter que les PDG d'entreprises d'éducation gagnent

plus de \$150.000 annuellement. David Coleman gagne plus de \$500.000 chaque année comme PDG d'une entreprise non-lucrative (Lewin, 2012). Mais néanmoins, leurs manuels sont toujours mal organisés et mal construits pour les nécessités des élèves. Et comme les réformateurs ont noté, ils se comportent plus ou moins comme les extensions des machines de testing et des normes qui dominent les salles de classes maintenant (Ansary, 2004).

### III. CONCLUSION

L'instruction actuelle se concentre sur la transmission des faits, et seulement est efficace si l'élève a souscrit à l'idée que ces faits valent la peine de savoir. Il s'agit d'un système de propagande que de nombreux élèves cessent de croire pendant les années qu'ils passent à l'école. L'enseignement actuel dans les écoles invite rarement la compréhension des problèmes les plus importantes pour les élèves; principalement les issues sociales, émotionnelles, environnementales et culturelles qu'ils confrontent quotidiennement. Si par hasard un enseignant discute un sujet d'intérêt, il est seulement autorisé à l'enseigner pourvu que les «résultats mesurables» peuvent être enregistrés; ce qui signifie que si c'est important sur le prochain examen. La vérité est, les élèves veulent apprendre et faire une différence dans ces domaines de leurs vies, pas écrire page après page, ou lire chapitre après chapitre d'un livre focalisé sur des questions que souvent seulement l'élite considèrent si important (et avec seulement une partie de la vérité des solutions). La plupart des instructeurs le reconnaissant cette phénomène. Les officiels ne veulent pas faire la même. Ces crises deviennent plus et plus grandes pour les élèves, comme la pauvreté et les divisions économiques continuent. Le système éducatif perdra toute sa habilité d'être pris sérieusement si les officiels ne cessent de concentrer sur les normes, la technologie et les examens, sans prendre les besoins des élèves comme importants.



Cette critique du contenu ne veut pas dire que les élèves n'exigent aucune instruction ni aucune orientation. Au lieu de cela, la question est que l'instruction de masse est maintenant devenue acceptable au cours des 100 dernières années, et a été crut à être l'apprentissage de masse pour la population. Sans doute le taux d'alphabétisation et de compétences mathématiques ont été largement transmis, plus en raison des pressions de la société que une perfection mythologique de l'école élémentaire. Cependant, la plupart, sinon tous, des enseignants sont d'accord que la compréhension est l'objectif, pas la récitation. Toujours aucune véritable réforme a été accomplie pour la majorité des élèves américains.

## **Applying the Research to Find Best Practices in Foreign Language Learning**

Learning modern languages is a topic rather unique to American education, primarily because there has been an almost majority-based rejection of foreign language as being necessary. Not only this, but for several years, due to limited technology and transportation, those who did learn a language knew only how to read and write, thanks to the implementation of the classical method for languages, also known as the grammar-translation method, originally used to learn Greek and Latin. As languages such as French, German and others were added, they were taught in a similar fashion in schools. The *direct method* or immediate immersion method, was then examined and estimated to be of greater value, especially as improvements in transportation allowed greater amounts of people to travel to Europe, and vice versa with immigration of the 1800s and early 1900s. Beginning after World War II, however, the army and universities began a new method, called *audio-lingual*, which grew to be greatly disliked and also misunderstood, but whose traces still remain in the approach used in most foreign languages today: the *communicative approach*, one not yet proven to lead to any actual improvement in foreign language communication.

In evaluating the effectiveness of all of these methods, it suffices to point out that across foreign language courses, student retention has historically been disastrously low, with the majority of students at both the university and high school level dropping it after the second year or third year (Asher, 1986), usually when the requirement has been fulfilled. Most foreign language practices and curriculum fail our students in the long-run, as do many other subject practices. Yet, despite the beliefs of many parents, students and educators themselves, research

shows that acquiring a foreign language is an extremely natural and attainable objective (Diller, 1970; Asher, 1986; Krashen, 2018; Stevick, 1989). Acquisition, defined as “the subconscious process that is identical to...first language acquisition...” (Krashen, 1985), in fact requires little talent or intense intellectual ability. The misconception that foreign language is a subject that few can understand is not shared by most of the world either, where being bilingual or trilingual is the norm, and oftentimes foreign language ability is critical for success. American language courses rarely reflect any of these ideas, and like most content courses in secondary schools, it’s difficult to make the majority of students “buy-into the material”, so to speak. Studies have described current pedagogy as “unnatural” in the way language are taught (Bozavli, 2017) and the content is boring for many students (Corzo, J. & Lopera, C., 2016).

Similar to mathematics, for American students, the question of “why do we need this?” arises commonly for modern language classes. Even among Spanish classes, this is still an important question. The U.S. does have a large population who speaks Spanish, but who is also growing in bilingual ability, as immigration dips and as the second generation children of Spanish-speaking immigrants grow up speaking English fluently, a phenomena that is well-documented today (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). English is the most commonly studied language in all of Europe and still the lingua franca of international travel and business . International airports now have legal requirements to expect employees to have basic English competence (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2013). The common argument used by modern language teachers to convince students that they must learn to speak another language in order to withstand the global onslaught is problematic. In addition, American people often interpret learning a language as a way to convert people to a different cultural identity entirely,

leading to general societal opposition to serious second language acquisition. Several of the national language societies make the argument for modern language study by asserting that bilingualism is required for good employment in the US. It's not. English is required in the USA for good employment, while bilingualism is expected only in bilingual communities such as in places like California, Florida and the Southwest.

Foreign language is simply a skill necessary for talking and connecting with people from a different culture. If one wants to learn foreign languages for employment gain, that is adequate. If a student wishes to learn Spanish because of its role in community issues, that will do. There is no single concrete reason for foreign language, except perhaps that we as a country and globe need better communication and understanding. There is a dire need for connectedness, for personal meaning in an industrialized world. Therefore, foreign language is just one of many skills that people should have access to that can improve human relationships and extend their window of opportunities.

Modern language education should not have the objective of making linguists of our students, studying only grammar and vocabulary lists. Unfortunately, that's a hard sell for textbook and curriculum creators, where memorization and drills dominate, and where foreign language acquisition is a sign of an intellectual, instead of a human being. None of that is reality; all modern research shows that second language acquisition is a sign of learning to respect, understand and interact well with a different group of people (Krashen, 2018; Moyer, 2018). In the age of mass communication, cheap plane tickets and global business, students examining what kind future they would like to have deserve opportunities to become skilled in understanding other people and who they are. In addition, each major area of study has

multilingual counterparts that students and those with a set career could benefit from, if they only had access to it. History majors without another modern language in their hand can only effectively examine English-speaking peoples, with resources by English-literate people. This is extremely limiting, considering that in America alone contains artifacts from Native American languages, as well as German, French, Italian, Yiddish, Chinese, Irish and Spanish speakers, just to name a few. Ground-breaking research is being done in countries across the world and here in the U.S., many highly-educated scientists come to work in university laboratories. Physicists, chemists and medical researchers who speak German, Chinese, Japanese or French will have a wider network and research base compared to those who only can utilize English resources, but social scientists especially will have a greater range of new materials available to them (Van Weijen, 2012). Outside of pure academics, sports teams, engineers, businessmen, politicians, and tourists going abroad without knowledge of the foreign language in that country or region are restricted to interactions with only the English-speaking elite, and very limited interactions with native people.

By neglecting to give people perspectives and interactions with the various languages that formed the history of the United States as well as other key regions of the world, one can hardly expect to make any progress or connections as a country. The US government agrees. The National Educational Defense Act of 1958 not only expounded the need for science and mathematics training but also foreign language courses; almost seventy years ago (History, Art & Archives, 2019). There is a rising amount of funding based on foreign language acquisition and opportunities, including the Critical Language Scholarship, and Fulbright Awards. In addition, numerous reports have been written by past administration and departments outline the

need for more foreign language training and knowledge in the US, such as the 1986, Condition of Education report dictates (Stern & Williams, 1986). Yet student retention, funding and success remains low for modern languages, as does public interest.

### **Linguistic Theories on Foreign Language Learning**

One reason for this lies in inadequate language teacher training and therefore poor student outcomes. The majority of people alive in the US today with a high school diploma fulfilled a language requirement in high school or college, but remember and use it very little. Dr. Diller's writing on the topic of second language acquisition (SLA) deserves a great deal of analysis due to its relevance as well as its concise portrayal of the problematic practices used today in classrooms. Karl Diller points out in his chapter on Linguistic Theories of Language Acquisition (1970) that language teachers become linguistic theorists when they comprehend the reason behind the practices that are implemented in the classroom. General linguistic theory, incredibly essential to good teaching, makes up only a small part of teacher preparation and deals with simply the latest theories on practices, rather than a in-depth analysis of each theory. Krashen's writings also have dealt with problems with inadequate linguistic or empirical training for teachers in modern language courses (Krashen, 1985, p. 52).

In the linguistics field , there have been two main battling opinions on SLA: empiricist and rationalist. Empiricists are known for the the drill and repetition focus of their approaches which have often been denounced. Yet empirical language methods somehow remains core to many foreign language classes today. In addition, empiricists avoid putting students in situations where they could possibly make a mistake or more importantly, where they could try something original. Most damningly, linguists who support empiricism deny the existence of universal

grammar and a universal language acquisition device, which Stephen Krashen and Noam Chomsky have proven to be essential concepts. These are also the two concepts that the opposing rationalists and the modern “Natural Approach” proponents now fully embrace.

The audiolingual drill method, probably the hallmark of empirical approaches, is regarded as most desirable for schooling because it is predictable, passive and easily measurable. It’s also wholly ineffective for long-term retention. Karl Diller laid out four main claims that rationalists have made that oppose this method, all of which have decidedly been well supported with modern research. The claims specifically are important enough to delineate here because they lay the groundwork for the Natural Approach, a highly rationalistic method, the work of Stephen Krashen with Tracy Terrell, and the foundation of phenomenal change for foreign language education.

The first tenet of rationalist theory that Diller delineates is that of “*rule-governed creativity*,” (1970, p. 13). This is the idea that being able to utter a new idea or sentence is indicative of language ability. It is mentioned that Chomsky also claimed that natural language behavior is “stimulus-free and innovative,” (Diller, p. 13). However, rationalists also acknowledge the need for grammar, perhaps better described as simply a small set of fundamental rules (Diller, p. 15).

Rationalists emphasize that people and students do not need to be able to just formulate a rule (p. 18) *per se*, or have a formal background in grammar. Instead, they need only to know and use it. De Souza, a rationalist, spoke of this ability to apply rules as occurring in 2 stages (Diller, 1970, p.18). The first requiring conscious implementation, and the second consisting of automatic language use after enough experience. This does *not* give support for learning verb

charts, tables and lists. Indeed, later studies of interviews with other proficient language learners have shown that these charts are either ineffective or only effective once a student is able to organize and chart rules by their own imagination and organization (Stevik, 1989). Instead, the better way for grammar learning is *rule-modeling*. Just as we learned rules for baking best, for cracking open eggs, sifting flour, oiling the cake pan, we similarly learn best by observing and trying things out with a guide or a mentor, to explain and show us along with the way. Diller uses an analogy of chess, concluding with this: “rules for action are best learned in conjunction with demonstration and practice of the action.”(1970, p. 18), meaning that ability to use the rules is all that’s required of grammar mastery. Curriculum in foreign language education today demands explicitly that students learn linguistic grammar extensively, something that is not only pointless but that actively disheartens students as they struggle to understand what only linguists have put together over decades and several centuries. Rationalists believe that since no native speaker needed a linguistics course in order to speak their maternal language, that neither do students going through the foreign language or second language acquisition process.

The final two claims that Diller makes in his chapter are two points that Stephen Krashen and other rationalists have researched extensively today: the universal nature of SLA and what defines true language acquisition. These two rationalist tenets also tear apart a great deal of harmful myths that teachers, administrators and eventually students have come to accept about the FL acquisition process, myths which are directly responsible for the low retention and failures for most students to truly acquire any FL.

The *universality of language learning* is part of the universal grammar that Noam Chomsky is so acclaimed for. However, this same theory also debunks the ideas that only



children can truly learn a language and that immersion always equals acquisition. Neither of these are true. In fact, Diller describes what Krashen would later also prove; that although adult learners usually possess a foreign accent, it's a sign of identity, not ability, and is less important than intelligibility. A 2018 study found that not all learners want to actually sound native and that socio affective factors such as attitude and desire to assimilate played a large role (Moyer, A., 2018). The authors of the study found that intelligibility was most important in pronunciation development for their students, and that having a network of native speakers was critical.

The final point is made that immersion into the language or country without people to help and guide understanding does not lead to language acquisition (Diller, 1970). Total immersion without help of their native language is no more effective than a young child learning to do math by sitting in a college calculus course. They would be dazed and confused, and perhaps highly discouraged. Just as importantly, adults and teens can use their reasoning skills to acquire a language faster than a children who are psychologically prepared for simple absorption of vocabulary. The myth that only children can truly learn a new language prevails, but studies and linguistic theorists see the opposite, with adolescents and adults being faster learners due to their ability to use abstract thinking and make connections much faster in certain areas (Moyer, 2018, Krashen, 2018, & Diller, 1970).

### **Comprehensive Input: The Natural Method**

The theory that foreign language learning is universal and natural does not mean it's automatic or entirely unconscious. It does require mental comprehension. This is a concept that anticipates Krashen's Comprehensive Input (CI), something yet to take root in general pedagogy unfortunately, because it is actually applicable to all subject matter and all skills worth learning.

Comprehensive Input theorists believe that we fully acquire a language when we have meaningful, personal and unique experiences in the language (Krashen, 2018). Experience and understanding of that experience is therefore the foundation of second language acquisition. James Asher tested and implemented a highly active and physical method that resembled CI learning in many ways, while many other studies, dealing with Content-Based Instruction and Second Language instruction, have found that same. Considering that this key theory of second language acquisition and learning has been around since the 1970's (if not earlier!), it becomes clear that education is certainly overdue for a fundamental change and restructuring.

Stephen Krashen's writings and research are a breath of fresh air for students and teachers alike. His theories are acknowledged as accurate by most of the modern language community and form the staple of any foreign language methods textbook. However, the rigidity of current curriculum and state demands make it exceedingly hard for any degree of widespread implementation by teachers in classrooms or for teaching courses to cover application of the CI hypothesis. Krashen himself is certainly an anti-establishment figure, as he now refuses to publish in expensive journals or work with book publishers, preferring to instead distribute his writings for free online. Krashen is a linguist, not a language teacher, but perhaps more importantly, he is himself an avid language learner with a large network of fellow learners and researchers across the world. Many of his key claims are founded upon a great deal of anecdotes from this network, as well as an admirable quantity of research literature. As mentioned before, Krashen's research is certainly based on the work of rationalists and linguistic giants of the past, however, the down to earth and unfettered claims made in his theory of linguistics and language learning are very understandable to non-linguists. Many of the aspects of Krashen's

Comprehensive Input (CI) hypothesis have been researched and expounded already in the rationalist school of thought. However, his crowning achievement lies in comprehensive, coherent and detailed research into a concrete, practical learning method for SLA. Again, Krashen does not have language teacher experience. No one needs to be a formally trained teacher in order to actually develop teaching methods; one instead needs to be a fellow learner. His foundational research goes back to the 1950's, and the hypothesis is cross-linguistically and cross-culturally sound, with Krashen having research literature from Western, African, and even Amazonian cultures. Chomsky's universal grammar may now have Krashen's universal acquisition method to accompany it.

The Comprehensible Input hypothesis, from his speeches at the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association 2018 Conference and his multitude of publications is this: "we acquire and develop literacy when we understand messages". He argues that people learn best when they focus on just wanting to understand the messages, instead of focusing on language acquisition itself (2018). He agrees with the problematic perspective of simply immersion being enough to learn. He also strictly rebukes the empiricists' drill and skill-building hypothesis being wholly ineffective as well as extremely dislikable. Krashen broke a great deal of new ground in other areas as well. He explicitly has denounced what he called "monitoring overuse," especially the concept of correction, word memorization and perfection in grammar as well as in accent (Krashen, 2018). Instead, he stressed that SLA is just that, acquired, while also natural, enjoyable and interesting, occurring sometimes unconsciously over time.

## **Current research findings and recommendations**

Language arts is not the study of grammar. It's about how humans create meaning with language, in all forms. Its forms are primarily an individual's language that has personal meaning. The theories put forth by Krashen and others are highly individualistic, believing that teachers should have confidence and faith that the Language Acquisition Device will come on and students will learn. Their foundation is highly intuitive and grounded in the definition of human language and what it means to use it.

Nowadays, the focus is on output and assessment performance, neither of which helps students language acquisition in the long-term. Past studies have indicated the same, cited in Dr. Krashen's and Dr. Diller's works, but current studies also make the same analyses, without much impact on creating change in the classroom. As Dr. Krashen has stated, forced speech is not only an anxiety producing requirement for students, but it makes no difference between who wait and those who speak immediately (2018). His writings point out how strongly linked speaking anxiety and high language anxiety are. A 2017 study indicated the importance of keeping students anxiety in the language classroom at the low-to-medium level to ensure comfort and comprehension (Kuşçu E., 2017). Earlier, a study in 2014 dove deeply into the roots and causes of anxiety, and found that student anxiety is often highest at the beginning of their learning, due to a fear of judgement, and is mainly linked to pronunciation ability (Baran-Lucarz, M., 2014). This particular study recommended that waiting for students to gain a basic competence in the language and placement into smaller groups would improve learning outcomes. James Asher's research into the Total Physical Response Method not only advocated for active, immersive learning, but the studies also found that listening comprehension of complex utterances was

necessary before the students began to speak (Asher, 1986). This supports Krashen's theory that students will feel ready to speak after some time, not immediately after learning two sentences as is done in classrooms today. Indeed, Asher recommends that forced speech be eradicated from the classroom as well.

Advocates for active classrooms have many varied studies at their disposal to show how both student grades and interest go up when the lessons involve movement and topics that are relevant. A 2013 study of young children learning French as a second language showed how math skills could be improved while using active techniques and immersing the students in French at the same time (Davis-Wiley, P. & Miller, R. 2013). A separate study in 2016, with Latin American students learning English via a new immersion program found similar results, but the authors noted how important it was that topics be connected to reality (Corzo, J. & Lopera, C., 2016). In particular, this class dealt with environmental issues that were affecting the community and student performance was assessed via projects about good environmental practices. This same study noted that earlier, common complaints by their students were about use of drills, grammar and the feeling of boredom that results from using previous traditional methods. Overall, findings indicated that student motivation improved after the change to an active and community-based style of learning.

The need for real, personal context in classes in order to improve enjoyment of school has been discussed for many years, despite lack of implementation. A 1967 book published on audio-visual techniques discussed the recommendations and best practices that helped student achievement. Several of these recommendations are *still* struggling to find their way into the classroom, including common-sense notions that the atmosphere should be comfortable for

students, that lessons should be non-tiring, and that students should experience the language with actual objects, pictures and examples, before learning formal rules (Huebener, 1967). Finally, the author noted the important of regular practice in practical situations as well as the need for teachers to train students in listening for understanding, rather than listening for translation. Many of these ideas have been tested in modern research as well. A 2017 study discovered many of the same needs mentioned above: learning vocabulary through interaction with the physical environment, audio-visual techniques and the need for context (Bozavli). Many teachers actually agree completely. While a 2012 study of teacher attitudes found that traditional methods of learning, based on grammar and drills are still widespread in FL classrooms today, but the surveys also found that newer teachers do want change, but feel restricted by limitations of funding and the school system structure (Kissau, Algozzine, &Yon).

### **Best practices**

Language learning is not based on a single method. Instead, classroom must be authentic, natural and engaging: they must be inherently variable yet coherent for their students. There are still new methods being developed, but as the Natural Approach method is still unchallenged with the research, teachers should keep in mind the top needs that students have if they are to acquire a language. Techniques from English as Second Language and French as a Second Language pedagogies are highly useful if they use a direct or whole language approach. However, the characteristics of effective classrooms include the key practices that research over decades has confirmed. Learning should be as physically engaging as possible. The content should be comprehensible from day one and still challenging. Teacher roles are to be interactive, not detached from their students work. Class topics should be personal and relevant for each

group of students, keeping in mind their interests and background. Physically active lessons increase engagement. Finally, the materials and challenges that the teacher chooses to use must be authentic, created by and for native speakers.

### **Conclusion**

It's very easy to see why the Comprehensible Input/Natural Approach method isn't found in most schools and if it used, is never fully implemented to the point that it simply loses its purpose. The idea of learning being an enjoyable, natural, active and unconscious process is inconceivable to current learning pedagogy overall. The learning methods used in both FL classrooms and most content courses have been outdated and disproven since the 1920s and 1950's. This includes the forms for the class itself, based on pupils sitting at chairs and desks, only one instructor per thirty students, and book-based instruction. Gradually, regular assessments, stricter standards as well as extensive homework became more essential. Now, we include technology, whose contribution to classroom learning is limited other than allowing for Internet access with faster communication, faster feedback on assessments and whose main proponents often include the biased distributors and sellers themselves. The list of issues continues, with many of the practices common today reflecting societal, norms and values of continual work and social conformity, as well as embracing of industrial ideals as definitive components of modern education. Unfortunately, there's absolutely no proof of success of our education system except in assessments designed by the very people exalting those ideals or through successful employment of graduates in large industrial companies.

Reform has been rallying cry for as long as education as we know it has existed, primarily because it involves control of a community's single most important possession: it's human resources. Today, most communities feel that resource is being poorly used and informed by others, at the expense of the people needing knowledge and skills more than anyone else: our children. Some argue that "this is just the way it is" and hope for the best, continuing on as before. Many disagree vehemently. 41% of teachers quit before five years of teaching (Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014), proving that going along with the status quo is an impossible task for many, even as they go through the motions. Remaining teachers, administrators and parents also find their job very difficult to do, especially when effective means of learning is incredibly easy and enjoyable to use with children. Issues like testing, "accountability", behavioral problems, teacher burnout are all are hot topics in education, but ultimately are just symptoms of the illness that has defined public education since it's widespread and rather haphazard implementation through the nation during the 1800 and early 1900s. The current system rests on a very feeble foundation regarding pedagogy, and the proliferation of student, teacher, and parent frustration is neither unsurprising nor new. It's perhaps more vociferous now. More importantly, it's not incurable by any means.

The problem doesn't lie in the teachers, the students, the staff, or ideology du jour. Rather, it's the content, it's the books, it's the dominating desire for uniformity and employability as a sign of success that need to be thrown out of education. Our children are not simply the next line of workers, meant to be better and more productive than the last line, as many intellectuals and researchers are asserting due to the overwhelming evidence. The



continual opposition and misery in schools should be the indications to parents and teachers and administrators that we need to stop.

If education is really going to shift and change for the better, it would mean starting small at first. Every teacher knows how restricted their moves are in the classroom. It would mean taking out these “standardized” and “systematic” creations, along with their accompanying worksheets, pre and post-tests, online e-books, exercises, and activities that fill time. Most teachers know that students deserve so much better than what policymakers and textbook writers and curriculum profiteers believe. It would necessitate taking out the powerpoint presentations, the lecture notes, and drills. Electronic curriculum is no better either by simply being paperless; it also has to go. Students are smarter than the developers think they are, and more importantly, anyone who’s had a true, enlightened education understands that typing or writing in the exact answer is *not* what an education means. In the place of those books, those curriculums and those tests? Give them an education, give them the experience they long for and deserve. Let students build and interpret their own world, just as each generation does, as each person *must* do. There is no substitute, no shortcut to the fact that each person bears the responsibility as well as the innate ability to experience the world, through infinite perspectives and in infinite forms. It’s risky and radical to think children need this, but for future generations, it’s worth the plunge.

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