

Dyslexia and Additional Academic Language Learning

# **Module 4**

# LANGUAGE LEARNING AND DYSLEXIA IN THE MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

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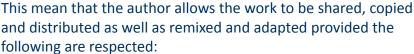
# Dyslang Modulo 4 Language learning and dyslexia in the multilingual society

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#### **Learning outcomes**

- Acquire a basic knowledge of the linguistic aspects that are relevant for language learning, with particular focus on the main areas of difficulties for plurilingual students with dyslexia and the possible recommendations of support
- Acquire knowledge about teaching methods, strategies and techniques that may be useful for plurilingual students with dyslexia in additional language learning

#### Terminologia utile

Phonological consciousness: is "the ability to elaborate sounds in oral language, that is the capability to analyze and manipulate the linguistic structure of the words, where adequate verbal or non-verbal stimuli are present." (Scalisi et al., 2003, p. 44). This allows the student, approaching a new language, to segment the running flow of speech and to extract words, and also to distinguish syllables and phonemes.

**Phonetics:** is the branch of linguistics that describes the physical characteristics of human sounds and languages. In other words, phonetics studies what we do while we speak and while we listen to someone talking.

**Phonology:** is the branch of linguistics that studies the linguistic function of sounds, that is their capability to differentiate meanings. Phonology also covers how the sounds of a determined language will combine together and how they can be modified in certain contexts.

Active vocabulary: the stock of words regularly used by the speaker to communicate. Active lexicon is always numerically lower than passive lexicon, in the adult as well as in the child.

Passive lexicon: the stock of words not regularly (or never) used by the speaker to communicate, but such meanings are known, since they have already been heard or read. Passive lexicon is always numerically higher than active lexicon, in the adult as well as in the child.

**Linguistics:** is the scientific study of the human language, in other words linguistics is defined as a descriptive discipline able to explain linguistic behaviour in human beings and their basic mechanisms (cf. Graffi and Scalise, 2002).

**IPA** (Internantional Phonetic Alphabet): is a system that works with a unique symbol for a unique sound, regardless of the language of the sound (English, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese...), and regardless of the writing system of the language (Roman, Cyrillic...). This allows the careful and consistent copying down of all the sounds present in the language.

**Morphology:** concerns the internal structure of the words and the different appearance the words may take with the adding of affixes or combined with other words.

**Pragmatics:** Pragmatics concerns the use of the language's expressions and their appropriateness to the communicative context.

**Syntax:** The stock of grammar relationship between the words of a sentence or, generally, the linguistic expression of more elements.



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# INTRODUCTION

During the European Council which took place at Lisbon in March 2000, a plan was issued (the Lisbon Strategy) to "support the employment, the economic reforms and the social cohesion into a knowledge-based economic context", and it focussed on the relevance of raising the cultural level. This perspective points to the key role of a good education and the learning of two foreign languages, over and above the mother-tongue, as a crucial element.

#### **Box 4.1 The Council of Europe**

The Council of Europe was founded on 5 May 1949 by 10 countries and now covers virtually the entire European continent, with its 47 member countries. The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg (France) and seeks to develop throughout Europe common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals.

One of the objectives of the council of Europe is to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity. In this perspective it fosters activities aimed to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in the field of education. These activities are carried out within the framework of the European Cultural Convention, (1954) ratified by 49 states.

http://www.coe.int/lang [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

The study of languages should not be considered as a self-contained activity, but as a primary element for permanet education and, particularly, for education to citizenship. This should apply even when objective or subjective "obstacles" are present, like for example a specific learning disability.

If correct methodological choices are made "there is no reason why dyslexic students cannot learn, at least at a basic level, another language or more languages" (Gabrieli & Gabrieli, 2008, p.14), provided that such choices are oriented towards the identification of strategies compatible with different cognitive styles and not the identification of different learning objectives.

School curricula should then provide an inclusive teaching approach which can ensure the right to education for everyone and guarantee that everyone can realize their potential in the professional and social environment, reducing possible emotional or relational problems.

The plurilingual background of the learner, a condition increasingly frequent in today's society, should be considered as a resource and not as an obstacle to strong learning.

As Daloiso writes (2011)

"Language is the mirror and vehicle for the culture of the people who speak it, and is inseparable from the language-culture binomial; from the comparison with "other" cultures, students will learn not only to appreciate their culture of origin, but also to be open, respectful and curious towards people belonging to "other" cultures. <sup>1</sup>

1. Daloiso, M., (2011), Le nuove norme in materia di disturbi specifici di apprendimento in ambito scolastico. P.4 (in italian)

Unfortunately, the linguistic repertoire of the learner is often ignored and languages are taught apart from each other. This prevents the learner from acquiring a united, transversal and complex competence, that redefines his/her identity and becomes part of it.

# 4.1 Teaching and learning of foreign languages

In line with a communicative, action-oriented and affective humanistic approaches, which promote the centrality of the learner in the teaching-learning process, language teaching should always consider the specific characteristics of the learners, their needs, their interests and aspirations, and take into account the differences in their learning styles, their languages and their cultures. When planning a learning activity, the teacher should also consider the aspects of the learner's daily life, the large amount of extra-scholastic input and opportunities to learn to which the learner is exposed, such as for example the Internet and other media, and an increasingly mobile and multicultural society. Youngsters are exposed to implicit language learning, and school has the duty to develop this and integrate it into scholastic activities, making explicit curricular learning more motivating. (See activity...Songs, video games, movies, chats,... skype technology).

At the beginning of the 1900s, the philosopher and pedagogue Dewey already stated that:

2. Dewey (1907) The School and Society: Being three lectures by John Dewey supplemented by a statement of the University Elementary School. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.10 From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school -- its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood <sup>2</sup>

Within today's society, the "waste" observed by Dewey can assume enormous proportions, considering the immeasurable amount of stimuli everyone can easily and quickly access. Recent research (Benson, 2006) has underlined how learners tend to undertake language learning activities outside school much more than their teachers can imagine. The risk is that teachers end up "wasting" this invaluable resource. In fact, a teacher should carefully assess the linguistic stimuli that permeate the students' living environment, and try to understand their potential in order to promote more effective and stable language learning. Unfortunately, the transfer into the classroom of the learning that happens outside the school context (and vice versa) is often very difficult to stimulate, as experimental research has demonstrated for over a century. However this must be an essential objective for language teaching (Detterman, 1993).

# 4.2 Basic language skills

There are four basic linguistic skills necessary to acquire linguistic competence: oral comprehension, oral production, written comprehension and written production.

	BASIC LANGUAGE SKILLS	
	COMPREHENSION	PRODUCTION
ORAL	Listening	Speaking
WRITTEN	Reading	Writing

IThe Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) includes also interaction as a fundamental language skills that should be developed. There are also activities defined as integrated skills (Balboni, 2007, pp.14-15): summarising, note taking, writing from dictation, paraphrasing....

	LANGUAGE SKILLS		
	COMPREHENSION	PRODUCTION	INTEGRATED SKILLS
ORAL	Listening	Speaking	summarising, note taking,
	Oral interaction		writing from dictation, paraphrasing, transla-
WRITTEN	Reading	Writing	ting
	Written interaction		- J

The receptive skills (comprehension), oral or written, are always developed before the productiive skills (production). It has also been also observed that the receptive skills turn out to be 4 times more developed than the productive skills in the learning process of a new language. For this reason the teacher should keep in mind that demanding an excessive effort in oral production can be useless and frustrating for the learner, if such effort is required too early in the learning process, when the oral listening skills have not yet been sufficiently developed. Furthermore, in the early phases of learning, it is necessary to favour oral language rather than written, in order to make LS/L2 learning as similar as possible to the acquisition of L1.

This is especially the case with dyslexic students whose biggest problems occur in writing skills, due to their decoding difficulty (that in some cases can affect comprehension) and/or writing difficulties, due to spelling and/or dysgraphia (for relative definitions see Module 2).

Of course, every student with a SLD has a different profile. In some cases, attention or memory problems can cause oral production or interaction problems: a student may not be able to recall a word or a concept he/she would like to express (due to a difficulty with their working memory); or his/her attention may be diverted by external interference while he/she is trying to understand or transmit a message.

#### Box 4.2 Stages of acquisition of a L2

In language acquisition the following stages have usually been observed (Krashen & Terrell, 1983):

- 1. **Pre-production**: the learner has a receptive vocabulary of about 500 words, but tends not to produce any spoken language, except for some sporadic repetition of what he has heard. Comprehension is of a contextual type and is ascribed to "active listening" activities. The "silent period" can vary in duration (it can last a few days, or several months) and may be due to multiple factors: an introvert personality, the feeling of inadequacy, the consciousness of not yet being able to pronounce correctly enough sounds of the new language, the fear of making mistakes and causing a negative reaction in the teacher, the comparison with peers, a teaching methodology that is inadequate and tends to keep a high "affective filter". It has often been suggested that the 'silent period' should be tolerated as it can have beneficial effects on the L2 learner. There are activities that can help students overcome this period and start communicating in the new language. Role-play and activities of a cooperative type can be very useful (to be carried out in small groups), as they stimulate and favour the communication between peers.
- 2. Early production: The first simple spontaneous oral productions appear.

  The learner has a receptive and expressive vocabulary of about 1000 words and can produce sentences of one word or two words. He/She can also use short 'automatic' sentences, but not always in the correct way.
- **3. Speech emergence**: The learner has a vocabulary of about 3000 words. He/She can produce short sentences and is able to start a conversation, understand simple instructions or short stories, answer yes-or-no questions, complete sentences with single words and answer multiple-choice questionnaires.
- 4. Intermediate fluency: The learner has a vocabulary of about 6000 active words, can use complex sentences both in oral production and in written production. He/She starts to show the desire to express personal opinions, share personal thoughts in the new language, ask for clarification, also use the language in other subjects, and transfer the strategies learned in the L1 to the new language.
- 5. Advanced fluency: This can be achieved within 4 -10 years and is the one defined as "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP). This allows the learner to use the new language to study and carry out different academic tasks (Cummins, 1989).
  Learners with specific learning disabilities may need much more time to achieve this level of competence. In some cases, they may not achieve it at all.

# 4.3 Linguistic areas relevant for the learning of an L2/FL

In the next paragraphs we will discuss the linguistic areas relevant for the learning of an L2/FL, focusing on phonetics-phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics. For each one of these we will try to underline possible difficulties or, in some cases, the strong points (!), with particular reference to students with dyslexia and/or a plurilingual background. We will then propose (see Appendix) a series of sample activities to carry out in class, so as to improve or increase linguistic and communicative competence in the specific areas.

# 4.3.1 Phonetics and phonology

When we learn a new language we realise that this includes sounds that do not exist in our mother tongue. These sounds can cause problems both in perception and in production. At birth we are able to discriminate virtually all the sounds of all the existing languages, but progressively, under the influence of the linguistic input we receive, this ability is lost or drastically reduced, so that we can only discriminate those sounds that we need to distinguish meanings, and that are therefore functional to communication. For this reason, when we learn a new language, it is possible to encounter difficulties related primarily to the sounds that are not part of our phonemic inventory.

If the student is a multilingual speaker, the coexistence of different languages and different phonemic inventories is generally an advantage, but in some cases, depending on the similarities and differences, it can cause some difficulties. Phonetic skills are often neglected in language teaching, but are extremely important especially for students with dyslexia who may have particular phonological difficulties. It is very important for the language teacher to be able to bring the student's attention to the similarities and differences in the sound inventories of the languages, to train their sound discrimination abilities as well as sound production.

"The competence in a spoken language consists of the ability to use the sounds that form words and sentences, in order to convey meanings. In order to speak we need to be able to articulate, through particular movements of the oral articulatory organs, the sounds of our language and, in order to understand the spoken language we need to recognize the same sounds in all the various auditory stimuli, that we perceive in the surrounding environment"

3. Nespor, M. & Bafile, L. (2008). I suoni del linguaggio" Bologna: Il Mulino. First of all we should not forget that phonetic competences are the first to be acquired spontaneously in the mother tongue, but they are not acquired so spontaneously in a foreign language. For students with dyslexia, phonetic competences represent a weakness. In these students, the phonological difficulties encountered in the mother-tongue are usually transferred to the new language to be learnt. Dyslexic students may struggle to internalise the phonetic models of the new language implicitly with simple exposure. (Daloiso, 2011). Learning new sounds, then, also requires some explicit teaching at all ages (also for pre-schoolers). So it is necessary for the language teacher to have some basic knowledge of phonetics, and to be able to retrieve information about the sounds of the languages represented in the classroom. This allows the teacher to help students learn to discriminate and produce the sounds of the new language, and develop an adequate "phonologic awareness".

"Phonologic awareness" is defined as "the ability to elaborate the sounds of the oral language, that is the capability of analyzing and manipulating the linguistic structure of the words, even in the presence of verbal and non-verbal stimuli" (Scalisi et al., 2003, p. 44).

In the early stages of language learning, the sounds of the new language are perceived as a unique, continuous flow. Only later does the learner become able to discriminate and extract sound units of different sizes.

In order to be able to speak and communicate in a new language, it is necessary to be able to discriminate and produce the sounds of that language, through the correct movements of the articulatory organs. First of all, when in the presence of a new sound, we need to understand which organs we should move and how to move them, in order to acquire and consolidate new articulation habits. To do so, it is necessary to create internal representation of the new sounds on the basis of what is perceived.

For this reason, it is very important for the teacher to have an excellent mastery of the language he/she is teaching, in order to provide students with adequate input and equally good feedback.

With the increasingly high number of multilingual students in schools, the teacher should therefore have knowledge of the phonemic inventories of the languages represented in class so as to foresee any possible difficulties or advantages that students may encounter, both at the sound perception and production level (see also Module 6). This means that the teacher must be conscious of similarities of sounds in the child's first language, the main language of instruction and the additional language as the child is likely to substitute first language sounds for new, similar sounds. The teacher also needs to be aware of any sounds of the new language that are not present in the first language as the child is likely to struggle to reproduce them.

1 Recent studies have demonstrated how in these phases the most involved cerebral hemisphere is the right one, where the areas specialized for language are located (Sugiural et al. 2011).

For example the sound of the first syllable of the English word "think" is not present in Italian, so an Italian native speaker will have problems distinguishing between this sound ( $[\theta]$ ) and the sound [t] (because the "place" where this consonant is articulated is very close to the English sound  $[\theta]$  – See Box 4.3 for "place of articulation") and the sound [f] (because the Italian consonant shares the same "manner of articulation" with the English [ $\theta$ ]). For the same reasons, a Chinese or Japanese native spaker will have problems discriminating between [r] and [l], because the sound [r] does not exist in the phonemic inventory of these languages.

For further information on classification parameters of the linguistic sounds see Box 4.3.

#### **Box 4.3 Linguistic sounds**

Linguistic sounds are divided into two main categories: consonants and vowels. They are produced by the articulatory organs that are present in the vocal tract. The articulatory organs which can be mobile (lips, tongue, soft palate, mandible) or fixed (teeth, hard palate).

 $\mp$ 

For further information see the following links:

http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fonetica articolatoria [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocal\_tract [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

#### **Consonants**

Consonants are produced when a mobile articulator gets close or in touch with a fixed one, so as to create a constriction of the air flow coming from the

Consonants are classified on a basis of different parameters:

- Place of articulation: The point of the vocal tract, where the constriction is created
- Manner of articulate: The type or degree of constriction that is created by the articulatory organs
- Voicing: The vibration of the vocal chords that may or may not be associated to the movements of the articulatory organs.

Further details are available at:

http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consonanti [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consonant [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

Vowels are produced without air constriction and are classified on the basis of the form assumed by the oral cavity during their production. The vocal tract shape varies according to the movements the tongue makes on the vertical and antero-posterior axis. It also varies according to the position of the the lips.

On the basis of these parameters, vowels are classified as:

- high (or closed) low (or open): according to the higher or lower position of the tongue in respect to the resting position.
- Front back: according to the fronted or backed position of the tongue in respect to the resting position.
- Rounded not rounded: according to the presence or absence of lip protrusion.

Further details are available at:

http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocale [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vowel [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

Finally there are also sounds defined as approximants (also called semiconsonants or semi-vowels), which can be said to fall between consonants and vowels, since they present typical characteristics of the first as well as the second type of sounds. Some examples of approximants are the first sounds of the Italian words "ieri" ([j]) and "uovo" ([w]), or of the English words "yesterday" ([j]) and "work" ([w]).

 $\overline{a}_{1}$  , which is the state of the stat

It is very important that the teacher consistently devises exercises to consolidate and reinforce the ability to discriminate between the sounds of the new language (it is not possible to imitate and use such sounds if they are not discerned) as well as the ability to produce them.

In order to train students' pronunciation the teacher can use the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols. More information on the IPA chart are provided in the Box 4.4.

#### **Box 4.4 IPA Chart**

In the various languages of the world, there is not always a biunique correspondence between the sound and the grapheme. In some cases, a unique grapheme can be associated to different sounds (in the Italian language, for example, the grapheme 'c' can be associated to the sound [t]] for 'cena', but also the sound [k] for 'cono'); in other cases, different graphemes or grapheme combinations are associated to a single sound (in the Italian language the sound [k] can be associated to 'c', as for 'cane', or to the grapheme combination 'ch', as for 'china'); in further cases a single grapheme can be associated to two different sounds pronounced consecutively (the grapheme 'x', for example, is associated to the sounds

In order to avoid ambiguities, the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) system has been created. This uses a single symbol to represent a single sound, regardless of the language where this sound is represented (English, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese,...), and regardless of the writing system used in the language (for example Latin, Cyrillic system, ...). This allows consistent, careful transcription of all the sounds of the languages of the world through a finite set of symbols.

These symbols are all included in the IPA chart, available and downloadable at:

http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/IPA\_chart\_(C)2005.pdf [Last accessed 15/12/2013]

#### On reflection task 4.1

- Think of a sound your students find particularly difficult. Why do you think that sound is so difficult?
- Would you be able to describe that sound and the way to produce it?
- Can you think of an activity to help your students discriminate that sound from other potentially similar sounds?
- Can you think of an activity to help your students practise the production of that sound in a funny and motivating way?

# 4.3.2 Vocabulary

4. From a lecture by Dr. Asher at Cambridge University, England

"Babies don't learn by memorizing lists; why should children or adults?" (Asher)

The most recent approaches to the teaching-learning of languages favour communicative competence and grant vocabulary, rather than syntactic aspects, a primary role. Developing even a limited vocabulary repertoire can permit a basic form of comprehension and communication which will form a basis onto which syntactic knowledge can subsequently be added.

The vocabulary proposed by the language teacher should, especially in the initial stages, be stimulating for students, and very close to their interests, their needs and to aspects closely related to their life.

In the case of students with dyslexia, the learning of vocabulary elements can be especially difficult, both because of a likely phonologic memory deficit, and because of difficulties with word retrieval. For this reason, there will be an even greater difference between the size of the receptive and productive vocabulary (see useful terminology).

In the case of multilingual students, the knowledge of more languages can be an advantage or disadvantage to the acquisition of vocabulary.

On the one hand, as already hinted at in Module 1, the bilingual/multilingual condition increases the cognitive flexibility and usually has a positive general effect on language learning, including vocabulary; on the other hand, the affinity between the languages involved (see Module 6) can produce a dual effect: let us consider for example two languages such as Italian or Spanish, both neo-Latin languages, and therefore containing many lexical elements that share the same root, so as to seem analogous. When the similarity in sound shape corresponds to a similarity in meaning, vocabulary learning becomes easier; when, on the other hand, this similarity in sound shape does not correspond to a similarity in meaning (this is the case of the so called 'false friends'), the student can encounter some difficulties.

Another aspect to consider is that in the first phases of language learning, the similarity in the sound shape and in the meanings can facilitate oral comprehension (and consequently communication), but at later stages the same early facility in communication can lead to contamination and to the use of similar words in the wrong contexts. This may be a passing problem or, in some cases, it may lead to consolidation of the errors.

Students with dyslexia, who struggle to learn one or more new languages experience a significant increase in the cognitive load. This, added to the deficit in the phonological working memory and to word retrieval difficulties,

can make language learning particularly hard. This is primarily true if the teaching approach adopted by the language teacher is mostly explicit, as this type of teaching relies heavily upon explicit memory and requires a big effort of attention resources, which are often poor in dyslexic students.

# 4.3.3 Morphology

The morphological and morpho-syntactic aspects of the language, as well as the phonetic-phonological ones, are learnt in an implicit automatic way both for L1 and, partially, for L2/FL. These aspects already cause problems for the dyslexic student in the L1 and are transferred to the L2/FL. For this reason, in the L2/ FL explicit learning must go together with explicit teaching. As mentioned in Module 6, differences in morphological typology between languages can be the cause of interference. It is therefore necessary for the teacher to acquire basic knowledge of the main morphological differences between the languages involved, in order to be able to foresee possible difficulties or advantages that students may encounter due to their L1s.

Furthermore, knowledge and awareness of such differences will help the teacher understand whether the difficulties that may arise are due to students' multilingual background or rather to dyslexia.

# **4.3.4 Syntax**

As mentioned before, a communicative approach to language teaching puts more enphasis on vocabulary rather than to syntax. However, syntax also needs to be granted due attention because it is important for achieving adequate linguistic and communicative competence. It is important for the teacher to be aware of the syntactic differences between the languages involved, so as to foresee any difficulties or advantages students might encounter in the learning process. This will also help to distinguish between expected difficulties in learning a new language and any possible specific learning disability.

In general the reflection about syntax would be more effective if preceded by the practical use of the structure to be learnt2. In other words, reflection should come after such structures have already been internalised as communicative behaviour. This is true for all kinds of students, but primarily students with dyslexia, as they can have the biggest difficulties with the retrieval and use of

syntactic rules due to a "working memory" deficit. On this topic, it is important to bear in mind that the syntactic difficulties in dyslexic students may actually be attributed to a specific language impairment (SLI). Several studies have demonstrated how subjects with SLI will develop dyslexia in 50-80% of cases.

#### **Box 4.5 Cross-linguistic Language Diagnosis (CLAD)**

European project on the study of Specific Language Impairment and Dyslexia

This four-year project studies language disorders, in particular the Specific Language Impairment (SLI) and dyslexia, in the various languages of the participating countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Romania). It analyses the differences between typical language development and the language development of the children affected by this disorder. The project stems from the necessity of studying language disorders in a multilingual context, a need that is becoming increasingly pressing in view of the continuous growth of migratory phenomena.

Schools and institutions may only offer early, effective intervention to immigrant students with language difficulties if they are able to identify the source of those difficulties. In fact, the deficits in language comprehension and production can be confused with difficulties and delays related to the multilingual condition of students.

Studies for the identification of specific markers also in a bilingual context allow an appropriate understanding of the nature of the problem and a consequent acceleration of diagnostic and therapeutic processes.

#### Aims of the project:

- to identify specific linguistic markers suggesting an SLI in a bilingual context
- to formulate detection tools, based on these markers, which can be used by teachers starting from the kindergarten
- to create tests based on these markers, in order to achieve an early
- to understand the extent to which the SLI can overlap with dyslexia The tools honed within the project will be developed in all the languages of the partner countries.

#### Search Results:

bilingual subjects with SLI show the characteristic symptoms of the disorder in both languages spoken

- their condition of bilingualism does not worsen any of the symptoms
- There is a partial overlap between SLI and dyslexia.

http://www.cladproject.eu/ [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

# 4.3.5 Pragmatics

Pragmatic competence is what allows people to "act", "do things" through the language. It is therefore essential if effective communication is to be achieved.

Normally learners with dyslexia do not have difficulties in this area, and it is therefore important that the pragmatic dimension is particularly valued in the context of teaching and learning languages. It may in fact constitute a kind of compensation in linguistic processing difficulties.

It is important that teachers value the clear, effective and appropriate use of language even when it contains syntactical errors. This is particulartly important in the case of dyslexic students, in order to avoid frustration and demotivation.

In addition, in oral communication it is also important to decode "non-verbal language", that is gestures, facial expressions, body movements, which are closely bound to the culture of origin. (See Box 4.6). It is important, therefore, that the extra-linguistic elements are taught together with the linguistic aspects, bearing in mind the increasingly shared view that language and culture are inextricably linked together. These extra-linguistic elements, i.e. gestures, facial expressions, body movements that are part of the non-verbal language, may in certain circumstances facilitate the understanding of the message, but could, if misinterpreted cause misunderstandings or accidents in communication.

Communicating with people from a different language and culture implies that the conventions on which we normally rely to understand the global and therefore real meaning of the message (...), can be different and difficult to understand. This is because, as we have already mentioned, we often make the mistake of considering the nonverbal languages as "natural", instead of "cultural" as their meaning varies from culture to culture.<sup>5</sup>

5.Caon, F.(2010) Dizionario dei gesti degli italiani. Una prospettiva interculturale. Guerra Edizioni, Perugia p. 34-35

### **Box 4.6 Gestures in different cultures**

We speak with the vocal organs, but we converse with the whole body (D. Abercrombie)

 $\pm$  . The substitution of the state of the

Body language is a fundamental aspect of communication. We use it all the time, even more than we may be aware of.

The language teacher, especially when addressing plurilingual students, should include activities based on non verbal language and considering intercultural perspectives. This will help avoid awkward misunderstandings. The following are two of the many gestures that have different interpretations in different countries:

- Moving your head from left to right, means "NO" in most countries, but in India, for example, it means "YES". Similarly, moving your head up and down means "YES" in most countries, but in Asia it usually means "NO"
- Raising your thumb up usually means "OK" in most countries, but may be misinterpreted in South-Asian countries, where it is considered an offensive and disrespectful gesture.
- Using your finger or hand to ask someone to come to you is considered offensive in some cultures as it is a gesture that is only considered suitable for beckoning dogs.
- Eye contact is associated with attentiveness and honesty in western cultures but in Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, it is considered disrespectful or rude. If a pupil does not look at the teacher, it should not be assumed that they are not paying attention.
- When talking, people from north Africa tend to stand closer to each other than Western Europeans usually consider appropriate.
- In Finland people don't greet each other when they meet in the street unless they know each other. They think it's embarrassing and wonder if they should know the person who greets them

Other similar example can be found here:

http://healthvermont.gov/family/toolkit/tools%5CF-6%20Cultural%20 Differences%20in%20Nonverbal%20Communic.pdf [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

 $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$  and  $\overline{a}$ 

#### On reflection task 4.1

- Can you think of any other example of gestures that have different meanings in different cultures?
- In your classroom, have you ever had to handle misunderstandings due to different interpretations of body language?
- What would you do if such misunderstanding happened among your students?

# 4.4 Spelling

Languages present considerable differences in terms of the degree of transparency of their orthographic systems. In other words, there is considerable variation between the degreee of grapheme-phoneme correspondence in different languages.

Among European languages, Finnish seems to be the most transparent, English the most opaque. German, Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian, Czech, Italian and Spanish are fairly transparent languages; Danish, French and Portuguese are essentially opaque languages.

For example, Italian has 25 phonemes represented by 33 graphemes or combinations of graphemes, French has 35 phonemes for 190 graphemes or combinations of graphemes, English has 40 graphemes for 1120 graphemes or combinations of graphemes.

The degree of transparency of the language strongly influences the facility for reading and the speed of access to the vocabulary. Consequently dyslexia in different countries (see Module 2, par. 2.1) will depend on the spoken language, both in terms of incidence and in terms of the severity of the disorder in the individual. The orthographic difficulties that the student with dyslexia has in his/her mother tongue will be transferred to the second or foreign language. However, if the new language to be learned is more transparent than the mother tongue, learners will find less difficulties in the FL spelling than in L1 spelling.

# 4.5 Learning a foreign language

To make the teaching/learning process effective, it is necessary to know how the "learning brain" operates in language learning.

The mother tongue is acquired mainly through imitation.

For this reason, using strategies of teaching/learning that at least partially rely on this mechanism can be particularly effective, especially in the early stages.

An important role is also played by the associative capacity of the brain that, according to Dehaene, is a pattern recognition system, and this is one of the major strengths of the human mind.

The associative activity can facilitate memorisation especially in the presence of factors such as:

- positive emotions
- multi-sensory stimuli;
- creative, interesting and meaningful activities.

Also the implicit (incidental/non declarative) memory plays an important role in language acquisition/learning. It is the oldest and most important memory in humans, the one that first appears in the child (already in the foetus) and the last to disappear in the elderly. Thanks to the implicit memory, acquisition of the L1 can happen without any effort and without us being aware of it (see Module 1, Box 1.2).

What is acquired implicitly, that is naturally and without any conscious effort, is automated through experience and practice, and becomes part of a stable set of acquired skills. At the language level, therefore, the implicit memory is what allows us to understand speech and to speak fluently.

We too often still use teaching methods that relate learning mainly to the explicit memory. This is a type of long-term memory (for more details see Module 1 Box 1.2 and Module 2 paragraph 2.6.4) and is essential for the conscious (not automatic) use of the language. The methods based mostly on explicit memory do not result in an adequte level of communicative competence. They focus mainly on translation and on the explicit teaching of grammar rules (grammartranslation method). They require a huge effort in terms of working memory. This is not good in general, and in particular for students with dyslexia. It is more effective to provide examples of sentences that contain a certain grammar rule and let student inductively retrieve that rule. The teacher should obviously assist students in this process.

Implicit learning is important for fluent, automatic elocution and should generally prevail on explicit learning. However, implicit learning is not sufficient on its own to reach advanced levels of linguistic and communicative competence.

It is therefore essential that teaching continuously connects explicit and implicit learning especially after students have reached a certain level of competence.

This is particularly true in the case of adolescents. According to recent studies, the maturation changes that occur during childhood and adolescence lead to a reduced involvement of the implicit memory in L2 learning (Ullman, 2004; 2005) and especially in FL learning. With this type of students, therefore, the support of explicit teaching becomes particularly relevant, although it should never prevail over implicit learning.

# 4.6 Dyslexia and foreign language learning

Partly summing up the contents of the previous paragraphs, we will list the major difficulties that can affect the dyslexic student's ability to learn languages.

- in the discrimination of the sounds of the language
- in reproducing the sounds of a language
- of a morpho-syntactic type
- in vocabulary acquisition
- in word retrieval
- in the application of grammatical rules
- in decoding
- in writing dictation
- in written production
- in the acquisition of spelling accuracy
- in carrying out tests at school
- in taking notes

These difficulties may result in:alto livello di frustrazione

- high levels of frustration
- fluctuating efficiency
- fatigue
- demotivation due to the difficulties encountered
- defensive strategies (avoidance, bypassing, passive resistance)

This does not mean that the person with dyslexia cannot learn languages. On the contrary, the teacher must assume that he/she can do so, provided that the teaching approach, particularly in the early stages, links the learning of the new language as closely as possible to the mechanisms of L1 acquisition.

Moreover, as we shall see below, it is important that the teaching approach is:

- structured
- sequential
- multisensory
- full of repeated positive feedback

# 4.7 What to do in class

European and worldwide organisations such as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and UNESCO are calling for increasingly inclusive schools (Watkins, 2007, p. 16). Teachers must respond to different cognitive styles, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and socio-economic conditions.

As emphasised in the "Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education - Recommendations for Practice :

6.European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011) Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Practice,. p.10

In all settings, diversity must be celebrated and valued and difference considered as a resource for learning.

Celebrating diversity means valuing the peculiarities, hence the uniqueness, of the individual.

The next few paragraphs will focus on some practical suggestions that the teacher can use in the classroom and which can in fact be beneficial to all students.

# 4.7.1 Different cultures, different languages, different cognitive styles: how to create a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom.

First of all, before undertaking any specific teaching activity, the teacher must focus on the creation of a welcoming atmosphere of collaboration, complicity, curiosity and mutual trust. He/She will then introduce the concept of diversity as a valuable resource to promote integration in the classroom. To do so, he/ she could start from a literary passage, a film, a cartoon, a song ... encouraging a collective discussion touching upon differences of personality, tastes, interests, dreams, physical appearance, country of origin, language, traditions and customs ... to finally reflect on the fact that diversity can also cover individuals' cognitive styles. Only in this way will the teacher be able to create an atmosphere that is favourable to learning, where students can feel at ease, and able to tackle different schoolwork ....

The teacher should try to distinguish between signs of possible dyslexia and language difficulties related to a student's bilingualism/multilingualism. He/ she must avoid merely expressing an opinion without analysing the type of mistakes made and their frequency, and should determine the origin of the difficulties even when colleagues have not raised any issue or concern.

# 4.7.2 Structuring learning activities

It is important to structure the classroom work into different stages, in order to ensure meaningful and effective learning.

The teacher needs to ensure an initial phase of motivational activity, in which he/she elicits the interest and curiosity of the learners. Later the teacher will introduce a certain topic and devise activities aimed at a global, general undertanding of the topic itself. Time will then be spent on developing a more detailed understanding of the topic through the use of specific, targeted exercises. There will then be a phase of synthesis and reflection, in which learners can re-elaborate and internalise what has been learnt in the previous phase.

After a possible test, the teacher should reserve time for a final phase where leisure activities are devised in order to reward students for their efforts and to practise the language again free of any explicit learning purpose.

PHASE	Examples of techniques/activities
Motivation	Brainstorming, watching a video, film, cartoon etc.,
Globality	Multiple choice, matching, transcoding,
Analysis	Completion, reordering, use of highlights, or circles, arrows, colours
Synthesis and Reflection	Role-play, role taking, role making, dramatisation, open dialogue, description of images, reconstruction of mind maps
Test	Matching, Transcoding, monologue, multiple choice, True/False, open questions (oral)
Deconditioning	Ludic activities of various kinds, like songs, dances, aimed to revise what has been learned, but without making the learning purpose explicit.

## 4.7.3 In addition...

It is important to remember that to increase the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, it is necessary to make the objectives of the learning activity explicit so that students know what they will do, how and why. As Pontecorvo (1995) says, "Knowledge of the objectives allows anyone who is studying to direct its activity and its interest, and it is true that students learn sooner and better if they know (and understand) the objectives of their work".

This becomes particularly relevant in the case of dyslexic students, who often have an attention deficit and may have more difficulties in tracing the link between a task/activity and its purpose. This prevents the child from building a mental representation of the task and causes a further decline in attention. So explaining to the learner the objectives of the proposed task helps provide him/her with a frame of meaning in which the task can be done more easily.

Regarding reporting and correction of errors, it is important to remember that:

 If errors occur in the oral production, the teacher should avoid correcting them explicitly. The teacher should show he/she has understood the message, and respond using the student's words as much as possible, but with the correct syntactic form or pronunciation. For example, if the student says "The tree are green", the teacher should respond: "Oh, yes. That's right. The tree is green!" • If errors occur in written production it is generally better to clearly delete them rather than highlight them. During study, students tend to highlight the important parts, those they want to remember. Because some dyslexics have a good visual memory, they are likely to remember the highlighted forms, so in case of a highlighted forms and may internalise the error!

#### Finally, it can be very useful:

- to suggest the student records the lecture
- To remember that dyslexic students may find homework assignments more tiring and more time-consuming so it is appropriate to reduce the workload in terms of quantity but not content. It is also important that students have time set aside for extracurricular activities.
- To bear in mind that some learning may not yet be fixed in a dyslexic student's memory.
- To use the terminology consistently (without using synonyms)
- To introduce one new element at a time
- To repeat the most important concepts several times both within the same lesson and between a lesson and the next one.
- To bear in mind that a dyslexic learner will be unlikely to be able to recall grammar rules and repeat them by heart.
- To bear in mind that mnemonic study should not be induced or demanded.
- To pay attention to the graphic aspect of the paper materials proposed
- To provide, before the lesson, an outline or map of what will be discussed in class.
- To teach how to build and use mind and/or concept maps (see par. 4.8.7)
- To collaborate with the family to ensure that the latter can help the child in planning work at home.
- To implement teamwork with colleagues from other disciplines.
- To encourage language departments to work together to ensure that they have the same approach to grammar, use grammatical terms consistently and make explicit links between similar linguistic features.
- To avoid overlapping of language tests with tests of other subjects.
- In collaboration with parents, to pay attention to diary management, especially with younger children.

Box 4.7 Ten rules to follow for the good foreign language teacher

In 1970, the psycholinguist Denis Girard drafted a set of rules for the good English teacher:

Teacher qualities

He explains clearly.
He makes his pupils work
He makes his course interesting
He insists on spoken language
He shows great patience
He uses a comunicative approach
He shows the same interest in all his students
He teaches good pronunciation
He speaks good English
He makes all the students partecipate

......e soprattutto

the best way to tell the children what to do is to demonstrate it!

Naturalmente questo decalogo vale per gli insegnanti di tutte le lingue!

Gabrieli, C. & Gabrieli, R., (2008.)Dyslexia, what is it?, Roma: Armando Editore

# 4.8 Strategies, methods, approaches to teaching/learning a foreign language

Recent research in cognitive science has resulted in a greater recognition of the importance of affective, socio-cultural and psychological factors in foreign language learning. The learner and his/her peculiarities (learning style, interests, needs, ...) assume a central role in the teaching/learning process, in line with an affective-humanistic approach.

Within the group class, the teacher will face different cognitive styles so he/she must take account of the fact that

There is not only one approach, there is no single strategy, both for teaching and learning, but there are strategies to suit different situations. Therefore, it is not superfluous to repeat that not a single method, but multiple methods are to be used. (Gabrieli & Gabrieli, p. 18)

For this reason we are now going to list a number of possible approaches to be adopted where appropriate in the class context.

# 4.8.1 The multi-sensory approach

Sending different information to the brain through various sensory channels (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, etc ...) facilitates the storing and retrieving of information and the learning process itself. Proposing multi-sensory activities makes the process of teaching-learning particularly effective, especially in the case of students with dyslexia, as well as with any immigrant students who have little competence in the language of instruction, and with whom verbal language use only should be avoided, in order to avoid fatigue, frustration and demotivation.

In particular, movement is of great importance in learning in general and in learning languages in particular. The brain is originally a motor and perceptual organ, whose areas have undergone what Dehane (2007) defines as "neuronal recycling" and have been re-functioned for purposes different from those for which they were developed.

Associating the language to movement, thus associating a linguistic element and its significance to an action, leads to a broader, "multidimensional" and therefore more stable mental representation of it.

As we read in Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia (2006), "The brain that acts is first and foremost a brain that understands."

## 4.8.2 Total Physical Response (TPR)

Developed in the late 1960s by James J. Asher, TPR bases the learning of a foreign language on the total involvement (both physical and psychological) of learners, trying to make the learning of a new language as similar as possible to the acquisition of the mother tongue.

TPR uses simple verbal instructions (commands) to introduce elements and language patterns. For example, the teacher gives a command, associating it with the corresponding movement, and the student must respond physically, by making the appropriate action (Stand up: the teacher stands up and asks the student to stand up etc.). This must be done immediately, without analysing the action.

After repeated activites of this sort, students are ultimately able to create their own commands and order each other to move around the room performing certain actions.

This approach, which is normally used with very young children, may also be effective with adults at beginner competence level and with students with dyslexia, because it trains listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition without requiring an effort of oral production. Also, this approach creates a relatively stress-free environment where students are free to copy each other if they are unsure what a particular command means.

This approach is particularly suitable for beginners, like all approaches that are mostly based on the oral use of language. However this is also a limit, since the use of written language is also important to acquire an adequate competence in the new language. Furthermore, TPR allows only a restricted use of language items.

The TPR is based on two assumptions:

- 1) The comprehension always precedes the production
- 2) There is a "silent period" (see Box.4.2.) which should be respected in order to avoid frustrations. Similarly to what happens in the acquisition of L1, the oral production will only take place after the internalisation of the linguistic elements and patterns.

Following the discovery of the "mirror neurons" (see Box 4.8), and the subsequent revaluation of the motor system, it has been possible to give theoretical support to this methodology of teaching/learning. The motor involvement (acting intentionally in a context), through the activation of the mirror neurons contributes to making the mnestic trace (relating to memory in general and in particular to procedural memory) more stable, not only in the person who performs the action, but also in those who observe it.

For more information about TPR, you can consult the website:

<a href="http://www.tpr-world.com">http://www.tpr-world.com</a> [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

#### Box 4.8 The mirror neurons

Everything began in the laboratory ... with a monkey, a scientist and a banana ... like many breakthrough discoveries, even that of the mirror neurons has been entirely accidental.

At the beginning of the 90's, a group of researchers at the University of Parma, coordinated by neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti, was studying neuronal activation in the brain of a monkey in the act of grabbing a banana. During a break, one of the researchers took a banana and ate it. Computers still connected to the monkey's brain recorded the same brain activity observed when the animal was actually pulling the banana ... It was initially considered as an error, but subsequent measurements led to the same results. It was therefore evident that certain neurons are activated not only when an individual actually performs an action, but also when the same subject sees the performance of an action by someone else.

These neurons were discovered later in the human brain too, thanks to noninvasive techniques of brain imaging.

It turned out that these neurons are fundamental not only to understand an action, but also to understand the intention contained therein. They are at the basis of the mechanisms of imitation and play a fundamental role in all learning processes.

Mirror neurons have also been found in the so-called cerebral area of Broca, designated to the language. This led to thinking that these neurons play an important role in the acquisition of the mother tongue and in communication in general, and that their function can (should!) be 'exploited' in teaching-learning of foreign languages, especially in the case of students with dyslexia. Teaching strategies broadly based on sensory and motor activity, on imitation, on emotional participation, on a contextualized input and on the anticipation of the intentions of an action, can go along the action of certain neural mechanisms, and encourage the storage in the long-term memory of what has been learnt.

# 4.8.3 Cooperative learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) is an educational movement which includes a set of teaching-learning methods based on co-operation between learners and is aimed not only at developing specific disciplinary competences but also at socialrelational competences often neglected by traditional approaches.

The CL favours using students' resources, rather than those of the teacher. It attaches great importance to student-student relationships and enables learners to learn from each other, to acquire different and wider viewpoints, share feelings, ideas, concerns and aspirations, and improve self-perception. Cooperation and the effort of managing interpersonal relationships have positive effects on cognitive development (since interaction generates greater cognitive complexity and therefore implies an increase in intellectual activity), on the ability to manage group relations and conflicts, on the motivation to learn and therefore on learning itself.

The cooperative activities can also be used as a "compensatory instrument" for students with dyslexia, or for multilingual students who have not yet developed an adequate competence in the language of instruction or in the language to be learnt.

'Folded value line' is just one example of a cooperative learning activity which could be used in the language classroom. An issue is raised, for example, the use of animal experimentation. The teacher finds out (through a show of hands) who is strongly for and who is strongly against. The students then physically position themselves (according to their own opinion) on the value line where one end means strong support and the other end means strong opposition.

The students firstly talk to the person next to them and share their (presumably similar) views and reasons for these views. One pair then joins another pair and they exchange their ideas. The pairs will probably refer back to their first conversation which will help them practise summarising skills. Then the line is divided in half. The two halves become 2 parallel lines of students facing each other. So in a class of 24, the line would be divided between persons 12 and 13. Person 1 would speak to Person 13, Person 2 to Person 14 etc. Students now have the opportunity to talk to someone whose opinion is different from their own.

After this, 1 or 2 students could be selected to summarise the different views they had heard or they could be asked to orally represent a viewpoint that greatly differed from their own, thus encouraging them to appreciate different viewpoints.

(Source: Jane Joritz-Nakagawa on 'Spencer Kagan's Cooperative Learning Structures' <a href="http://www.jalt.org/pansig/PGL2/HTML/Nakagawa.htm">http://www.jalt.org/pansig/PGL2/HTML/Nakagawa.htm</a> )

For further information about cooperative learning, please consult the following sites:

http://www.iasce.net/[Last accessed 19/12/2013]

http://www.apprendimentocooperativo.it/ [Last accessed 19/12/2013]

# 4.8.4 Format Approach

The Format Approach, developed by the American psychologist Bruner in 1975, is an approach that uses events that repeat themselves in a similar manner within the school day in order to practise and repeat communicative acts. In this way, the learners can share experiences, exchange objects, perform daily gestures etc., always combining the words with actions and/or concrete objects. It will require many repetitions before students will be able to extract the word from the context, 'fix' the meaning and include the word in their acquired vocabulary.

This approach is normally used with children from preschool and early elementary/primary school. However, it can also be useful with older children, especially those with dyslexia.

Interesting material tied to Format activities (especially narrative format) is available in several languages at the following site: <a href="http://www.hocus-lotusedu">http://www.hocus-lotusedu</a> [Last accessed 19/12/2013]

#### An example of the Format Approach

In "Scaffolding Children's Talk and Learning", Carol Read provides an example of the Format Approach. The example focuses on teaching children to talk about the weather. The children are encouraged to go to the window and look at the weather. This routine takes place regularly before the morning break. The teacher asks the children what the weather is like and uses flashcards to present different types of weather. She then asks questions such as "Is it sunny?" and the children respond with "Yes" or "No". She then asks additional questions such as whether the children will need their coats and whether they will be able to play outside.

The routine is frequently repeated but with additional elements and with the children gradually taking more ownership of the conversation. Over time, the flashcards will no longer be required and the children may themselves initiate the question about the weather. Please refer to the link below to read the dialogue that took place between the teacher and the children.

http://www.carolread.com/articles/s%20talk%20and%20learning.pdf [Last accessed 19/12/2013]

# 4.8.5 Storytelling

This approach involves the use of narrative and employs multisensory channels. The teacher tells short stories sequentially, using different languages (iconic, pictorial, mimic-gestural, dramatic) and different media. He/she connects to the imaginary world of learners and this is therefore particularly attractive not only for children and teenagers, but also for adults, provided that the content of the story is chosen on the basis of the interests, experiences and needs of the learners.

For an example of story-telling, have a look at the video of Janice Dykes telling the story of Bitika, a Madagascan lemur. The narrative contains a lot of repetitive sequences and these enable the children to understand the content. The children are encouraged to join in with the story and to use different gestures which reinforce the vocabulary. They then work in small groups on a paragraph of the story and learn it by heart, using gestures. They then perform their paragraph to the class. The children work with the teacher on a text based on the Bitika text and they suggest different animal words. Finally the children are given a scaffolded version of the text and complete the blanks with words of their own choice.

http://www.teachersmedia.co.uk/videos/ks2-mfl-story-writing [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

Other useful links:

http://www.debbieworks.altervista.org/story\_telling1.htm [Last accessed 18/12/2013]

#### On reflection task 4.2

- Can you think of a story you have successfully used in language teaching? If so, can you describe it?
- Can you analyse the features of the lessons that made it successful?

# 4.8.6 Ludic approach

The purpose of the ludic approach is to stimulate learning, offering the student funny, playful, non-anxiety-inducing activities which can sustain and increase motivation. Playful activities create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom and, although they often do not constitute real games, lead to a total involvement of the student. Indeed, recreational activity requires an involvement not only at a cognitive level but also at a linguistic, sensory-motor and emotional one. When the child is playing, he/ she is pushed to "do things", building, manipulating and making something in a practical way. This is a privileged way to perceive and learn by activating all the child's own senses. Besides, games usually involve "challenges" which normally lead children to have fun, making them enjoy things and fostering an implicit type of learning. This can be particularly useful in the case of students with dyslexia. In addition, regarding the possible presence of multilingual pupils in the class, the motivational push of playful activities can help overcome any language barriers that may have arisen due to a lack of competence in both the school language and the FL.

The Common European Framework of Reference of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 55) also recognises the importance of ludic activities in foreign language learning. Of course it is important that these tasks are simple to execute and involve abundant use of oral language. Such activities are especially effective with children, but can also work with adolescents and adults if properly designed.

Moreover, recreational activities can foster the development of intercultural competence, bringing the learner, in a simple and natural way, into contact with elements of other cultures in a cooperative context.

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Moreover, recreational activities can foster the development of intercultural competence, bringing the learner, in a simple and natural way, into contact with elements of other cultures in a cooperative context.

Examples of ludic games can be found in "The role of word games in second language acquisition: second language pedagogy, motivation and ludic tasks" by Fernando Arturo Ojeda (2004). <a href="http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UFE0003980/00001">http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UFE0003980/00001</a> [Last accessed 19/12/2013].

Ojeda describes a game "Qué és" ("What is...?") in which learners are put into pairs and write a 'What is...?" type question on a piece of paper and then fold the paper over. They swap their pieces of paper and each write an answer on the folded paper without seeing the question. They then open the paper and read their questions and answers out loud and choose the one that they prefer. They then join other pairs and together choose their favourite combinations which are written on the board for the class to see and enjoy. They may decide to go for the ones which make grammatical sense or are the most amusing or the most creative or they may opt for the most absurd. When Ojeda tried out this game, one of the examples generated was: "Qué és español?" "Es la nariz de un elefante"

"What is Spanish?" It is the nose of an elephant" (page 55).

#### On reflection task 4.3

- Can you think of a ludic game you have successfully used in class?
- Can you search the web and find a ludic game that you think would work well with your students?

# 4.8.7 The use of mind maps and concept maps

The teacher can facilitate the understanding of the concepts and learning contents to be explained in class, using visual aids, such as PowerPoint files or maps (mind maps or concept maps). They capture the attention of students, facilitating understanding of new concepts and information.

Mind maps have a radial structure of a hierarchical-associative kind. There is a core idea in the centre to which other first level elements are connected. First level ideas may on their turn be linked to other second level ideas and so on... They are particularly useful to represent non-linear reasoning. Concept maps are more useful to represent concepts or ideas with a temporal evolution. They are usually tree shaped.

It is preferable if the students create the maps themselves, so as to make learning more meaningful. However, the workload they have to face at home does not always allow the students to find the time to create maps on all topics of study. Therefore, delivery of the visual material used in class can on the one hand reassure children (and parents!) because it allows them to have a ready support they can use at home to study, and in class as a compensatory tool for tests; on the other hand it certainly makes study less active and less significant.

For this reason, the teacher should occasionally prompt students to create customised maps. To create a map, the first thing to do is to select the most important information within a text. Unfortunately, this is not an easy task (teachers may have often noticed that if they ask students to underline the most important information they often underline all or nothing), especially for those who have trouble in decoding.

The Box 4.9 reported underneath contains some useful tips that the teacher may give students to help them in the construction of mind or concept maps.

#### 1. BOX 4.9 - Come costruire una mappa cognitiva: consigli per gli studen

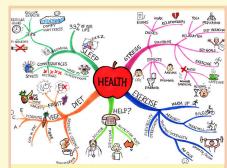
Maps can be useful to you:

#### at school

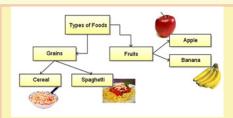
- to help you follow and learn the lesson better
- to help you keep the thread when you have to present a topic
- to help you retrieve specific vocabulary
- to make things easier for you in tests

#### at home:

- to memorise
- to revise
- 1. Look at the possible images accompanying the text and the relative captions. This is useful to get a general idea of the topic the text deals with.
- Read the titles of the chapters and paragraphs, to get a rather more precise idea of the topic. This will make comprehension easier later on.
- 3. Don't read the text but go to the end of the chapter or paragraph where som questions on the text's main topics are usually listed.
- 4. Read the first question.
- 5. Take a highlighter and highlight the answer to this question.
- 6. Find the key word. To find it, think of the word, word + adjective, image, word + image... that remind you of the answer found.
- 7. Take a pencil and write or draw the words and/or images you have found in the text margin.
- 8. Read the second question at the end of the text and proceed in the same way.
- 9. At the end you will have all the key words listed at the text margin and starting from these you can begin to build the map.
- 10. Choose the type of map you prefer and find more congenial (mind map or concept map).



This is a "mind map". At its centre is the main "concept". The related subtopics are developed around this, each connected to the centre by a line. Other "little branches" may also leave from these branches...



This is the "concept map". It is more useful to represent topics/concepts that involve a temporal evolution.

It will seem like a lot of work for you at first, but if you do it each time, straight after your teacher's explanation of the topic, you will reach the exam/test day already knowing nearly everything, and revision will be quick and easy.

http://www.learningfundamentals.com.au/wp-content/uploads/health-map.jpg http://www.biologycorner.com/worksheets/introduction\_conceptmap.html#.UrQXTfTuKls

#### 4.8.8 Test and evaluation

In the phases of test and evaluation, it is important that the teacher keeps to the following guidelines:

- Evaluate the content more than the formal aspects.
- Consider mainly what students know and not what they don't know.
- Supply a copy of the tests for successive reflection and awareness of possible mistakes.
- Avoid open questions requiring an answer written in the FL.
- Allow the use of necessary compensatory tools (maps, tables, digital dictionaries...) during the tests.

If the test is oriented towards comprehension of a text in the foreign language or towards the acquisition of contents in the foreign, it is necessary to:

- Allow written answers in the language of instruction
- Supply multiple-choice test items
- Supply True/False test items

# 4.9 Practical recommendations

# 4.9.1 Recommendations for primary/elementary school

Teaching an additional language (FL) in primary/elementary school is a complex task, especially when the class contains foreign pupils who have not yet acquired minimal skills in the language of instruction.

The teaching activity is more effective if based on a ludic, multi-sensory approach to linguistic learning (see par. 4.8.1). Especially where the class contains pupils with dyslexia, an approach that involves the senses, movement, images, mime, singing etc. becomes fundamental, since it plays on the child's joy and motivation in learning, and fosters implicit learning.

It is also very important to focus the teaching exclusively on oral use of the language, especially if the pupils have not had the opportunity at infant school to come into contact with the language to be learnt even in the form of nursery rhymes, songs, games etc...

Introducing the written form of the language should generally be avoided at least until the children have acquired minimum vocabulary and the ability to produce simple everyday phrases. Also, especially in the course of the first year, it is important not to request written use of the FL until the pupils have acquired adequate skills at the level of decoding, comprehension and written production in the language used in the educational context (that is, the mother tongue for autochthonous learners, or L2 for immigrant children).

This does not mean that the written channel is to be excluded. As Daloiso (2009) writes, "The written form does offer the pupil a further possibility of anchorage on which to play for memorising" (p. 41). However it should not be demanded at primary school3. It is essential to focus on oral communication as much as possible as this will permit the implicit acquisition of both vocabulary and some basic elements of grammar.

It is important that, from the very beginning, children are trained in the pronunciation of sounds in the new language (as already pointed out in paragraph 4.3.1) and are made to understand that the words must be pronounced correctly so as to avoid misunderstandings. Exercises and games aimed at helping the pupils form correspondence between the perceived new sounds and the mental representation of the articulatory movements necessary for their reproduction will therefore be useful.

Approaches to be considered when teaching languages in elementary/primary school, especially in classes containing plurilingual pupils and/or pupils with dyslexia (which are nowadays very common), are the Total Physical Response (see par. 4.8.2), Format Approach, Sorytelling and, as already hinted at, all the playful techniques, examples of which can be found in the Appendix. It should be emphasised that these techniques and approaches are considered effective for all students, in that they guarantee a teaching action appropriate to all learning styles, and are therefore inclusive.

# 4.9.2 Recommendations for lower secondary school

The recommendations suggested for teaching FLs in elementary school are also valid for secondary school the lower/middle level.

However it is necessary to bear in mind that, as already hinted at in paragraph 4.5, this phase introduces maturational changes that affect the implicit memory, which consequently plays a less important role in language learning. In this phase, then, it can be useful to bolster the learning activities oriented to implicit learning with an explicit reflection on the grammar of the language.

It is of course important that teaching is based on content which will keep the students' motivation high so it should be related to their interests, needs and experiences.

Especially when the classes contain students with dyslexia and/or multilingual immigrant students, it is important to use multi-sensory activities (see par 4.8.1 and Appendix) as well as cooperative activities (see par 4.8.3 and Appendix).

The latter may be particularly effective at the relational level too, in that they create a situation in which students must collaborate to reach a common goal. In this way, they are driven to feel responsible, value everyone's contribution and support each other by reciprocally compensating for possible weak points.

Cooperative techniques, generally oriented to an oral use of language and to the development of a communicative competence, can if well planned, be particularly motivating and effective.

# 4.9.3 Recommendation for upper secondary school

The recommendations made for lower secondary school are also valid for upper secondary school. Teaching activities must be motivating, involve students in a multi-sensory and global way, include elements of play and be primarily focussed on the oral use of language and the development of communicative skills. It is important to make use of co-operative activities and activities which aim at the development of multi-cultural skills, especially in classes containing immigrant students with additional languages and/or dyslexia.

Implicit learning should generally prevail, though it can be useful to bolster it with explicit explanations especially concerning grammar. In this phase of schooling, more attention will be devoted to written language and students will be expected to read literary texts or texts containing cultural information. In the case of students with dyslexia, it is then useful for the teacher to introduce the use of cognitive maps (see par. 4.8.7 and Box 4.9), both as a tool to use in class to explain and facilitate comprehension of new content and as a strategy the students can use autonomously in home study. To reach this latter goal, it will be important for the teacher to explain to the students how to construct personalised maps, supplying them with the indications listed in the Box 4.9.

## 4.9.4 Dyslexia-friendly text

In the choice of textbook or in the preparation of paper materials to hand to their dyslexic pupils, the teacher must pay attention to the typographical characters, layout and paper used, so as to avoid additional barriers for those who are already having difficulty decoding.

The characters used must:

- be sans serif
- have very clear upper and lower cases
- present signs differentiating letters that are mirrored (b, d, p, q) or graphically similar (a, e, o, t, f)
- have a font size of 12-14 typographical points

PRINTING IN UPPER CASE should not be used for more than 5 consecutive lines, as the readability level will then drop significantly. The reasons are as follows:

- 1. the capital letters, that are useful for marking the beginning of the sentence, are lost (although this problem can be partially overcome with the use of CAPS)
- 2. readability depends on being used to a certain type of character and most printed material use small letters
- 3. the characters are differentiated less from each other: since they are all upper case, there is no shape contrast, as there are no multiple adjacent edges at the top and bottom of each word (see example below).



#### Layout must follow the following criteria:

- ensure that the line length is around 13 cm (60-70 characters)
- use a 1.5-line spacing
- ensure that text is left justified with a ragged right edge (so that each bullet point has an active verb).
- don't divide a word between the end of one line and the start of the next. This can cause great problems for people with dyslexia as they may end up with two separate words which do not belong to their mental lexicon.

- preferably subdivide the text into short paragraphs, separated by a blank space
- leave wide margins framing the printed area, as they are useful for transcribing key words, taking notes etc.
- use bold type and not underlining to highlight important parts of the text.
- use listed points instead of dense blocks of text.
- include in boxes the parts of the text you wish to emphasise.

### The paper used must be:

- not white, but of a very soft pastel colour
- opaque and not glossy
- weighing at least 80-90 g/m2

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#### **APPENDIX**

# **Examples of practical activities**

This section will list a series of activities devised especially for dyslexic pupils but which are appropriate for all types of learners. Many of these activities can be useful for students of different age groups and school grades. For this reason they are listed in this paragraph, along with indications of the age range and didactic goal for which they were created.

N°		Activity	Area	Goal	Age range	
			Phonetics/	Recognise new	Elementary/primary school	
1		Spot the sound	Phonology	sounds	Lower secondary school	
					Upper secondary school	
	1. The teacher introduces a new sound and gets the class to listen to it repeatedly.					
	The sound may be produced by the teacher, or a recorded version can be					
	provided (see the links)					
	2.	The teacher prono	unces a series	of words. The stude	ents have to recognise the	

words containing the sound just introduced..

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range		
2	Noises and sounds	Phonetics/	Memorise and	Elementary/primary school		
	Noises and sounds	Phonology	reproduce new	Lower secondary school		
			sounds	Upper secondary school		
1	1. The teacher introdu	uces a sound, g	gets the children to	listen to it repeatedly and		
	explains the articul	ation moveme	nts involved.			
2	<ol><li>The teacher asks th</li></ol>	e pupils to try	to reproduce the se	ound.		
3	<ol><li>To foster memorisa</li></ol>	To foster memorisation of the sound, the teacher asks the students to associate				
	it with a noise, an animal noise, an onomatopaeic sound, etc					
1	<ol> <li>The teacher offers to</li> </ol>	The teacher offers the class feedback on the "noise" which mostly closely				
	resembles the sour	nd introduced.				

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
3	Rainbow writing	Spelling and Vocabulary	Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language	Elementary/primary school

- 1. The child is given a laminated 'tram-lines' sheet and is reminded of the spelling rule/pattern or the tricky word and any memory anchor linked to the target word.
- 2. The teacher/teaching assistant says the target word that they want the pupil to write (eg 'rain') and show them the written word. The teacher and pupil say the letter names and the word out loud (eg r-a-i-n, rain).
- 3. The child repeats the letter names and the word out loud (eg r-a-i-n, rain) while writing it on the tram-line.
- 4. The teacher/TA corrects the spelling as necessary and reinforces the correct spelling with any relevant rules or memory tricks.
- 5. The child says the word out loud and writes it again. (S)he then writes on top of the word four times, using four different-coloured pens.
- 6. The teacher/TA askes the child to write and say the word again with their eyes closed or to 'see' the word in their 'mind's eye' and spell it out.

It is important that the pupil uses cursive script to reinforce motor memory. Also, this activity works better if carried out in small groups and in the presence of a TA.

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
4	Form letters and words	Spelling and vocabulary	Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language Broaden lexicon	Elementary/primary

This activity uses a multi-sensory approach and focuses on the memorisation of vocabulary and improving spelling accuracy. This technique will be particularly useful in the case of students with dyslexia.

- 1. The teacher asks the children to form, with a material like plasticine, the object corresponding to the word he/she wants to teach.
- 2. He/she then asks them to form, still with plasticine, the single letters which make up the word.
- 3. He/she asks the child to close their eyes and touch the single letters formed, first from left to right, then from right to left, and again from left to right (it is important that the teacher ensures the last time the child touches the letters he does so in the correct direction). This process will help the child to form a mental representation of the written word corresponding to the object.
- 4. The teacher asks the child to try the *spelling* of the word without looking at the letters.

Below is a possible representation of the word 'Auto', the Italian word for



N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
	Perceive sounds	Phonetics/	Reproduce new	Elementary/primary school
5	physically	phonology	sounds correctly	Lower secondary school
				Upper secondary school

This exercise is useful for helping the student "physically perceive" (Daloiso, 2011) the new language's sounds, so as to notice if his/her pronunciation is correct or not. The following example relates to Italian-speaking students learning English

- 1. The teacher introduces a sound, for example the aspirate "h" in English. He/she lets students listen to the sound repeatedly and explains the articulatory movements involved.
- 2. The teacher asks the pupils to try to reproduce the sound.
- 3. The teacher asks the students to place their hand in front of the mouth and try to pronounce a series of words like "home", "hope", "hot", etc.... He/she will explain that, if the pronunciation of the aspirated consonant is correct, the student will perceive the blow of air from the mouth on the palm of the hand. The same thing can be done using a sheet of paper placed in front of the mouth. If the pronunciation of the aspirated consonant is correct, the blow of air will make the paper move forward.
- 4. Still using a sheet of paper, the teacher may introduce the aspirated occlusive consonants at the start of an English word. In words like "pan" or "pot", the "p" sound is at the beginning of a word and is followed by a vowel. In cases like this, the "p" sound is always followed by an aspiration. The same does not happen in

So, to highlight the difference in pronunciation of these sounds with regard to the same consonants at the start of Italian words, the teacher can ask students to pronunce in succession words such as "pan" and "pane", or "top" and "topo". If the pronunciation of the English words is correct, the sheet of paper will move forward when "pan" and "top" are pronounced.

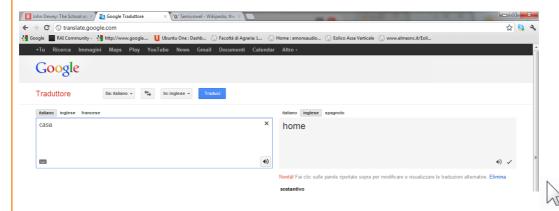
N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
6	Graphic dictation	Vocabulary Phonetics/ phonology	Exercise oral comprehension. Memorise lexicon	Elementary/primary

- 1. The teacher pronounces a word and the pupils must draw it.
- 2. The same word may be further specified, for example with adjectives: 1) Dog; 2) White dog; 3) White dog with a black tail.
- 3. The teacher may help comprehension by miming if necessary.

This activity can have different variants: for example, for practising prepositions of place, the teacher can describe a whole picture and the students have to draw it. Alternatively, the students could work in pairs. One person in each pair has a picture and they have to describe it to their partner.

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
9	Listen and repeat	Phonetics/ phonology	Train pronunciation	Elementary/primary school

In order to practise pronunciation the teacher may use vocal synthesis software like for example the multi-lingual vocal synthesis associated with Google Translate. To hear the pronunciation of the desired word all you do is click with the mouse on the lower right icon as indicated in figure 5.1 There are however various online dictionaries with associated vocal synthesis.



It is a good idea to remember that Google Translate, like other similar software, can be a great tool to use for the goal just described, though it must be used with caution as a translator of complex sentences, despite the improvements added to the latest versions. Meanwhile it can be used simply but effectively as a translator of single words. Certain continuous or non-continuous voice recognition software may also be useful. "Dragon naturally speaking" is an example of the former although it is not available free of charge. Google Crome is an example of the latter.

These tools may be very useful for improving pronunciation, as demonstrated in the experiment carried out by Sugata Mitra in India starting from 1999: Prof. Mitra, professor in Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Science of the University of Newcastle (UK), elaborated the "Hall in the wall" project. One of the goals of this project was to improve the English pronunciation of Indian children. Playing on their natural curiosity, he placed public computers (kiosks) over various parts of India. These computers could be used to practise the language and were equipped with software for continuous voice recognition. Children were able to "dictate" brief phrases to the computer and check how accurate their pronunciation was. Noticeable improvements were registered within just a few months. For further details please refer to the following link.( http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com/).

The software used by S. Mitra is "Dragon Naturally speaking", which is available in various languages but is not free.

There is however less sophisticated but free software that can be used for the same goal. It may be necessary to match vocal synthesis software (the google translator may perform satisfactorily for this goal) to a voice recognition (speech-to-text) software like

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
7	Cooperative Learning - Jigsaw	Oral and written comprehension	Improving oral and written comprehension, enrich vocabulary	Lower secondary school Upper secondary school

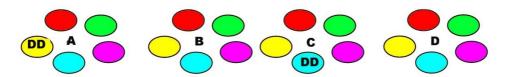
For this activity allow at least two hours.

Imagining a class of 20 students, the teacher will divide the class into heterogeneous groups, each containing 5 people. The teacher will identify a leader for each group. The students will be organised into a circle within each group. The groups will be as far as possible from each other.

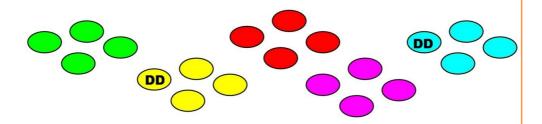
The teacher will propose a written comprehension activity based on everyday habits, preferences and tastes of a successful singer popular with young people.

1. The teacher will divide the text into 5 parts, each regarding one of the following topics: 1. What the singer does on week days; 2. What he/she does in his free time; 3. What he/she does at the weekend; 4. What he/she likes to eat/drink/wear; 5. What his tastes are in music/cinema/...

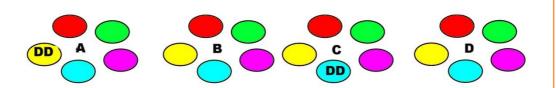
Each person in a group will receive a different part of the text from the teacher and will have time to read it... The teacher will ensure that the students concentrate on their own part of the text and will not look at other parts.



2. All the students who had the same part of the text will form a group and will discuss the topic among themselves. They will get ready to present it to the other members of their original group.



3. Each student will then return to his own jigsaw group and present the topic of their own text part to the partners. The teacher will encourage the latter to formulate questions and ask for explanations, and will try to intervene only when necessary, to facilitate interaction.



4. Finally, the teacher will hand all the students a photocopy with a multiple-choice exercise based on the whole text and each student must complete it individually.

If the class includes students with dyslexia, the teacher may find appropriate (depending on the student's need) to exempt them from reading the text, as in phase 2 they will learn the information in their part of the text from their partners. From that moment on they will participate in the activity as described above.

In this case co-operation will become particularly significant, and if the teacher has adequately worked with the class to create a good inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, the activity will certainly proceed smoothly.

If you prefer not to use the text, the same type of activity may be done by watching a film, a cartoon or video. In this case it will be necessary for the class to have at its disposal a computer for each *jigsaw* group.

Let's imagine using a 90' video divided into 5 sequences. The first 4 will be 20 minutes each, the last (the final part of the film) will be10'.

In phase 1 of the activity, groups A, B, C, D will watch film sequences 1, 2, 3, 4 respectively. In phase 2, each expert group component will tell the others about the part of the video it was able to see. In phase 3, each student will return to its own jigsaw group knowing what happens in the video up to minute 80. At this point the teacher asks the students to imagine the end (the activity could be particularly fun if done, for example, with a thriller movie).

Each jigsaw group elaborates its own hypothesis and then everybody watches the last part of the film.

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
8	Words in your mind	Spelling Vocabulary Semantics	Improving the skill of creating mental representation of an abstract concept  Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language  Broaden vocabulary	Elementary/ primary school

The "Form letters and words" exercise is a multi-sensory activity and can be used for working with words/abstract concepts. This exercies will be particularly useful for those dyslexic children who have difficulties with text comprehension and find it hard to create mental representations of words and concepts. Some of them, being visual thinkers, may struggle with abstract words where the meaning is not immediately linked to an image; others, with even greater difficulties in mental representation, may have problems with both abstract and concrete words.

- 1. The teacher asks the children to form, with a material like plasticine, an abstract concept (change, intelligence, consequence, via, while, now, before, after...).
- 2. He/she then asks them to form, still with plasticine, the individual letters (from which the word is composed) corresponding to the concept.
- 3. He/she asks the child to close their eyes and touch the single letters formed, first from left to right, then from right to left, and again from left to right (it is important that the teacher ensures the last time the child touches the letters he/she does so in the correct direction). This process will help the child to form a mental representation of the written word corresponding to the object.
- 4. The teacher asks the child to try the *spelling* of the word without looking at the letters.

Below is a possible representation of the word 'cambiamento' ('cambiamento' in italian means 'change'):





N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
9	Back to the board game	Vocab ulary	Broaden lexicon by revising newly learnt words	Any

The teacher asks for 2 volunteers to stand with their backs to the board.

The class is divided into 2. Half the class works with Volunteer A and half with Volunteer B.

The teacher writes a newly learnt word on the board. The volunteers are not allowed to look at the word.

The class shouts out clues and the volunteers try to guess the word.

The volunteer who correctly guesses the word first scores a point for their team.

**NB** You need to know your students quite well and should avoid selecting a student with severe word retrieval difficulties as one of the volunteers (unless they really want to volunteer and will not be upset if they cannot guess the word on the board).

You can do this at all levels. Some nouns and adjectives may be relatively easy to define but it gets interesting when you put up words such as 'carefully', 'thoughtlessness' or 'doubt'. It also encourages the class to think about the different parts of speech when they are providing clues.

N°	Activity	Area	Goal	Age range
11	Sentence Auction	Grammar Oral comprehen sion	Encouraging students to recognise errors in their own writing and to learn from each other.	Any

- 1. Collect some examples of mistakes made by students in recent writing activities. (Be sensitive – don't select ones that easily identifiable and/or might make someone feel awkward). Also include a number of sentences with no error.
- 2. Divide the class into teams of 4 or 5 students.
- 3. Ask them to go through the sentences and decide which they think are correct and which contain an error. Move round the class ensuring that everyone is trying to participate.
- **4.** Tell the students that they have €100 to spend and that the winning team will be the team that buys the most correct sentences.
- 5. Play the role of the auctioneer if you have a hammer, all the better! Introduce each sentence and encourage the students to buy it. If more than one team wants to buy it, then they have to bid. The team that offers more money will receive the sentence.
- 6. Follow this procedure for all the sentences and keep a note of which sentences were bought by which team. Ensure that teams do not spend more than €100!
- 7. Go through the sentences in turn, generating discussion about possible errors and providing clarification where necessary.
- 8. Congratulate the winning team.

**Examples** of sentences used with a group of Polish students:

- A wedding in Poland is very important celebration.
- Before leaving home, the young couple is receiving a blessing from their parents.
- On the first day, the ceremony takes place in the bride's house.
- The young couple is getting married in the church or in the registry office.

N°	Attività	Area	Scopo	Fascia d'età
12	Cuisenaire rods.	Vocabulary Grammar Oral productiono n	Broaden vocabulary and develop oral production.	Elementary/ primary school

Cuisenaire's rods can be used in different kinds of activities related to language learning. Cuisenaire's rods are ten sticks of different colours (white, red, light green, pink, yellow, dark green, black, brown, blue and orange) and length (the orange stick is ten times longer than the white one). In L2/FL teaching you can, for example, use rods to introduce colours.

The teacher shows a rod saying its colour, lowers it and raises it up again. A student is then asked to repeat the colour he heard and so on with the other colours. Students who say the colour correctly gets the rod as a point marker. The sentence may be made more complex with the construction article-adjective-noun ("a red rod"). When students have become familiar with the linguistic structure, this can be expanded to a full sentence ("It's a red rod"). Then the teacher can practice the plural ("These are blue rods"), integrating numbers, if students already know them ("They are two light-green rods"). The teacher needs to decide the degree of difficulty of sentences and evaluates their correctness - when a student makes a grammatical or pronunciation mistake, the teacher can call another student or say the correct phrase, then ask for it to be repeated. The rods can be used to create objects (a clock to practice the time) or situations (a house to describe the parts of the house or the daily routines). The rods can also be used to practice the comparatives and the superlatives of adjectives ("The white rod is shorter than the red rod"; "The orange rod is the longest rod"). You can also use the demonstrative pronouns ("This is a white rod"). This technique may be used to visually represent the syntax of a sentence, by associating to each rod a certain grammar element. Rods can then be moved or switched to help the student say sentences in a correct way.

In this kinds of activities the teacher should try and talk very little and let the students work as independently as possible, intervening only when really necessary.

(Activity suggested by Daniela Polidoro, language teacher who participated in the Swiss pilot course.)

#### **Useful links:**

- https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/cuisenaire-rods-language-classroom
- <a href="http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-">http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-</a> materials/using-cuisenaire-rods-with-young-learners/155710.article
- http://john.mullen.pagesperso-orange.fr/cuisenaire.htm
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOpZzsFfDtg

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# Language learning and dyslexia in the multilingual society

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