

Training and Learning Styles in the Business English Classroom

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Teaching and learning are two different processes. They may be complementary, but teaching rarely (if ever) guarantees learning. At best, teaching can influence learning, make learning more effective, provide a suitable/favourable learning environment.

If, in the Business English classroom, the emphasis shifts from teaching to learning, we need to ask ourselves how people learn. There exist different psychological theories of learning and the aim of a Business English teacher is to link the theory to classroom practice. Valuable work in the area of learning styles has been done by the educational scientists, Honey P. and H.Mumford. They suggest that each learner has a preferred learning style that he or she brings to a specific task and identify four typical styles (Honey, Mumford, 1992). Using these four learning styles as a starting point, Nick Brieger, a leading authority on Business English, identifies the four types of learners: the activist (1), the theorist (2), the pragmatist (3) and the reflector (4).

The activist (1) learns by doing the task. In the language classroom, these are the learners who enjoy the communicative tasks or the communication practice. They enjoy using the language and experimenting with communication.

The theorist (2) learns by understanding the underlying theory. These are the learners who want to know why a particular language form is used in a specific situation or why a particular communication technique is appropriate in a particular setting.

The pragmatist (3) learns by practising in a controlled environment. These learners enjoy the security of controlled practice exercises. They often feel that this stage gives them the confidence to use language forms or communication accurately.

The reflector (4) learns by watching others doing the task. These learners are likely to feel insecure about their ability to perform in the language. However, in a secure environment they become willing to participate in the range of communicative tasks and communication activities.

So, according to N.Brieger, given a task, such as learning twenty new words in English or improving presentation techniques, each trainee will approach the task with his/her own preferred learning style. And some learners will be more successful than others. If the teacher can adapt his training style to his trainees' learning style, he can go some way to helping them achieve their learning objectives more effectively. This approach involves identifying and being aware of the trainees' learning styles and providing classroom tasks adapted to their style.

The classroom is, by its nature, a very different place from the real world, which most professionals inhabit. But the Business English classroom is to act as a bridge to this world and prepare trainees for the types of communication that they are likely to encounter in the real world. There are different methods of perceiving and constructing this bridge. Training approaches and activities will vary according to the diverse viewpoints that trainers may have about the classroom (Brieger, 1997).

In the real world approach, the trainer will try to recreate in the classroom a believable professional environment through simulations in which trainees will play their own real – life roles. Not only will they be expected to work on their communication skills, but the context in which the skills will be practised will aim to simulate professional reality.

Where the classroom is viewed as an arena for developing skills for later transfer, the focus will be on practice around case studies, situations which present a reality, but not the trainees' own. These case studies and such learning environment will provide a backdrop against which communication skills can be practised and developed.

For some trainers and trainees, the best results may be achieved by creating a learning environment where skills can be encouraged to develop naturally. In this situation a supportive learning environment, which promotes stress – free learning, is the aim. Tasks can be challenging, but they should be firmly positioned within the ambit of the classroom. Beyond the classroom is another world with its own patterns of behaviour and the trainer's role is to prepare trainees for the demands of this world.

Finally, the classroom can be seen as separate and divorced from the professional world. Within such learning environment the trainees will need to make the jump from the classroom themselves. Trainers see their role in terms of giving their trainees a secure linguistic base. A good grasp of language forms will give them the foundation they require to succeed in the real professional world.

These viewpoints are obviously not mutually exclusive. While teaching, Business English trainers may move between all of them, adapting teaching methodology according to the learners, their objectives and their preferred learning styles. (Brieger, 1997).

Business English is a multifaceted subject. Regarding the wide ranging content of Business English with influences drawn from a range of disciplines and the needs – driven approach at the heart of Business English, which requires trainer responsiveness in terms of both content and methodology, it is not surprising that the repertoire of different training styles which Business English trainers may call upon draws on a range of approaches from different areas.

Among them ranks the approaches to learning and language - a behaviorist approach, a cognitive code approach (building upon mentalist theories), etc.

The relationship between learning and language is complex, as is that between language and thought. Much learning takes place through language (e.g. listening to the teacher, reading a textbook), and learning may be internalized through language and thought. So, language is vital in any learning context. In the Business English classroom, the situation develops to include the use of language as a learning tool and language as the object of learning itself. On the one hand, Business English teachers aim to help their trainees extend their English language knowledge, on the other to facilitate the development of the communication skills needed in their professional environments. In both cases, the learning and practice in the classroom are not an end in themselves – they should act as a bridge to the real world in which language is used as a tool for communication. Besides, we do believe that the Business English learner should be considered as an intelligent human being who brings an assortment of knowledge and experience to the learning situation and is capable of finding things out for himself. So, this brings us on to a cognitive approach to learning and language which is more likely to provide a suitable learning environment and lead to successful learning of Business English and that is why should be admitted as more preferable one in teaching Business English.

The Business English trainee brings his existing knowledge and previous experience to the classroom. He is very active cognitively in discovering language. Learning takes place by relating the new information to existing information, often within a problem – solving framework (Ellis, 1986). Meaning is crucial in assisting the trainee to understand the material. This combination of discovery, meaning and thinking can lead to greater depth and duration of learning, which in turn can facilitate retrieval. Instead of language being the object of study, it is viewed from an interactive and communicative standpoint (Littlewood, 1981). It takes into account not only linguistic knowledge, but also language skills and functions and the context in which they appear. Contextualized presentation of language (i.e. comprehensible input) helps facilitate access to meaning and also assists in transfer of the language to other situations.

Within the cognitive approach all the necessary skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing - are actively developed. Activities in the Business English class are mainly task – based. Trainees work in pairs and groups, with each individual contributing his/her own knowledge/experience. Challenging learning games and role-plays are widely practiced. A wide range of visual aids (OHP, audio and video material and increasingly multimedia) is extensively used to bring more dynamic and authentic models of language, communication and content which today's sophisticated trainees expect into the Business English classroom. Material is

mostly presented within a business context – that is relevant and of interest to the Business English trainees. Mistakes are accepted as a normal part of the learning process.

The learner dependence has implications for the role of the Business English teacher. The learner thinks, discovers, uses, solves problems, learns. The teacher organizes, assists, guides, encourages, monitors and evaluates. It is trainer's responsibility to turn the Business English classroom into a varied learning/teaching environment, creating the positive learning context for each Business English trainee and to present material in such a clear, concise way that meaning is apparent and effective learning may take place.

References:

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Principles of Intrinsically Motivating Tests

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The reasons for assessment can be grouped under two main headings^ for feedback to aid learning & for a comparable measure of competence. Comparable measures are the reason for public examinations and regular assessment or testing within educational institutions. Assessment as an aid to learning encompasses benefits such as reinforcement, confidence building, involvement and building on strengths. (Dudley-Evans, Jo St. John 1998:210).

So, Assessment is a process of measuring, and one formal method of measuring is to test.

It is important to understand the difference between testing and teaching. They are very interwoven and interdependent. Every instructional sequence has a testing component to it, whether the tests themselves are formal or informal. Teachers measure or judge learners' competence all the time. Whenever a student responds to a question or tries out a new word, that student might be tested. How are testing and teaching different?

The difference lies in formal and informal testing. Informal te