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## Things You Can Learn from Doing a Language Course

Over the last several years I have gone overseas several times to study languages and travel. Last year I collected my observations in a short paper for my graduating students, describing the benefits continuing your education in this way. Here are some highlights:

### About Yourself

- Interacting with a new language, culture or situation reminds you how hard it can be to get used to new ways of doing things.
- A jolt like that, which can really shake up your stubbornness, is especially valuable if you are set in a comfortable situation.
- The process may be uncomfortable, but it can help you crystallize your priorities and values.

### About Learning

- Being a student again, you're forced to develop study techniques or steal them from your classmates. They may be ideas that had never occurred to you in your own school days. You can then pass these on to your students.
- Learning as a paying adult, you approach school differently, setting your own standards for what to learn and how well. Your students could benefit by being made aware of this process.
- You will probably have to develop strategies to surmount various cognitive or emotional hurdles. Here, too, you could share both the strategies and the concept of developing such strategies with your students.

### About Teaching

- Seeing another teacher from the student's point of view makes you re-think the principles underlying your teaching. You may see certain conflicting priorities (form vs. meaning, productive vs. receptive skills, inductive vs. deductive reasoning, individual vs. group work, etc.) in a different way.
- You can directly copy other teachers' ideas on activities, topics, and sources.
- Watching another teacher work is a good reminder of the technical details of teaching, such as timing, giving instructions, using the board, etc.

(Adapted from "Intensive Language Courses in Lifelong Learning"  
Timothy Buthod, *Bunkyo Gengo*, March 2012)

<Cards>

I try to keep up...by listening to a lot of audiobooks (I can't read on the move and I commute a lot).

-Teacher A

*Q: Would this be a good suggestion for your students? If not, how could you adapt it?*

In many respects, I teach as I was taught. If it worked for me..., it should work for others as well.

-Teacher B

I encourage reading, since it works for me.

-Teacher C

*Q: Do you agree with this "Golden Rule"?*

I have...about 6 tests a semester in all my classes,...If work is checked on a regular basis, students are more likely to keep up with it.

-Teacher D

I'm...stricter about setting and collecting homework – it creates a kind of motivation that many students may appreciate in a way.

=Teacher E

*Q: Have communicative teachers generally strayed too far from their role as schoolmasters?*

Taking the Japanese tests (JLPT) made me realize the difficulty Japanese students may have when reading English, as I also have the same problem: I can't read fast enough in Japanese. And my vocab is not big enough.

-Teacher F

*Q: Does the answer lie in test-taking techniques? Or simply more reading? Or something else?*

Still going, but having lessons and not studying between lessons can't count as studying. So I suppose I'm not for now. This was part of a conscious effort to emulate my students' learning of English, in the hope of understanding what they experience.

-Teacher G, on studying Korean

*Q: Doesn't this lack of study also count as part of their experience?*

Reading (almost) every day - 10-30 pages of detective stories, and recently listening to the same via French radio podcasts.

-Teacher H

I read read read, underlining interesting expressions.

Teacher J

*Q: Is reading alone enough? Do you need to supplement it with some other activity?*

Korean—textbook, one-to-one lessons, word cards (occasionally)

-Teacher K

I used to have a private teacher for Korean and we worked from a textbook with no English and on pronunciation.

-Teacher L

*Q: Do these study conditions actually parallel our students'?*

Korean - struggling for almost three years. I just don't find the time, or make it. I think I'm motivated, bt it doesn't convert into doing something.

-Teacher M

*Q: How can you address this problem?*

I've learned that asking them to speak in class may often mean demanding a performance in front of the class when they're not ready.

-Teacher N

*Q: Does this match your experience?*

In my free time I study Chinese. I began...because I found a fun podcast.

-Teacher P

*Q: Can one particular medium or way of studying spark a lasting interest in a language?*

I study it because there are Chinese students at my school.

-Teacher Q

I'm currently studying mainly Korean because we have groups of Korean exchange students who come to visit throughout the year.

-Teacher R

*Q: How much contact do you have with international students at your school? And in what language?*

I want to feel what a lower-level student experiences.

-Teacher S

*Q: Is it possible for a language professional to feel what an 18-year-old student feels?*

I meet with a Chinese student for 30 min, exchanging for 30 min English.

-Teacher T

*Q: Can language exchanges really work?*

I have realized that the best way to learn a language is to speak it.

-Teacher U

*Q: Is there one best way? Or, if there are various possible ways, is there any essential element to successful language learning?*

I took up Korean after visiting a couple of times and wanting to visit again in the future.

-Teacher V

*Q: Can a language teacher simply study for the same reasons anyone else would?*

The biggest frustration is not being able to practice in a real situation and not having easy access to any answers to questions I might have.

-Teacher W

*Q: How can you deal with this? Is there a parallel for students?*

I think studying helps me to be a more patient teacher and empathise with the students.

-Teacher X

*Q: Can you think of any concrete examples of this?*

I...think it helps to see what works and doesn't work.

-Teacher Y

*Q: How often do teachers actually change their techniques from this experience?*

I try to keep in the back of my mind the country where the language is spoken, the people and culture of its speakers, including the people's origin and history, and then imagine myself communicating with native speakers, both past and present, using the words and structures of a particular lesson.

-Teacher Z

*Q: Could we ask this of, say, a typical Japanese university student?*

Frustrations: Focusing too much on the ultimate goal (getting through that damn book by the time the Korean exchange students come), thereby failing to adequately understand the grammar or...vocabulary...before proceeding to the next lesson.

-Teacher α

*Q: Are there any parallels to our students' experiences here?*

Being a language learner has enabled me to understand the difficulties of learning and remembering vocabulary, the frustrations inherent in either forgetting words or confusing 2 or more words, and the innate tendency to wish to compare the grammatical structures of my mother tongue to the language under study. I can thus pass on how I have tried to overcome or resolve these obstacles to my students to try to limit the probable frustrations that they might be facing.

-Teacher β

*Q: How specifically could you pass this on to students?*



I wanted a contrast to my Japanese study.

-Teacher γ

*Q: Why is a contrast important?*

I have a French 'pen-pal' which is a nice way to communicate.

-Teacher δ

*Q: How could we encourage our learners to set up relationships like this?*

Frustrations: Not having a lot of everyday French contact

-Teacher ε

*Q: What are some ways to overcome that obstacle?*

I think it has made me embrace technology as a key instrument in a learner's orchestra.

-Teacher ζ

*Q: What lessons can using technology yourself teach you about how to approach teaching your students?*