

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR ADULTS--A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

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The Progressive Group Teaching Method described by Hartl and Cisarova is both relevant and timely for consideration within the Canadian context. As one who has worked almost exclusively with adult language learners for the past eleven years, I strongly support the intent of such a method for several reasons.

An environmental setting in language instruction tailors the course to the adult more than do many current directions in language teaching. To paraphrase Anthony Gregoire in his keynote address to the 1985 TESOL International Convention: *all too often we use bad judgement in insisting upon one approach. When buying a suit, we alter the suit to fit the individual; educationally, we tend to try to alter the individual to fit the suit.* As the distance increases between "formal" schooling and a subsequent return to the classroom, individuality becomes more defined in terms of the work world. The familiarity/comfort of the classroom recedes quickly into the background/past; re-entry into the world of "formal" schooling becomes threatening/intimidating. An approach like the Progressive Group Teaching Method might ease the adult more gently back into the "school" ambiance—which so many fear. In adult language learning, gentleness of approach is of primary importance; for many people, the language being attempted is, in itself, intimidating.

A further point on the importance of a "user friendly" approach in language learning is of particular relevance for the Canadian context. With Canadian students, the fear of loss of identity often works to inhibit the language learning. (These observations are from the perspective of one facilitating the acquisition of English.) If the learning occurs within the culture of the language being learned, the benefit of using the environment is maximized. By attending classes in different "environmental" classrooms (without walls), learners are able to observe and identify differences in culture. In recognizing the differences, individuals are often able to feel their own identities with more confidence. Incorporating the environment/culture into the learning process may enable the culture to become a tool for self-

definition for the learner; as confidence is gained in the situation, so inhibitions to language learning are lowered. In my experience, upon completion of a language course, students have frequently described just this process.

The dearth of language text material designed exclusively for adult use is familiar to anyone working with adult learners. Much available material is juvenile/condescending to the adult learner, often leaving him/her feeling insulted, bored or uninterested in seemingly irrelevant content. In utilizing the environment, participants are presented with relevant, challenging stimuli, enabling learning to proceed from a posture of interest.

The structure of the relationship between teacher and student is another positive aspect of the Progressive Group Teaching Method. The teacher seems often a facilitator, rather than a teacher/lecturer. Development is often directed by the learners—the learning becomes active. This method would surely appeal to adults, who are actively engaged in directing their own, personal daily routines.

The inclusion of a socio-cultural component in Canadian second language courses has been promoted by the Federal Government Second Language Bursary Program for the past two decades. Excursions into the local environment/culture are a required part of any course affiliated within the Bursary Program. With the Progressive Group Teaching Method, excursions take on a different dimension. To consider the environment as classroom seems to be an intelligent and adult use of the socio-cultural milieu. Many possibilities exist for integrating aspects of the suggested methodology into a traditional classroom approach.

The method, as described, surely leaves many questions unanswered. Insufficient information is given to determine facts concerning variations of proficiency and how these are addressed. Language learners do not read, speak, and/or comprehend on an even level—a fact which has implications in assessing any approach.

The apprenticeship of teachers for such an approach is another consideration. Spontaneity, creativity, and flexibility would surely be requisites; a step-by-step handbook might be, at least, inadequate/misleading. In the process of having students become the catalysts for curriculum development, teachers would need keenly-developed linguistic intuition. In sharing the control of curriculum with the students, a teacher would need experience in making the most of a situation—of drawing the linguistic potential out of events as they happen.

Despite the lack of scientific/scholarly perspective, this article merits serious consideration in planning curriculum for adult second language learners. The Progressive Group Teaching Method considers the special needs created by the time period between "formal" education and further study; it addresses the enhanced motivation problem which **greatly** affects adult language learning. Those adults tending to be more intrinsically motivated, may respond with greater commitment when they see that their interests/needs are influencing both the class environment and the subject matter.

Within the last few years, the term "realia" has crept into the jargon of language learning. "Bringing the real world into the classroom" has been found by many teachers to be a successful tool. How much more effective for adults to have as the classroom "the real world"—their world, the world in which they function on a day-to-day basis.