



Bryce Hedstrom

CSU Student Questions

Guest Lecturer in the course of Frederique Grimm, PhD.

EDUC-462-001: Methods and Assessment in Teaching Languages

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These are some insightful questions. They show that you are thinking deeply about our discussion and how you would apply the ideas in your teaching. I have categorized your questions in order to address topics more fully. As I mentioned last time, my task is to explain CI methods clearly. Your task is to let me know if I am doing that or not. When my explanations below are not clear, please let me know.

REVIEW

This is a short video by Steve Kaufmann, a true polyglot and leader in enjoying and explaining language acquisition. His recent musings here support the MANIAC acronym we discussed last time: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AvgL1xPbol>

Here are links to the acronyms for the hypotheses and practical applications we discussed last time:

[MANIAC](#) (Stephen Krashen's hypotheses of language acquisition)

[SCRIMP](#) (Practical teaching practices based on SLA theory)

YOUR FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

GRAMMAR

"I am wondering how you are able to transition from very little grammar to more grammar at higher levels without fossilization."



It seems to me that fossilization happened more frequently when I taught with grammar-driven syllabi. I think it was because students were getting the grammar in lock-step, rather than as they were ready for it.

If CI teachers are doing it right, there are all kinds of grammar elements embedded in the messages being communicated back and forth in class. There is no holding back from using grammar naturally. Independent reading helps with this too.

To prevent fossilization, use language naturally, but check for comprehension often. Students cannot just nod their heads and pretend they get it.



Put individuals on the spot and ask differentiated comprehension check questions:

- 1) What did I just say? (Slower students).
- 2) What the difference is between ... [two similar forms of words]. (Average students)
- 3) Form new sentences. (Faster students)

“How do you address important grammar, like conjugating, without focusing on it too much?”

By not over-emphasizing grammar and using it to communicate rather than to study. You are using the language to talk about interesting topics in a comprehensible way. You do this by sheltering vocabulary, not grammar. That is, you need to protect students from too many unknown words, but use grammar naturally, just as you would with a child:

With children, we would not hesitate to communicate with simple vocabulary and what language teachers would consider complex grammar:

Parent: *What did Momma say? She said, ‘Eat your vegetables.’ I would like you to eat your vegetables, too. Do you remember what we talked about? I told you that if you hadn’t finished eating your vegetables by the time the rest of the family had eaten, you wouldn’t be able to have any ice cream. So, what would you like to do? Have you decided what you’re going to do yet? Will you be eating your vegetables or not? I hope you do, because I want to go eat some ice cream with you.*

3 ½ year-old child: *< Completely understanding the simple high-frequency vocabulary and also the multiple verb moods and tenses, pushes the plate away and begins to cry. >*

That is sheltering vocabulary, not grammar. And it happens all the time with natural language use. Sheltering vocabulary is using high-frequency vocabulary with complex grammar in a compelling message. You can do it with just a few high-frequency verbs and nouns, but all kinds of verb tenses and moods in the grammar.

Just as we would not prevent a child from hearing complex grammar, we need not shy away from using the appropriate grammar when the meaning can be clear to novice level students due to context and similar sound/meaning pairing of words—especially when it adds to the flow of the message.

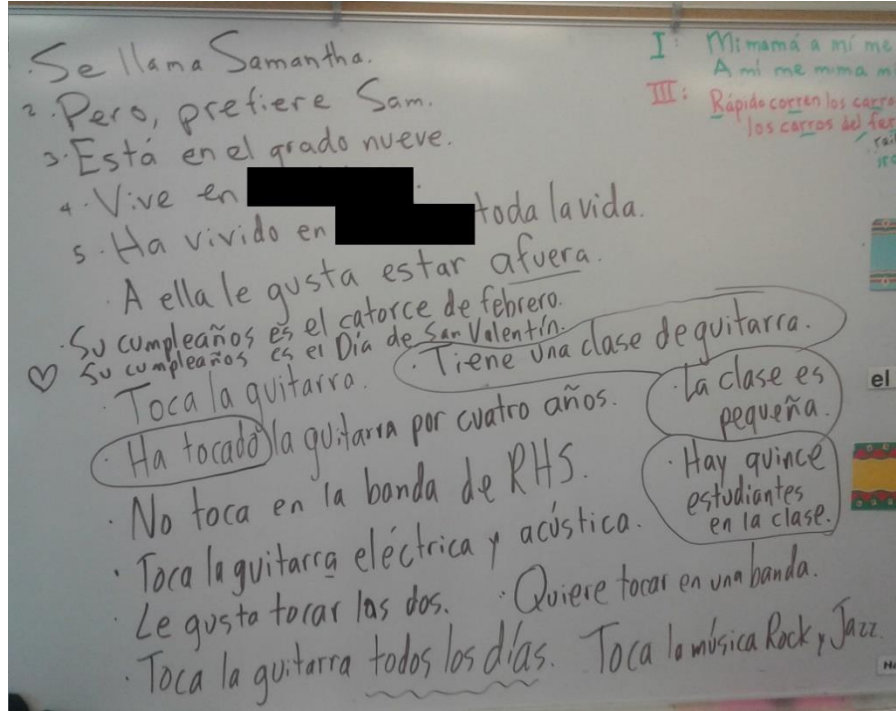
(Excerpt from [Hi-Impact Reading Strategies](#), by Bryce Hedstrom, 2021)

You can also introduce conjugation by using it horizontally in a meaningful way. Here is an example from a level 1 *Special Person* interview in November.

3rd Person

This was the second interview of a shy student. It was in late November in a Spanish 1 class. In her first interview, in September, we only got through the first five statements below. She seemed reluctant to talk more, so I stopped that first interview, and said we'd come back to her sometime.

Several weeks later, we got back to her. Students in the class came up with the first 5 sentences from their memories of that first interview. The rest are from this interview with her. It started slowly. When asked what she liked to do, she replied with a dry (but in Spanish): **"I like to be outside."** That is a nothing answer—there was nothing personal in it—flat tone, no sparkle, no pride. I wondered if the interview might need to be cut short again.



But it finally took off when I asked what *else* she liked to do: **¿Qué más te gusta hacer?** She tried to nonchalantly say that she played the guitar, but something in her voice gave her away. Finally! A topic that allowed for some interesting follow-up questions! It also turned out that this topic gave her **an opportunity to display excellence**—she was taking a guitar class, but she practiced 2 to 3 hours a day. Nobody practices that much just to go through the motions to get a credit. Clearly, playing the guitar was something she loved. She played so much, in fact, that she had callouses on the fingertips of her left hand. That's dedication. We were in the presence of potential greatness. This is what we are looking for in *Persona Especial* interviews: **passion, pride, uniqueness, commitment, and/or excellence**—something that allows each student to tell their story. Here it is in English:

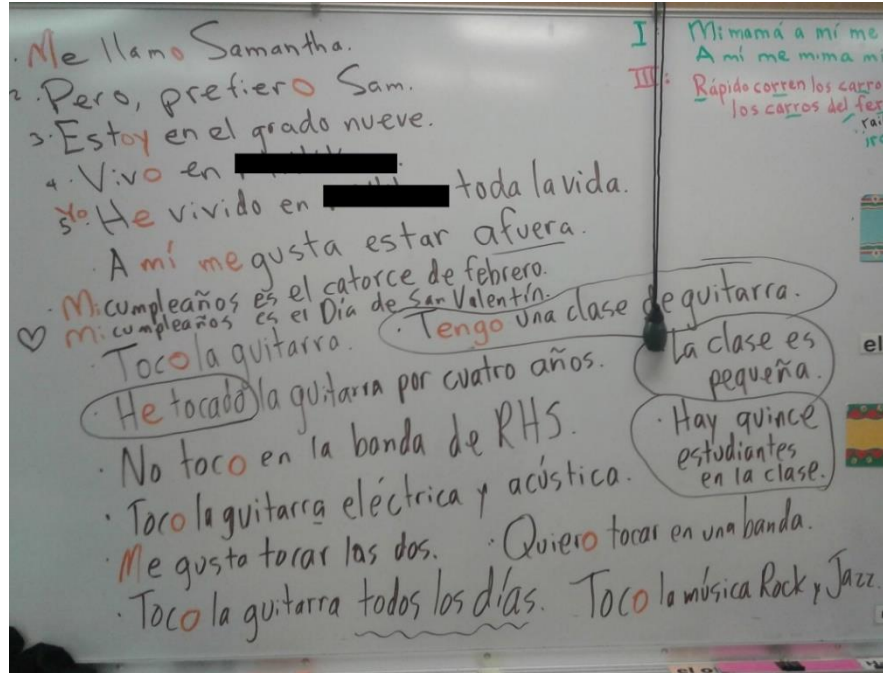
*Her name is Samantha.
But she prefers Sam.
She is in grade nine.
She lives in _____.
She has lived in _____ her whole life.
She likes to be outside.
Her birthday is February 14th.
Her birthday is on Valentine's Day.
She plays the guitar.
She has a guitar class.*

*The class is small.
There are 15 students in the class.
She has played the guitar for four years.
She does not play in the band at RHS.
She plays the electric guitar and the acoustic guitar.
She likes to play both of them.
She wants to play in a band.
She plays the guitar every day.
She plays rock and jazz music.*

The only three words that a couple of students did not recognize in this interview were **afuera** (outside), **ha tocado** (has played) and **todos los días** (every day). Sam, the interviewee, only needed help with **afuera**.

Changing to 1st Person

Occasionally, it helps to be sure all students are clear on the difference between the third person and the first person. This would get old if it were done for every single interview, so don't do that, but in this case, it was set up by saying, "Class, wouldn't it be a shame if Sam flunked the quiz on her own self tomorrow? How could that happen? How will Sam need to change these sentences in order for her answers to make sense tomorrow? For example, can she write 'Her name is Samantha?'"



Students gave the changes and the teacher made the adjustments on the whiteboard. Students volunteered the changes and the teacher wrote them out. Most of the changes to the first person were minor. Those minor changes were highlighted in a different color. This is not done every time a student is interviewed, but it can help if some students are fuzzy on new verb forms, or if there is a new student in the class.

*My name is Samantha.
 But I prefer Sam.
 I am in grade nine.
 I live in _____.
 I have lived in _____ my whole life.
 I like to be outside.
 My birthday is February 14th.
 My birthday is on Valentine's Day.
 I play the guitar.
 I have a guitar class.*

*The class is small.
 There are 15 students in the class.
 I have played the guitar for four years.
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Excerpt from the forthcoming book [Special Person Student Interviews](#), by Bryce Hedstrom.



“How do you address common mistakes while maintaining a student's confidence?”

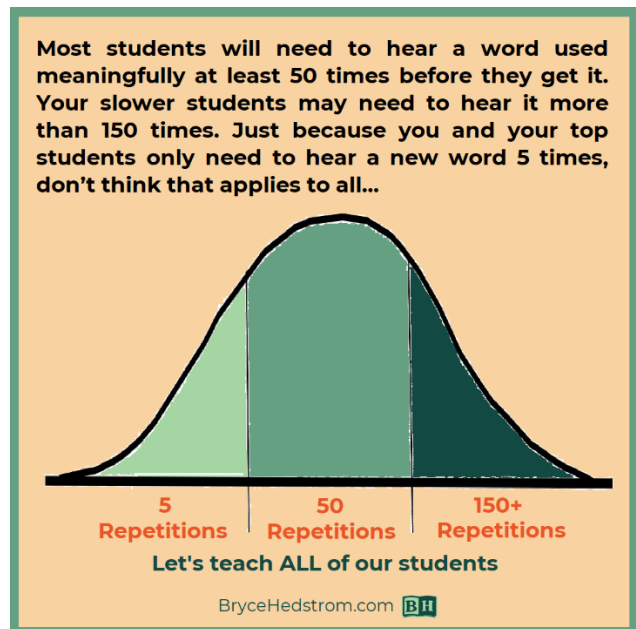
1) Restate with Correct Grammar and Word Use. I think the best pedagogical way is by restating mistakes with correct grammar while focusing on the message the student was trying to convey. This involves truly communicating with students, rather than correcting them. If you corrected the grammar of a child every time she made a mistake, she would rightfully quit talking to you. She would realize that you care only about your own agenda, and not at all what she wanted to talk about. The same thing happens with students. We want them to engage emotionally with the language through us. I believe that produces better and longer-lasting language acquisition results.

2) Comprehension Checks. You also ask many comprehension questions, targeting specific learner groups in the class: the slow, the average and the fast language acquirers.

3) Graceful Repetition. This is anecdotal, but it fits the experience of many language teachers I know: Slower students may need to hear a word used meaningfully 150 times before they get it.

Students acquire language at different rates. Natural language use can handle this if we are using high-frequency vocabulary. The trick is getting enough meaningful repetitions. Worksheets don't do that because lists of words do not always convey messages in a meaningful way. Human brains are designed to receive and send meaningful messages, not random lists of isolated words—a list of 50 fruits and vegetables does not carry much meaning.

The chart is anecdotal, but fits with my experience and that of many teachers I know.



4) Treat Students with Respect and Care. Call attention to their mistake indirectly. Let them save face. Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise. Give students a positive reputation to live up to. Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct. Don't criticize, condemn or complain. Give honest and sincere appreciation when students put forth effort.

Each of the above statements are adapted from one of the best books for teachers to read: *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie.

“What do you think about handouts? Do you think they are helpful? Do they get old?”

Handouts that explain grammar can be helpful to us language nerds. But we need to recognize that we are abnormal. People that enjoy and appreciate grammar are probably just 5% or so of the population. Most students do not care about grammar or understand it



well, at least consciously. On a subconscious level, their minds can process the grammar if they are provided with enough interesting comprehensible input.

In higher level courses and with older students, handouts explaining grammar can be helpful to give them confidence and allay nagging questions about how the language functions. In beginning courses and with children younger than middle school, grammar explanations and drills are not helpful. And even with more advanced and older students they do not increase fluency. Grammatical explanations are interesting and useful to students that wish to pursue further study in linguistics or pursue degrees in the language—but that is a small percentage of students.

Grammatical explanations and vocabulary drills do not help students to speak fluently

Handouts to “practice” the language are not always useful. Using handouts to check what students recognize can be valuable information for the instructor to alter the emphasis in some parts of the course if students are not getting pieces.

Hopefully I answered you question. Were you thinking of different kind of handouts, or a different use for them?

SPEAKING

“Since forced output is not accepted in the CI approach, can a student end up not participating orally in a course at all at the end of the semester?”

The idea of forced output must be nuanced. Students should be given opportunities to speak at every level. Even in the first days of level 1, students have the opportunity to speak and many will want to.

The trouble comes when we ask students to speak at a level that is above their ability. It makes students feel inadequate—like they don’t get it and never will.

Most students will willingly speak up in the language. The teacher needs to be aware of the expected output at each level—not the course level, but the acquisition level.

“In lessons taught using CI the teacher is usually the protagonist of the class. How can we make CI more student-centered?”

I agree that the teacher should not just stand up front and talk all, day every day. But also keep in mind that nothing is more student-centered than making sure students understand the language. This is done by regular and differentiated comprehension checks.

If by student-centered, you mean student-directed learning, a CI class is ideal. Self-Selected Reading and Special Person interviews do this to a high degree.

Expecting students to do most of the speaking in a language class provides poor input to the other students. That is a sure way to instill poor language habits in students.

A CI class is not just the teacher speaking all the time. Self-Selected Reading is vital too. This is the ultimate student-centered activity: Students pick what they want to read and read it.



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While students do free voluntary reading the teacher should be reading too—not grading papers or answering questions to the helpless hand wavers.



“Isn't it frustrating for students to not speak for a while? At early levels, since they are cognitively able? I am saying this as CI does not encourage speaking until the students are ready.”

Students have the opportunity to speak from the earliest days even in beginning courses. Shutting down student responses in the TL is misguided. Demanding that students not speak is not a good idea, in my opinion. Just because they are not forced to speak does not mean they may not speak in the TL.

In the few brief moments of learning new vocabulary with actions via TPR there is no need to speak, but shortly thereafter, students are answering questions with short answers, as is appropriate for novices.

In the demonstration in your class, we did not have time for me to model this.

PARTICIPATION

“What do you do when students don't understand or don't participate?”

“How do I get the less participative students involved?”

Regular, differentiated comprehension checks are what helps here. Do not just ask one kind of question. We will talk about techniques for doing this upon my next visit.

Communicative games can help. I'd stay away from drills disguised with technology. On days when you are exhausted or have a sub, they might be useful.



“How do you deal with ‘not making the student uncomfortable’ when calling them out to participate. is there an ‘acceptable’ level of ‘uncomfortableness’?”

Absolutely. It is ok for them to feel a bit uncomfortable, but not overwhelmingly uncomfortable. You need to be aware of the general aptitude for language of each student. Ask comprehension question to the slower students. Ask comparison questions to the average students (most of them). Challenge the faster students to creat with the language at above the course level—don’t let them coast.

COURSE STRUCTURE

“What does the first day of class looks like for different levels?”

Each class will get the “bookends,” how to begin and end class. Each class will get some content. Each class will have a quiz on that content tomorrow. This shows that we are serious about learning the language, not just goofing around. If there are school or class rules that need to be reviewed assign those as homework. Do not waste valuable class time on that.

Level 1, Day 1:

- “What is your name?” and, “What name do you prefer?” with 3 students.
- Quiz tomorrow on those three students. Teacher will point at them.
- Students will write *“Se llama...”* and *“Prefiere...”* for each.
- Teach password and explain how it works to enter class tomorrow.
- Explain the materials they will need—just a composition book and a pen.
- Explain that there will be a 5 question warm up on the board. They will need to finish it within 1-2 minutes after the late bell.
- Teach 3 high-frequency verbs with TPR: quiere, tiene, va
- Teach how to end class and practice it 3 times before class actually ends”

Teacher: ¿Clase?
 Students: ¿Sí, señor?
 Teacher: Gracias por aprender.
 Students: Gracias por enseñarnos.
 Teacher: El gusto es mío. Chao.

Level 2, Day 1:

- Ask 3 students to introduce themselves in the TL.
- Quiz tomorrow on those three students.
- Teach password and explain how it works to enter class tomorrow.
- Explain the materials they will need—just a composition book and a pen.
- Explain that there will be a 5 question warm up on the board. They will need to finish it within 1-2 minutes after the late bell.
- Teach how to end class and practice it 2 times before class actually ends”

Teacher: ¿Clase?
 Students: ¿Sí, señor?
 Teacher: Gracias por aprender.
 Students: Gracias por enseñarnos.
 Teacher: El gusto es mío. Chao.



Spanish 3, Day 1:

- Ask 3 students to tell us what they did during the summer in the TL.
- Quiz tomorrow on those three students.
- Teach password and explain how it works to enter class tomorrow.
- Explain the materials they will need—just a composition book and a pen.
- Explain that there will be a 5 question warm up on the board. They will need to finish it within 1-2 minutes after the late bell.
- Teach how to end class and practice it once before class actually ends”

Teacher: ¿Clase?
 Students: ¿Sí, señor?
 Teacher: Gracias por aprender.
 Students: Gracias por enseñarnos.
 Teacher: El gusto es mío. Chao.

Spanish 4-AP, Day 1:

- Ask 3 students why they are taking the class and what they hope to
- Get out of the class (In the TL).
- Get them talking about their future and give them the chance to use hypotheticals, to feel out where they are with their language skills and fluency.
- Quiz tomorrow on those three students.
- Teach password and explain how it works to enter class tomorrow.
- Explain the materials they will need—just a composition book and a pen.
- Explain that there will be a 5 question warm up on the board. They will need to finish it within 1-2 minutes after the late bell.
- Teach how to end class and practice it once before class actually ends”

Teacher: ¿Clase?
 Students: ¿Sí, señor?
 Teacher: Gracias por aprender.
 Students: Gracias por enseñarnos.
 Teacher: Ha sido mi honor. Chao.

Say that † to a group of seniors on the last day of class and there will not be a dry eye in the house.

“How do get away from an almost 50-50 class (English/L2) to the 90% encouraged by ACTFL? Is it just for oral?”

It is for speaking and reading. It can be done when you teach for acquisition. The 90% or more level can be reached, even in novice level classes in the first days. Here’s how:

1) **Comprehensible Input.** Realize that people acquire language by comprehensible input—by hearing messages in the target language that they can understand and getting a little more with each message. They do not acquire language by hearing explanations or “practicing” speaking. Speaking can help them feel like members of the club and can motivate them, but they will acquire language by hearing messages in the language that they can understand.



2) **High Frequency Vocabulary.** Begin teaching [essential verbs and valuable classroom verbs](#) in the third person singular with TPR right away.

3) **Expectations.** Explicitly tell the students [what they should expect from you](#) and what you expect from them: 90% or more target language. Also explain to them that people acquire language by understanding the language. If the classroom airwaves are clogged with English, less target language acquisition will be happening.

4) **Make it a Game.** Give a student a stop watch and the [classroom job](#) of counting how many minutes the class goes, teacher included, without speaking English. Write the number of minutes each class went speaking only the TL. Make it a competition between classes. Not for prizes or points, but for pride. This can help to train them to learn for learning's sake, not for a grade.

SPECIAL PERSON ACTIVITY/METHOD

“Would you speak a little bit more on the “Special Person” ideology? Would you pick students that are normally more talkative or students that hardly participate at all? How would it look like if a student doesn’t want to participate?”

Do not pick the talkative students—they are either needy or want to take over the class. Just go around the room, one-by-one.

Allow students to pass. Do not force a student to talk that does not want to. That is the surest way to kill the mojo in the class. When you make a student talk, it shows that it is your agenda and not theirs. It shows that you do not care at all to get to know them, that you just want to push your program and that you are just acting like you want to get to know them. Students can smell that. They will know you are a phony.

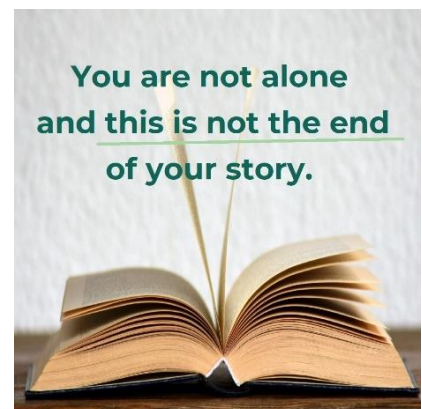
See below.

“Does it get ‘old’ to create and listen to the special person activity?”

If you do it poorly, yes. It is terribly boring if the teacher always goes straight down the list of questions with each interview. Don’t do that. Students have unique interests, talents and abilities. You are using *Persona Especial* questions to help discover those.

It does not get old if you are actually focusing on the students. I have had student ask if we could do it all day, every day, because they learn so much and because it is so interesting. That happens when you actually want to get to know students. Here are the pro tips that make it work:

1) Discover Their Story. Everyone has a story. When students trust you (and one another) they will freely elaborate on their stories. You will discover wonders in each one of them. Ask the common questions on the posters until a student shows enthusiasm. It may be a “lean in.” It may be something in the voice. It may be a twinkle in the



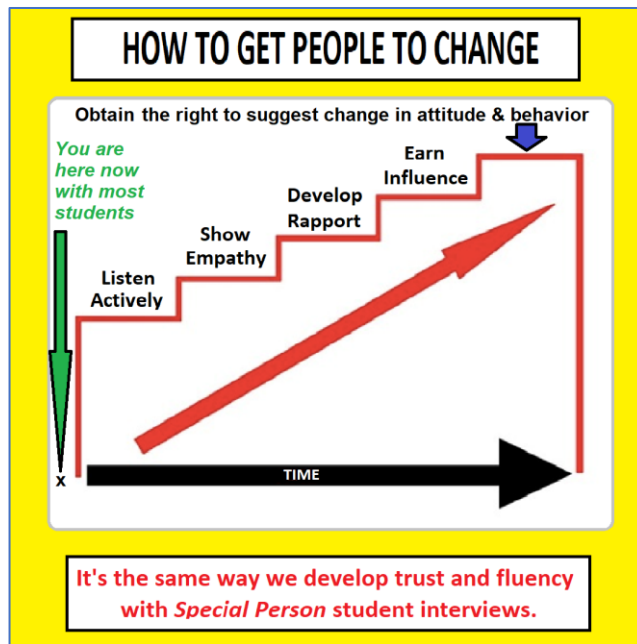


eye. When that happens, go after it. Keep following up. Keep asking questions as long as the mojo lasts.

2) Don't Interview Reluctant Students. Do not try to interview a student that does not want to talk. Allow students to pass. Go around the room alphabetically or, better, by the seating chart, and talk to the students that want to talk. If you go by the seating chart, you will be in about the same spot in each class and it will be easier to remember where you left off last time.

3) Don't Take Volunteers. Do not take volunteers, just go down the list or around the room. If you take volunteers, you will get the needy and unpopular kids that will kill the mojo—it will instantly become uncool. Worse yet with volunteers, the show off kids that want to take over your class will volunteer and try to sabotage the process.

4) Trust the Process. This is a chart of how to get people to change. We are trying to get students to change their attitudes and behaviors, to want to learn the language, to go deep with it, to want travel, to live or study in other countries. Here's how to motivate change:



OTHER TOPICS

“Would it be possible to talk about other methods you’d do in class in regards to the different levels of proficiency?”

The general methods are the same, regardless of the proficiency level. There can be more explanations at higher levels, but even those need to be kept short—to help understand the sentence that has just been said.

Discussions in upper levels are obviously deeper and more refined.



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In upper levels, short grammar explanations can be helpful. Your amazing 6-week lesson on the subjunctive will not help them to become fluent with it.

“On the walls, teachers in CI seem to use a lot of posters with the translation. It does end up looking very busy. Don't student get overwhelmed?”

Translations are not always necessary. You are right, it can be overwhelming if posters are placed poorly or are unnecessary. ADHD students and others can be distracted by word posters everywhere. I like to put word walls and grammar posters on the side and back walls. The front wall is reserved for pictures to inspire students to travel and not take away from the language.