INTRODUCTION

The publication of the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolios (ELP) has led to the creation of new outcomes-based curricula in many European countries.

Many secondary school teachers still struggle with this shift of paradigm and do not really know how they could foster their learners’ language competence in a foreign language. Since teachers can’t know what they don’t know, they need a map in order to walk new paths and a reflection tool which helps them recognise which aspects they need to pay more attention to in their teaching.

MY QUESTION: What are the most crucial aspects in language teaching which would allow the majority of language learners to reach the required competence levels in listening, speaking, reading and writing?

LITERATURE SEARCH

I began a literature search and tried to cover the most important areas which are relevant to the secondary school language classroom:

• research in second language acquisition (e.g. Ellis, 2008a, 2008b)
• language teaching methodology (e.g. Willis & Willis, 2007; Arnold & Murphey, 2013; Goh & Burns, 2012)
• publications on neuroscience (e.g. Zull, 2002)
• Hattie’s ground-breaking collection of evidence-based research into what actually works in schools to improve learning. (e.g. Hattie & Yates, 2014)

MY FINDINGS:

SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE TEACHING

Successful language teaching and learning at school needs to be organic and sustainable. It can’t be successful, if it works against the laws of nature and does not take the evidence of research into account.

... NEEDS TO BE ORGANIC

• It is informed by how languages are actually learned as demonstrated by second language acquisition research (e.g. importance of input before output, the importance of formulaic language, the fact that learner language has its own syllabus, the role of feedback).
• It develops the whole person (self- and social competence, L2 language competence).
• It pays attention to the individual learner’s abilities and needs.
• It takes the social nature of language into account and thus the dynamics of the language class as a group.

... AND SUSTAINABLE

• It is formative in nature and focuses on growth and development.
• It builds on prior knowledge and skills.
• It focuses on deep learning and develops the learners’ long-term memory and fluency in language use.
• It nurtures and fosters the learners’ motivation and creates opportunities for everybody to be successful (differentiation).

11 ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE TEACHING

1. Develop self-efficacy and self-competence.
2. Develop a supportive learning environment, group dynamics and social competence.
3. Provide inspiring topics and tasks and develop thinking skills.
4. Start with meaning-focused input – develop reading and listening skills and strategies.
5. Support the acquisition of lexis and formulaic language.
7. Develop meaning-focused output and scaffold speaking and writing.
8. Focus on form and develop learner language.
9. Develop memory and fluency in language use, teach learners how to learn.
10. Use formative teaching and assessment and foster growth.
11. Celebrate diversity and foster learner autonomy.

TOOLS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Questionnaire

How organic and sustainable is my language teaching? Self-evaluation or reflection tool to locate areas of improvement in language teaching (11 aspects, 4 questions each, total of 44 questions).

Book (work in progress)

Tool for teachers to learn more about their areas of interest and directions for development. Each chapter contains
• a brief outline of the topic summarising the most important factors,
• a few sample activities for the classroom,
• a list of references with helpful literature.

FEEDBACK AND FURTHER INFORMATION

• What do you think about my project?
• Would you have any questions or suggestions?
• Would you want to try the questionnaire?

Please contact ursula.schaer@fhnw.ch

THANK YOU!