

Motivating Adolescent Students

If you can teach teenagers, you can teach anyone! (Michael Grinder)

Intro activity

Take a minute or two to find your own answers to the following questions:

When you were a teenager...

- who were your idols/heroes/heroines?
- what did you enjoy most?
- what was your greatest worry?
- what were you absolutely sure of?
- what interests did you have?
- which of your teachers did you have excellent rapport with? Why?
- which of your teachers did you have little rapport with? Why?

The Romantic Period (9/10 – 15/16) – key features

- Students are faced with the task of developing a sense of their own distinct identity.
- They begin to ask themselves existentially threatening questions that they cannot find answers to.
- This amounts to a lot of insecurity, and leads to feelings of loneliness and being threatened by the world.
- Students defend themselves against their own emotions through extreme outward conformity - which manifests itself in styles: clothes, music, behaviour, their choice of heroes/heroines and... LANGUAGE (Cool Speak!)
- The romantic learner is fascinated with extremes and realistic details - the more different from their own experience, the better.
- Preferred stories incorporate realistic detail, and heroes and heroines with whom the learner can identify – protagonists who embody the qualities necessary to succeed in a threatening world (based on Kiegan Eran's work – see reference below).

In this period they will find themselves drawn to people who they are sure their parents would not like, and using language and opinions that are at odds with theirs.

(Guy Claxton)

Practical suggestions for the language classroom:

1. Establish a classroom culture of rapport and mutual trust.

The teacher will be the sort of person who is aware she is teaching forty individuals, not a mass. She is likely to be a good observer and a good, empathetic listener. If the humanistic exercise is to be relevant and adequate to the task of offering students a new experience of themselves, then the teacher's attitude must be positive, her interpersonal skills good, and her training adequate.

(Mario Rinvolucris in Arnold, 1999)

2. Consider the key concepts of romantic understanding

- when choosing the content, and
- when determining the organisation of our students' learning

What content?

Romantic learners ...

- seek out the limits of the real world, looking for pairs of opposites within which 'reality' exists. So they are fascinated by extremes.
- are fascinated by realistic details – the more different from their own world, the better.
- prefer stories and story forms that incorporate realistic detail, and heroes and heroines with whom they can identify, who embody the qualities necessary to succeed in a threatening world.

Organisation of our students' learning:

- Learning can be successfully organised by starting with something far away from the students' experience, but connected to them by qualities with which they can associate.

3. Teach for multiple intelligences

If in our language lessons we systematically manage to activate other intelligences in addition to the verbal-linguistic one, our students will feel more 'addressed' in our classes. In addition, we will be better able to appreciate the otherwise often hidden strengths of our students and use these to develop their language learning further.

All practical examples taken from:

English in Mind, a 5-level course, from beginner to upper-intermediate level, by Herbert Puchta and Jeff Stranks (with P. Lewis-Jones and R. Carter), published by Cambridge University Press.

NEW in 2007: English in Mind DVD

Background reading:

Egan, Kieran, **Romantic Understanding**, New York and London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990.

Gardner, Howard, **Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice**. New York. Basic Books. 1993.

Puchta, Herbert and Mario Rincoluceri. **Multiple Intelligences in EFL. Exercises for Secondary and Adult Students**. Innsbruck. Helbling Languages 2005.

Arnold, Jane (Ed.). **Affect in Language Learning**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999.

Claxton, Guy. **Live and Learn: An Introduction to the Psychology of Growth and Change in Everyday Life**. New York. HarperCollins College Div 1984.