



## **Learning and Teaching Languages – a Connecting Link for a Better Understanding in the World**

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### **Introduction**

Referring to the title of our paper "Learning and Teaching Languages – a Connecting Link for a Better Understanding in the World" we want to inform you about two interesting projects that provide new technologies in language training and a new approach of European networking and cooperating in the field of language training and more.

### **1. The European Jigsaw Classroom**

First I will give you an overview of the technique(1). The jigsaw classroom is a cooperative learning technique with positive educational outcomes. Just to compare with a puzzle, each piece - each student's part - is essential for the conclusion and full understanding of the final result. This strategy is so effective, because if each student's part is essential, then each student is essential; and that is accurately what it means.

The course of action is like it follows: The students in a language class, for example, are divided into small groups of four, five or six students each. Suppose their task is to learn about the different cultures and languages of the European Union. In one jigsaw group, a student is responsible for researching information. Another member of the group is assigned to cover a different task; a third student is assigned something about another main issue; the fourth member is to research the contribution of the others. After this step of work each student will come back to her or his jigsaw group and will try to present a well-organized report to the group. The situation is specifically structured so that the only way in is that each member has to listen the other five course works and than to report the main issues.

To make sure that each work will be perfect, the students don't go back to their jigsaw group immediately, but meet first with students from each jigsaw group who have the identical exercise. For example, students assigned to the EU language topic meet as a team of specialists, gathering information, becoming experts on their topic, and rehearsing their presentations. Finally this is the "expert" group. To hear and rehearse with other "experts" is principally useful for students who might have initial difficulty learning or organizing their part of their special work.

After presenting the different works in the expert groups, the jigsaw groups meet again in their initial heterogeneous formation. The EU language expert in each group teaches the other group members about the development of the different EU languages. Each student in each group educates the whole group about her or his specialty. Students are then tested on what they have learned about the history of the European Union from their fellow group member. This part of the Jigsaw can also be organized like a quiz, like a cloze or like a memory and so on.

#### **1.1 The benefit of the jigsaw classroom**

First of all it is an important and efficient way to learn new objects. But even more remarkably is the group working process, which trains listening, engagement, and empathy by giving each member of



the group an essential part to play in the academic activity. The group members have to work together as a team to reach a common goal and each person depends on all the others. No student can succeed alone, only if everyone works well together as a team. This interaction among all students in the class lead them to value each other as important contributors to a common assignment.

### **1.2 Jigsaw in 10 Easy Steps**

The jigsaw classroom is very simple to use. If you heed the advice of Mr. Elliot Aronson from the University of California, follow these ten steps:

1. "Divide students into 4, 5 - or 6-person jigsaw groups. The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability.
2. Appoint one student from each group as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most mature student in the group.
3. Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments. Examples for topics:  
[http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/index\\_de.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/index_de.htm)
4. Assign each student to learn one segment, making sure students have direct access only to their own segment.
5. Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.
6. Form temporary "expert groups" by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.
7. Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups.
8. Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.
9. Float from group to group, observing the process. If any group is having trouble (e.g., a member is dominating or disruptive), make an appropriate intervention. Eventually, it's best for the group leader to handle this task. Leaders can be trained by whispering an instruction on how to intervene, until the leader gets the hang of it.
10. At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material so that students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but really count"(2).

## **2. Project at the University of Education Baden/Austria**

Now let's take a look at our project(3) itself, which had taken place at the University of Education Baden/Austria 2006. The idea was simple. Each university, which joined this project created language-learning modules in their own language and got then access to each other's modules through this system. It is a new approach and technique to the acquisition as well as management of language competence.

Learning one or more foreign languages is for many people - teaching and learning languages in the EU - not only necessary for job-related reasons. In order to support this life long learning a friendly environment for languages has to be created, which supports to acquire a foreign language in a practice-oriented manner. The traditional language training is in many cases dominated by cognitive aspects and provides too little possibilities to gain experience in pronunciation and intonation of the foreign language as well as to practice communication within a contingency approach.

If learning a language means on the one hand to acquire language competence by auditory processing approach and on the other hand to bring the use of language in every-day-life-situations into focus then the most effective way to learn a foreign language is to live in the country where the target language is spoken. The second best alternative is to use native speakers as language trainers. Both ways are mostly out of question because of time and money constraints.



To help the learners to overcome this barrier we were using the “Electronic Voice und Ear-Trainer” during our project. Therefore we were able to provide the students a native language level both with regard to pronunciation, melody and intonation as well as with regard to the updated use in the country of the target language.

How could we do this? First we had to define the structure of the modules (level, content, duration and so on). Then each participating university creates language-learning modules including also CD-ROMs spoken by native speakers. After checking these modules we use them during the programme – as teachers and learners.

What was the point of doing this project? How can the students benefit from this?

- The students and lecturers gain more language competence in a shorter time.
- The students and lecturers get a better inside into cultures and ways of life and promote in this way the intercultural dialogue.
- It helps students and lecturers who don't have enough time or money to spend on travelling.
- It helps students and lecturers with hearing impairments. They are really going to benefit from this training.

At least I want to mention the unique aspect of this method within the following short video sequence.

## References

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- (1) Aronson Elliot: The jigsaw classroom <http://www.jigsaw.org/overview.htm>
- (2) Aronson Elliot: Jigsaw in 10 Easy Steps <http://www.jigsaw.org/steps.htm>
- (3) *Projekt EARL – Ear & Language* – Entwicklung von Sprachlernmodulen mit muttersprachlichen Trainern und unter Verwendung des Elektronischen Ear&Voice-Training-Systems, Baden 2006