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USING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STRATEGIES IN THE SECONDARY
GERMAN CLASSROOM

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“A person hears only what they understand.”
-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the use of employing language acquisition strategies in a German II college preparatory high school classroom. Sixteen students in grades ten and eleven participated in the study at a northeastern United States suburban high school consisting of approximately 1900 students. Methods of gathering data included teacher observation, student interviews and surveys, and student work. Methods of analysis consisted of coding, writing emerging theme statements, review of student work, student drawings, and student surveys. The students were presented with new grammar and vocabulary through physical movement and storytelling along with the keyword method. Findings suggest that the use of storytelling and physical movement in the classroom increase student and teacher enjoyment and provide students with comprehensible input, which motivates students to continue learning another language beyond the minimum requirement for most colleges. Furthermore, the increase in enjoyment helps to lower students' affective filter, setting the stage for increased language acquisition.

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RESEARCHER STANCE

“Education is not the filling a bucket but the lighting of a fire.”
- *William Butler Yeats*

When students came into my German I classroom at the beginning of the school year in September, there was always such excitement in the air. It seemed they could not wait to get started to learn German. As I became more acquainted with my students, I found out the many reasons for their desire to learn the language. For some students, there were familial roots in the German language and culture, and for others there was an interest in European history that motivated them. Other students envisioned going on in business or science, which led them to study German. A few students however, did not have a concrete reason for taking German, and some had even just been placed into my class because the Spanish classes were too full. I listened to each of these reasons, and I was always filled with hope that I could encourage the students who did not know why they were there, and that I could further the excitement of the students who wanted to be in my German classroom.

As each year progressed, that initial charge of excitement always diminished, the honeymoon always ended. The students began to complain about the “stupid” rules of grammar, and they started to question why “the Germans” did not “just do it the way we do it?” The test and quiz grades began to go down, and students’ interest began to wane. This was always a difficult and frustrating

time for me. I tried various means to spark interest by telling funny stories about my time spent in Germany, and by looking for interesting cultural lessons for my students, but this never carried a long-term effect. I realized that I had to find ways to help my students achieve more success in the German classroom in order to encourage them to continue on to the higher levels, and not to drop out of the language classroom after they completed the mandatory two years needed to get into college.

Nicht Scheissen vs. Nicht Schiessen

I clearly remembered very long ago students in high school hating German as much as I perceived that some of my students did. During my high school years, I did not care what the opinions were about language learning because I was enthralled with doing isolated grammar drills and memorizing vocabulary lists. When I reflected on why I liked German so much, I quickly realized that my father was the reason. My father passed on his love for the German people, their culture, and their language to me by telling me his story.

The Germans captured him in December of 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge when he served in the American Army as a reconnaissance scout, paired as a “buddy” with Kurt Vonnegut. This pairing caused them to become true friends, a friendship that lasted until both of their deaths. As they began their friendship, my father and Vonnegut enjoyed arguing about who was better at speaking German, each believing he was more advanced with language skills than the

other. One of these arguments happened during the moments before they were captured when they were lying in their foxhole paging through a German dictionary and they saw two German soldiers positioned with their rifles, ready to shoot. My father thought quickly and decided to speak to them in German. He mustered up the courage to yell “Nicht Scheissen!” not wanting the Germans to shoot them. After he yelled this, the German soldiers began to laugh, which led the American soldiers to sense that they were being taken as prisoners instead of being shot. It bothered my dad enough to find out why the enemy soldiers had laughed at his impeccable German only to find out later that what he had yelled on that cold December evening actually meant “don’t shit!” rather than “don’t shoot!” He had not mastered the language to the degree that he supposed, which may thankfully, have saved some lives.

That was the end of the joviality during his tenure as a prisoner of war. After they were captured, they were marched by foot from Brussels to Frankfurt and then transported to Dresden, via cattle train, just before its firebombing from the Royal Air Force and the Americans. Before descending into a slaughterhouse, which was the quarters for the American prisoners, my dad was awestruck by the beautiful city of Dresden and he even started to dream about returning there after the war.

The beautiful image in his head of Dresden changed after the German soldiers brought the American prisoners up and out of the slaughterhouse to help

clean up the destruction after the firebombing. The prisoners quickly discovered when they emerged that the city had been annihilated and that their job was to start to clean up the dead bodies and to create funeral pyres for them. They worked alongside German women who were also helping to clear up the rubble and everyone was starving to the point of death, including the German women. Many of them did something that touched my father's heart and made him forever grateful to the Germans. They snuck pieces of black bread behind their backs for the American prisoners to eat, which saved their lives. The reverberation of this story, and other stories caused me to become curious about these Germans, so it was only natural that I would one day want to learn their language.

When I entered the ninth grade and it was time for me to choose a language to study, I knew immediately that it would be German and that I was going to love it. I wanted to soak up anything I could that had to do with these people and their culture. This enthusiasm carried me through high school and into college, where I majored in German and still learned by the use of drills and by reading books that I could hardly understand. I began to hear more German from my professors, however, and slowly I began to comprehend what they were saying. After this, I went to Marburg, Germany during my junior year as an exchange student, only to find that I could still not speak the language even after all those years that I studied it! My own love of the language and culture kept me motivated and prevented me from giving up on being successful in my course

work in Germany. After I graduated from college, never wanting to teach, I returned to Germany to live and work for two years.

My career as a teacher began several years later when I was literally thrown into a classroom in a private school in the United States. I quickly discovered that I loved teaching and took courses to become certified. I wanted to pass on my love of the German language and culture, and I was convinced that my students would hear my story and would want to experience something similar for themselves. My delusions were revealed quickly, though, since my students did not share the same experiences that I had with the German language and culture. How could I expect them to have any interest in the language by forcing nouns, verbs and adjectives on them? How was I supposed to teach them German?

Need for the Study

With this realization, I saw the need to search for ways to engage my students and to help them see the value of learning German. As mentioned earlier, students came into my classroom for many different reasons with various learning styles and background knowledge. I could not use a “one size fits all” type of instruction. I wanted to find ways to instruct that would provide scaffolding to as many students as possible. I believed that students’ interest in sticking with German could be helped by showing them ways to have more success in learning German.

When I studied German, I did drill after drill in the classroom. I mastered the grammar and thought I would be able to speak the language. When I went to Germany to study, however, I realized that I could not speak a full sentence and that all of those drills I did in the classroom had not prepared me to understand the lectures, or to communicate with fellow students at the “Studentendorf.” It took a silent period for me to begin to understand the language, and to internalize many structures of the language so that I could begin to communicate. I had discovered a love for grammar, and hence, I did not regret doing those grammar drills in the classroom, but I realized that many of my students did not feel the same way. Therefore, it was important to know how I could find ways for my students to acquire German instead of learning grammar and vocabulary in isolation.

When we were babies, we did not consciously conjugate verbs and make adjectives agree with their nouns: we learned language naturally from our parents. I knew I had to find ways to help students “acquire” German rather than just learning isolated grammar rules, or writing sentences in isolation. I longed to discover what would happen in my own classroom when I abandoned traditional teaching methods and replaced them with a variety of approaches for students to acquire language more naturally. This knowledge led me to my research question: What will be the observed behaviors and reported experiences when I use various language acquisition approaches in my German class?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning: Then and Now

Various trends in education have affected how language teachers choose strategies to use in their classrooms. Smith (1998) differentiated between a “classical” style of learning, and an “official” style. He discussed how in the last two centuries, we have changed the focus of our teaching and learning from learning by apprenticeship (the classical style), to learning by rote memorization (the official style). The official style of learning was based on behaviorist learning theory, which stressed the importance of the learner responding to a repeated stimulus, and thereby established a habit. Linguists adopted this theory in the 1940s and 1950s and promoted a style of teaching called the Audiolingual method, where learners had to tediously memorize dialogues and language patterns under controlled circumstances. There was no room for spontaneous creativity, and only highly motivated learners had success with this method (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

One of the most prominent advocates of the behaviorist theory was Skinner (1957) who adopted the term “operant conditioning” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 56). He promoted the idea that the human mind is a “tabula rasa” (p. 56), and could be imprinted with language by rote memorization and drills, and by using reward and punishment. Dewey (1938) disagreed, however, noting, “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean

that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other”(p. 25). Dewey directed these words at the empiricist philosophy, which promoted that the crux of education was how a student behaved after experiences. He urged educators to reflect more deeply on a true understanding of the continuum of experience is in order to provide valuable, rich experiences that led to further rich learning opportunities. Dewey believed these types of meaningful and personal experiences provided a conduit for the student to develop from within and to strive in furthering his or her own education.

Linguist Noam Chomsky challenged Skinner’s theory in 1959 and brought to light the fact that Skinner had not used human subjects to support his theory. Chomsky negated Skinner’s theory by asking how it is that children used such creativity to devise language. Chomsky’s research led him to conclude that children were born with a “language acquisition device (LAD)” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 58). Children had an innate sense of grammar, Chomsky argued, and acquired language with the help of a skilled speaker (e.g., his or her mother). These examples of Skinner and Chomsky’s opposing theories illustrated the shift that had occurred in how researchers believed language is acquired. Skinner’s theory was an empiricist theory, and Chomsky’s theory was known as an innatist theory. Chomsky’s challenge to behaviorist learning theory signaled the beginning of an explosion of research on language acquisition, and it formed the

foundation for many language-teaching methods available to teachers today (Omaggio Hadley, 2001)

Innatist Theories

The shift from empiricist to innatist theories for language acquisition provided educators with many new options in the language classroom.

Chomsky's idea of a LAD led the researcher Krashen (1982) on the path to studying how acquiring a second language could be similar to acquiring one's first language. Because of the notion of a LAD, Krashen delved into ways that learners acquired a new language. He came up with the Monitor Theory, which consisted of five main hypotheses. The hypotheses are listed with a brief explanation below:

- 1) *Subconscious acquisition of language.* This was when the learner was unaware of overtly learning grammar rules. This was sometimes described as "picking up" the language.
- 2) *Learning grammar in a natural order.* Krashen believed that there was a certain progression to how grammar was acquired e.g. the past tense was acquired relatively early during language acquisition. Most textbooks do not introduce past tense until higher levels of language instruction.
- 3) *Conscious knowledge of grammar rules to serve as an "editor" to language output.* Krashen believed that grammar instruction was only useful at higher

levels of language instruction. Students began to use this knowledge of grammar as an “editor” when they produced the language.

4) *Learner receiving comprehensible messages a little beyond what he or she is capable of.* The learner kept receiving messages that were understood but with added new messages and language just beyond what he or she was capable of.

5) *The learner having a low affective filter (so that comprehensible messages can be received.)* Affective filter was a term that Krashen used that indicated what the learner’s emotional state was during a learning episode. The affective filter was high when the learner was nervous or experiencing stress (conversely the affective filter was low when the learner was relaxed). Krashen believed that high affective filter blocked the LAD in the brain from receiving comprehensible messages.

The language teaching method that evolved from these hypotheses was known as the Natural Approach (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Krashen made the distinction between “learning” a language and “acquiring” a language. When the learner received comprehensible messages, language acquisition began. The learner built up receptive vocabulary with little or no memorization, and then started to use this vocabulary to produce speech. If a more adept speaker in an environment that is non-threatening encouraged the learner, language acquisition continued to increase (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

As explained by Liao (2000), an approach loosely derived from the Natural Approach was called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Teachers facilitated authentic settings in the classroom for learners to negotiate meaning. The students experienced a real-world sense of the need to deliver messages to each other in the target language. Teachers modeled correct use of the target language and did not explicitly correct any errors made by the students. In the beginning stages, teachers provided large amounts of language scaffolding for students and then gradually allowed the students to *learn* from each other as language proficiency increases. Teachers also spent time teaching students various strategies to help increase language acquisition.

Shehadeh (2002) explained an important concept that was present when teachers use the CLT approach for language acquisition. He referred to Swain's (1985) hypothesis, which was called Comprehensible Output (CO). When a learner was paired with a partner who was more experienced with the language, the learner paid attention to his or her language output. When the more experienced speaker corrected the learner's output and caused him or her to notice mistakes, the learner attempted to correct mistakes and thereby increased language acquisition. This activity pushed the learner to become more proficient and accurate. Shehadeh referred to a study he did on two groups of Japanese low-level learners of English. One group was constantly *pushed* for one week to produce past tense sentences accurately, and the other group was not asked to

self-correct. The teacher modeled and explained to the second group correct conjugations of these verbs in isolation, and outside of natural conversation. After one week, the first group started to show significantly higher accuracy than the second group. The first group's proficiency and accuracy kept growing at significantly higher rates than the second group for the remainder of the semester of instruction. The CLT approach used comprehensible messages along with CO to help the learner make progress. A caveat to the CO hypothesis was that care must be given that the corrective feedback the learner receives was accurate and timely.

Krashen (2008) disagreed, though, with Liao's definition of CLT and rejected the notion that the Communicative Approach was remotely similar to his philosophy of language acquisition. He felt that the Communicative Approach focused too much on the output that a student produced, and not enough on comprehensible input. Shehadeh (2002) argued that Krashen had misunderstood Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (1985). Krashen (2008) stated:

The Communicative Approach (again, as I understand it) is thus not only not the same as the Comprehension Hypothesis, it is the opposite. (Of course, 'real-life situations' entail input as well as output, but nearly all manifestations of the Communicative Approach I have seen focus on the output side.) (p. 182)

Swain and Shehadeh argued that the learner was making use of his or her "editor" (hypothesized by Krashen) when he or she paid attention to output and that the

CLT method of teaching was not the opposite of Krashen's strong belief that comprehensible input was far more important than comprehensible output.

Mackey (2002) studied language learners using the CLT approach where the learners were paired with native speakers. Mackey videotaped the learning sessions and then surveyed the students. The learners felt they were being pushed by native speakers to produce more accurate language, as in the example, "he is forcing me to think harder, think harder for the correct word to give him" (p. 390). The learners also sought to understand the native speaker by asking for re-phrasing and slower speech. They consciously sought comprehensible input while the native speakers pushed them to produce more understandable, accurate output. Mackey's study pointed toward the need to emphasize not only the learner receiving passive input, as Krashen argued, but also toward the need for the learner to actively seek more comprehensible input in order to push his or her output to higher accuracy and fluency levels.

The Cognitive Theory

McLaughlin, Anderson, Shiffrin & Schneider, and Ausubel developed the Cognitive theory in the early 1990s, which was based on the premise that first and second language learning differ from each other. They concluded that learning a second language was "the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill" (as cited in Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 65). The theorists believed that new language knowledge had to be practiced, automatized, and linked to previous knowledge in

the human brain. After the learner had automatized language structures, he or she was free to notice new structures for further acquisition. There was a mesh between conscious learning of a language, and subconscious learning of a language (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). The language teaching method that evolved from this theory was known as the Cognitive-Code Method. Here teachers determined what knowledge students had and helped them link new language to existing background knowledge. Learning had to make sense and have meaning to students. Students encountered new rules and linked these new rules to their existing background knowledge and thereby gained higher levels of language control. The cognitive theory was in direct opposition with the behaviorist or empiricist theory (Omaggio Hadley, 2001).

Oxford (1990) listed cognitive strategies for learning a language, including practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. Learners used these strategies to manipulate the target language in a way that was meaningful. When teachers showed students how to use these strategies, and when students employed these strategies, the learners linked new information with information that was already stored in their brains. This helped to fill in and overcome gaps in knowledge. Students began to consciously use strategies to self-direct in order to progress in communicative competence. Oxford opined that self-direction was crucial for a learner of languages.

Language Acquisition

Even though current research has steered second language instruction away from behaviorist methods, most contemporary textbooks authors still apply behaviorist ideas. Many of the drills in textbooks today exemplify practice at low-level skills, often where students can complete them sans understanding the meaning. Aski (2005) discussed how alternative practice could be offered to students instead of mechanical drills. She recommended providing students with activities to learn grammar where meaning was crucial to perform the activity correctly. She believed that this caused the learner to notice structures, and to internalize these structures that led to greater language acquisition. Wong and VanPatten (2003) pointed out that drills were left over from the Audiolingual Method (ALM), which was based on a behaviorist theory. When students completed mechanical drills, understanding the meaning was of no concern. Paramount in these drills was the one correct answer required and the rationale behind these types of drills was that the student over learned a particular form, which promoted accuracy in other instances in the target language. Lightbown and Spada (2006) referred to a study done during the late 1970s where French learners of English practiced the present progressive tense during mechanical drills. The students began to use the auxiliary *be* and the *-ing* correctly “(for example, ‘He’s playing ball’)” (p.141), but then started to use it where it did not belong. They started to over generalize the verb *to be*, e.g. “He’s want a cookie”

(p 142). Because of the use of these drills, the students fossilized this form incorrectly into their use of English. Wong and VanPatten (2003) pointed out that it is imperative for language learners to pay attention to meaning during any activity performed in the target language, which helped to facilitate long-term retention of language structures with higher accuracy. They reported on a study conducted where one group of students received explicit instruction of grammar along with low-level drills, and another group was instructed using activities where meaning was crucial to completing the grammar activity. The second group made significantly higher gains in language proficiency, and these gains were maintained after a month when they received a posttest. Wong and VanPatten pointed out that learners needed constant exposure to comprehensible input of language in order to activate the innate LAD. They boldly made the assertion that drills were superfluous, and could even be detrimental to a language learner.

Catton (2006) provided clear distinctions between traditional language learning and language acquisition. Clark (as cited in Catton, 2006) asserted that traditional language methods used activities that were mostly at the knowledge or informational level, and did not reach higher levels of cognitive and affective learning domains on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Krashen described traditional methods as "conscious learning vs. unconscious acquisition" (as cited in Catton, 2006 p.18). With traditional language teaching methods, a student learned *about*

the language and was conscious about learning rules and vocabulary. On the other hand, language acquisition was sometimes referred to as *picking up* a language. There was very little conscious work done when it was being acquired.

Skala (2003) compared five different methods, based on current research, to teach language to high school French One students. She used the Total Physical Response method (TPR), Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), grammar instruction, literature, and varied classroom activities. TPR used physical movement along with commands to teach vocabulary and vocabulary structures. TPRS also used physical movements along with storytelling and reading to teach vocabulary and vocabulary structures. Her findings showed that there was a high level of frustration on the part of the students when she used the traditional grammar teaching method. Their test scores were also at the lowest level after she completed this method. The students enjoyed TPR, TPRS, and varied class activities the most during this study, and their grades reflected the highest achievement at the conclusion of these units. After the conclusion of the literature unit, student grades were at the median point. Skala was hesitant, however, to endorse using one method over the other method for classroom instruction, citing all of the research available about various intelligences and students' and teachers' preferences. Her final recommendation was for teachers to take into account students' individual learning styles and intelligences, and to tailor instruction and use of strategies.

Affective Filter

Various strategies are available for teachers to use in order to help lower what is known as affective filter. As cited in Lightbown & Spada (2006), Krashen (1982) coined the term affective filter where he explained that when a learner's filter was high, because of lack of motivation or anxiety, the comprehensible input messages would not reach a learner's LAD. When a learner's affective filter was lowered, comprehension increased and acquisition became possible.

Catton (2006) discussed Krashen's theory of affective filter where the learner with a high filter was impeded from receiving comprehensible input. She studied 11 students acquiring English as a second language and employed a holistic model that followed the Natural Approach (Krashen) theory, where she ensured that the teacher placed high importance on the well being of the learner. The teacher's role was to make sure that each student's needs were met. The holistic model based this aspect of the teaching method on Eastern philosophy, in which it was believed that intelligence was a function of not only the brain, but also of the entire body, and the two were closely connected. If the learner was experiencing mental or physical discomfort, he or she might have understood the message, but it did not reach the area of the brain responsible for language acquisition. The results of her study were that 10 out of the 11 participants

experienced high gains in English proficiency and retained this high level when tested again after the study was over. Catton went on to imply that learning disabilities were sometimes mislabeled because high affective filters were not being identified and addressed by teachers. She stressed that teachers needed training to identify when a student was displaying a high affective filter. By the same token, she believed that teachers should receive training on how to intervene to lower student affective filter.

It is important for a teacher to be sensitive to when students might be anxious in the classroom and to provide extra support when that is the case. Gregersen (2005) emphasized the need for teachers to be able to identify students in the classroom who were anxious. She advocated that teachers look for non-verbal clues in students that signified a high affective filter. According to experts in the field of non-verbal communication, Americans averted eye contact, blocked their bodies, and leaned away from the teacher when they were tense about communicating. Non-verbal messages (i.e. body language) were usually more accurate than spoken messages and could provide deep insight as to the level of the affective filter in a student. In her research study, Gregersen made the effort to understand which students were anxious and which students were not anxious by paying attention to non-verbal messages from the students. She studied 13 students of first year French. After she identified the students who had a high-affective filter, she provided intervention to lower the filters of these students. At

the end of her study, the students who were nervous began to relax and even started to increase in proficiency. They also began to speak in the target language at increased rates. Oxford (1990) stated:

Inhibited learners are paralyzed by actual or anticipated criticism from other people and from themselves, so they try to ensure that there are as few 'chinks in their armor' as possible. Self-encouragement and anxiety-reducing strategies can help learners lower their inhibitions and take appropriate risks. (p. 142)

Oxford gave advice to teachers on strategies they could teach to help students lower their affective filter. She recommended that students keep a language-learning diary, in which goals could be set, and where the student could see progress over a period of time. She also recommended that students pay attention to the type of self-talk that they practiced, asserting that too many negative thoughts led to a *self-fulfilling* failure.

It is important for any language teacher to be keenly aware of how a student's emotions can help or hinder the language acquisition process. Ray and Seely (1999) believed that students needed to experience very little stress when they were learning a language. They stated that learning was severely compromised, and at times non-existent when students experienced stress. They used the TPRS method where they obtained information about the students' lives to build stories, in which targeted vocabulary and grammar structures were practiced. Students helped to create these stories along with the teacher and then acted these stories out. Students started to concentrate on the meaning of the

discourse rather than on correct grammar or vocabulary in isolation. The result of this was that affective filter was lowered, and motivation increased during this activity.

Another strategy to lower the affective filter that merits teachers' attention is the use of drama in the classroom. Dodson (2000) used drama in her classroom to increase acquisition and to lower affective filter. She viewed using drama as a form of CLT. Students communicated with each other and internalized grammatical and vocabulary structures through things such as pantomime, improvisations and folk tales. She gave the example of using drama to practice past tense for verbs. Students acted out as a child who had eaten all of the cookies by the time the mother had finished a phone conversation. Students had to pay attention to the verb tenses to guess this pantomime correctly. Dodson emphasized that by using drama, all of the four domains of language acquisition were practiced, almost simultaneously. Fluency and communication were stressed, rather than the isolated focus on form when using drama in the classroom. Because the students were focusing on the message being conveyed during this activity and not on isolated grammar drills, the affective filter remained low.

Student Motivation

Sometimes there exists frustration and disconnect between teachers and students that can be avoided when teachers introduce various learning strategies in the classroom. Often, the student's main goal is to achieve a high grade in a language class. He or she perceives learning grammar and doing well on grammar tests as the route to success in a language class. Chavez (2007) investigated the idea of student beliefs about language learning and motivation. Her research study showed how students and teachers had different views about what was actually happening in the language classroom. Teachers in her study used a communicative style of teaching and did not place a strong emphasis on correct grammar at the early stages of language acquisition. Students, however, placed more importance than teachers on the ability to understand grammar and actually wanted to learn more grammar than what the teacher was providing. The students' main objective was to achieve a higher grade in this subject. Chavez obtained this information by using surveys with the students. The students' desire here resonated with the traditional way in which languages have been taught in the USA, where emphasis is placed on producing accurate grammar at early stages of language learning, and where students were rewarded with higher grades for this accuracy. With this study in mind, it was easy to understand why students who did not excel in grammar dropped out early due to frustration and why they carried around the belief that they were not gifted enough to learn another

language. Teachers could alleviate this frustration by sharing various learning strategies with students and allowing students to experiment with them.

Can teachers alter a student's opinion about the reasons for studying another language? Gardner and Lambert (as cited in Hernández 2008) referred to different types of student motivation. The first type of motivation that students could have was called integrative motivation. When students possessed this, the reason they had for studying another language was mainly to be able to communicate with the people who spoke this language as their native tongue. Students were also deeply interested in the foreign culture. Their goal was to become proficient enough to be able to develop relationships with native speakers and to be able to learn the target culture.

The second type of motivation that students have was called instrumental motivation, where a student studied a foreign language to fulfill a requirement for further career opportunities or to enter a specific college. Hernández (2008) conducted a study on students who were studying Spanish at the university level. His results showed that students who possessed integrative motivation while studying another language fared remarkably better than students who were just fulfilling a requirement for graduation. Students who had integrative motivation also tended to keep on studying the language and even decided to spend a prolonged period of time in the target culture.

What kind of strategies can teachers use to influence students to keep studying languages? Hernández recommended they turn to the ACTFL National Standards for ways to nurture a more integrative motivation in students. Students should have meaningful interaction with native speakers using authentic materials in the classroom whenever possible. He suggested possibilities, such as the use of Skype, to provide face-to-face interactions with native speakers. Students and teachers could also use the Internet for a plethora of authentic cultural material. Using these resources could convince some students to change from an instrumental to an integrative motivation.

Sometimes students' and teachers' reasons for studying and teaching a language are misaligned. Jacques (2001) pointed to research that not only placed importance on a student's attitude toward learning a language, but also to the many different ways teachers could be motivated to teach. He conducted surveys with students and teachers with the purpose to find out how student and teacher expectations in a language classroom differed. He discovered that students were less interested in the use of authentic materials, cultural activities, and the use of the target language than were their teachers. Students and teachers both agreed on the need for a supportive classroom setting, where corrective feedback was given in a timely manner and a classroom where questions were welcomed and answered. Students and teachers also expressed the need to communicate objectives and goals that each had for every language class. This study pointed to

the need for teachers to be willing to establish relationships with students where communication was open and receptive. In a supportive classroom, where community was established, students and teachers could forge a plan together to aid in meeting objectives for language acquisition.

If a student achieves success in a language classroom, motivation is likely to increase. Ray and Seely (1999) discussed the teaching strategy called TPRS, where students received vocabulary and grammar through storytelling in the target language. Teachers spent the majority of time in the classroom making the language understandable through personalized stories involving aspects of the students' interests and experiences. They discovered that even students who had received a grade of "D" in a traditional classroom were able to achieve an "A" in a TPRS classroom. Such success for students increased student intrinsic motivation that usually resulted in students who advanced to higher levels of language classes.

Providing Comprehensible Input

Krashen (2003) explained comprehensible input as " $i + 1$ " (p. 4). This meant that the learner heard language that was already known (i) to advance to a higher level ($i + 1$). If the input was not comprehensible, the learner would not be able to draw on background knowledge, and could not use context clues to reach a higher level of competency. This idea of $i + 1$ was known as Krashen's Input

Hypothesis, and it was an important backdrop for the TPR and the TPRS methods mentioned previously.

Ray and Seely (1999) advocated the use of TPR to teach beginning levels of language. TPR was based on findings from Asher (as cited in Ray and Seely, 1999), where vocabulary was taught by the use of pantomimed commands. When physical movement was involved along with the target language, the learner was able to understand and commit new vocabulary to long-term memory. The learner received comprehensible input through these commands (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). An added benefit to using the TPR strategy was that the teacher could assess students' understanding by how they performed the commands.

Ray and Seely (1999) believed in helping the student master a basic vocabulary list during the initial stages of language acquisition, which was achieved through the use of TPR. After this initial vocabulary had been acquired, the teacher was able to move on to creating stories with the students by using techniques that promoted constant comprehensible input while it added new language to the student just a little beyond his or her comprehension.

Davidheiser (2002) used TPR exclusively during the first half of beginning German classes. He added grammar into the commands in order to simultaneously build vocabulary and grammar. Students in his classroom then worked in pairs to give each other commands for further practice. Davidheiser expanded the use of TPR into TPRS and constructed stories together with the

students using this vocabulary and constantly added new vocabulary and grammar. Davidheiser revolutionized the way he taught German by providing students with comprehensible input through TPR and TPRS.

Werstler (2002) compared the use of TPR and TPRS with students to how mothers spoke with their babies and provided constant comprehensible input before the child was able to utter his or her first word. Babies were able to understand a large amount of language before they were able to speak. Werstler discussed the need to teach language by using commands that were comprehensible, just the way mothers did with their own children. If students could not understand the language used in the classroom, they would not learn. Students also needed to have a silent period where they could understand what was being said in the classroom before they were required to speak and use the target language. Werstler's students in her study achieved success, and they maintained this success one month after the study was complete. Werstler used an ample amount of comprehensible input in her study through TPRS. She compared these students to a control group of students who were taught using traditional textbook drills. The students in the second group achieved a lower level of language proficiency and they declined further at the conclusion of the study.

Other Teaching Methods That Promote Acquisition

Each student enters a language classroom with an individual learning style, and there is no magic solution to ensure success for every student to acquire a language. Oxford (1990), however, discussed various language learning strategies that could be used to reach many students in a language classroom. She recommended a semantic map as a useful tool to remember vocabulary. Students could either write a list of words that were related to each other or they could use a graphic organizer to surround a thematic picture with related vocabulary words. An example of this was a picture of a woman's head surrounded by hair, where students labeled vocabulary that related to hair. This strategy appealed to a visual/spatial learner.

Oxford (1990) also recommended teaching students how to find keywords to learn new vocabulary. There were two steps involved in this method. First, the learner identified a word in his or her native language that sounded like the target language word being learned. Second, the learner visualized the new foreign word interrelating with the native language word. An example of this would have been the word "der Teller" (German for plate). Students could imagine a male bank teller walking around holding up a plate. The fact that the teller was a male helped to remember the masculine gender of the word. When students employed this strategy they were using a cognitive memory strategy.

Language acquisition increases when students become aware of various learning strategies, reflect on strategies that work for them, and use these strategies for learning. Huang (2003) conducted a study on Taiwanese college students who studied English. She divided them into two groups, where one experimental group received extra training on using various strategies for learning English. The control group received the same instruction as the experimental group, but without the strategy training. The results of her study were that the students who received the strategy training achieved higher gains in English proficiency than did the control group. Furthermore, the experimental group started to report back that they were starting to use various learning strategies in other classes, even up to one year later. This was a compelling study that demonstrated the importance of strategy training in the classroom.

Sagarra (2006) conducted a study on college students who studied Spanish at a U.S. university. The students' native language was English, and they were divided into three groups. Each group used rote memorization, semantic mapping, and the keyword method to learn a set of vocabulary words. The order of when each method was used varied with each group. The result of this test was that the keyword method was superior to rote memorization, and semantic mapping. Rote memorization, however, was a better method than semantic mapping when the students were given a second posttest. The keyword method proved to be superior after the posttest. When the students used the keyword

method, they created a picture in their brain and linked new information to old information activating background knowledge. In this study, the keyword strategy was a powerful way to retain target language vocabulary.

Huang (2003) also conducted research on how teaching students various strategies to remember language could benefit them. The results of his study not only showed that the students were able to remember the language better, but also that they were able to transfer learning strategy skills over into other subjects. Once again, students were re-tested after the study was over, and still retained the vocabulary and structures.

Helping students become aware of learning strategies helps increase language acquisition. Teaching students these strategies also helps students to reflect on their own learning, which can lead to increased motivation and transfer of these learning strategies to other subjects in school.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Goal

“The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language.”

-Ezra Pound

My frustration with students who were struggling in my language classes led me on a journey to search for ways that I could help them have more success. My goal for this study was to implement a more natural way to help students acquire German. After researching language acquisition strategies and experiencing first-hand one of the strategies during the summer before my study, I chose three that I hoped would work. The following is how I organized my study.

Setting & Participants

I teach in a suburban high school that has approximately 1900 students. The students come from several rural townships and from the suburb where the high school is located. The World Language department consists of Spanish, French, German and Latin. There is an unusually large number of German students due to the Pennsylvania Dutch influence still alive in this area. The high school is in the second year of Corrective Action II. PSSA scores in Math for 11th graders are: 25.6% advanced, 29.9% proficient, 23.3% basic and 21.2% below basic. PSSA scores in Reading for 11th graders are: 34.8% advanced, 37.4% proficient, 12.5% basic and 15.4% below basic. The population at this high

school does not have significant ethnic diversity and consists primarily of Caucasians. There are 12 English Language Learners (ELLS).

The students in this study are sophomores and juniors. This level two, German, college preparatory class consists of 16 students, eight males and eight females. Two of the males are juniors and the rest of the students are sophomores. There are no students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Three of these students had me as their teacher in German I. The prerequisite to qualify for this class is to achieve a 72% in the German I level class.

Data Gathering Methods

Student Surveys/Questionnaires:

During this study, I conducted four surveys/questionnaires. I was interested to find out what students would self-report about their proficiency in German and to see how this reporting might evolve. As MacLean & Mohr (1999) remind us “Survey data can show you the scope of your question and tune you in to the general understandings of your students” (p. 42).

The purpose of the initial survey (Appendix A) was in response to advice from MacLean & Mohr (1999) stating that it is important to establish a starting point for future comparison with students during my study. I further followed their advice by spacing surveys throughout the study and by keeping accurate records of the dates when I administered these surveys.

The second survey (Appendix B) showed how the students perceived their competence in German at that point compared to the beginning of the year. This survey was conducted after a quiz on new vocabulary and grammar and I was able to get a “feel” for student attitudes about their ability after this survey. This was proof to me that surveys were an important component to my study.

The third survey (Appendix C) was for the purpose of finding out from the students’ viewpoint what strategies we were using, that they liked best and to find out what they perceived to be their strongest skill in German. This survey helped me to realize that the students were conscious of strategies we were using and were beginning to reflect on them.

The fourth survey (Appendix D) helped me to see how students’ perception of their abilities in German was evolving. I conducted this survey as one of the final activities during my data collection. The four surveys provided me with valuable information on how the students felt they were progressing in the language and how they perceived the value of using language acquisition strategies in the classroom.

Student Observations/Researcher Log

According to Hendricks (2009), “Observational data are the most important source of information in an action research study,” (p. 90). I kept a legal pad with me during my entire study and jotted down what the students were doing and saying during classroom activities. Later that same day, I expanded on

these notes by entering them into my field log and adding significant details that I remembered. I made sure to check myself when I started to assign feelings or motives that were displayed by the students. I kept a doubled sided field log and wrote my reflections and feelings separate from what I actually observed.

It is important to note that I paid close attention to students' body language and noted what I saw in my field log. When I conducted my literature review, I found useful research about body language, which helped me to obtain clues about my students' affective filter. I used my field log regularly throughout the study to read and re-read, looking for patterns that began to emerge.

Student Work

I collected various forms of student artifacts throughout this study. This enabled me to determine the “effectiveness of instruction or intervention” (Hendricks, 2009, p.82). After I used each strategy to teach, I quizzed the students and asked them to draw or act out what they were hearing. This gave me insight to how well they understood spoken German. Students rewrote stories that we told during class, which helped me to assess written German. Students read extended stories and translated these stories, which provided insight on how they were progressing with reading the language. And finally, I made notes in my field log when I heard the students speak German. That helped me assess how they were acquiring new vocabulary and structures. I used these artifacts to compare how each strategy was working. At the end of Unit Two, students

completed a summative assessment. This showed how they acquired new grammar introduced during this study.

Student Interviews

According to Eder and Fingerson (2002), interviewing students “allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives.” (p. 181). The interviews that I conducted during this study happened mostly in a natural context as I walked around the classroom during group work activities. I asked the students questions when I perceived that they were relaxed and enjoying an assignment. I reminded myself of the advice that Seidman (1998) gave to be sure to “listen actively” (p. 63). By following this advice, I was able to understand better what my students thought I was doing in the classroom. These interviews provided another lens or voice in this study, which helped to add more dimension to my research data.

Trustworthiness Statement

My initial step was to receive permission from the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (Appendix E) at Moravian College to initiate this research study. Likewise, I received permission from my building principal and assistant superintendant (Appendix F). My assistant superintendant sat down with me and asked me to explain thoroughly about this research study and gave me his approval. My students and their parents were informed in detail about this study and they signed an informed consent form allowing me to proceed (Appendix G).

They were fully aware that they were not obligated to participate in this study and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Every member of the class participated in this study and handed in the informed consent form preceding the study. I followed guidelines set forth by Holly, Arthar, & Kasten (2005), when I created my informed consent forms.

After I collected all signed informed consent forms, I set up my field log. I followed advice from MacLean & Mohr (1999) and experimented with ways that worked best for me to record what was happening in my classroom. I wrote notes on a legal pad and then as soon as possible wrote everything on word documents and stored these entries in chronological order. No one had access to these files except for me. I separated what was actually happening from what I was feeling and thinking by using two columns in my field log. I referred to this field log weekly in order to begin to look for patterns, which provided further insight into my study. I coded my field log following advice from Hendricks (2009) and used these codes for further interpretation.

I protected the anonymity of my students by assigning each of them a pseudonym that was not similar to their real name. I stored all data I was collecting in a safe place in my home where no one had access to it except for me. I stored all data in my locked classroom while I was at school and conducting my study. At the completion of the study, I destroyed my field log so that identities could not be traced.

I encouraged my students to react honestly during this research and I remained honest with what I wrote down in my field log. I realized that I harbored biases before and during my research. One of these biases was that I underestimated the ability of these students and expected less from them than they provided. After I reflected on my field notes and saw student artifacts, I realized how often this bias came to light during this study. I also assumed that any language acquisition strategy would provide positive results because I had been using some of these strategies in previous years of teaching. I knew I had to be open and cognizant of these biases and be ready to change. I followed advice from Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997), and I asked my students if my perceptions about what was happening in the classroom were aligned with their perceptions. “Honoring their voices allows us and others to see past the edges of our vision” (p. 315). This provided yet another lens through which I viewed my data.

I collected various types of data daily in order to triangulate my data and to view my study through different lenses. I followed the advice from Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997) on triangulation in order to “present a variety of dimensions or points of view in the writing” (p. 35). I conducted student interviews and surveys. I collected formative and summative student assessments and recorded observations made in the classroom. I used these various types of data to follow advice from Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001) which stated

“triangulation is a term used for the conscious intersecting of multiple methods for data collection” (p.70).

I utilized peer debriefing with fellow teachers to obtain even more insight to my data. I spoke with teachers whom I worked with and with teachers in my research group at Moravian College. These sessions were valuable to me as a researcher and provided the support that I needed to continue with my study.

Finally, I did extensive research into language acquisition before I started this study, which provided valuable information to guide me into choosing which strategies to implement. I put myself into the position of a student by attending a weeklong seminar during the summer before my study where I started to learn Japanese. I learned about types of strategies that can help students have more success and was able to see how they worked on me. This provided remarkable insight to how a student feels in a language classroom, which can help or hinder language acquisition. After this experience, I was able to look at my data “backward and forward” (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997, p. 44).

The following page provides an overview of the general timeline of my research study.

Research Timeline

- Weeks 1 and 2: Reviewed German I vocabulary and grammar. Students completed “Mein Buch über Mich” Survey One
- Weeks 3 and 4: TPR and TPRS strategies used to introduce new vocabulary and grammar, followed by a formative assessment.
- Weeks 5 and 6: Grammar instruction using drills and contextualized activities. Survey Two
- Week 7 and 8: Introduced additional vocabulary using the Keyword Method, followed by a formative assessment.
- Week 9 and 10: Second round of TPR and TPRS strategies used to tell story using unit grammar and vocabulary, followed by cumulative unit test. Survey Three
- Week 11 and 12: Introduced new unit vocabulary and grammar using TPR and TPRS strategies. Final Survey

OUR STORY

Showtime

“Ich war vielleicht ‘ne Niete in Deutsch und Biologie,
Dafür konnt’ ich schon immer ganz gut mal’n”!
-Reinhard Mey

After I finally received approval from Moravian’s Human Subject Internal Review Board during the summer before my study, there was no turning back. I began to check daily to find out who the new members of my German II class would be. When I found out who they were, I realized that I already knew several of them, which led me to have some mixed feelings. For example I felt especially bad about having to teach Damien again because he openly expressed his frustration with German when I taught him last year, and I felt like I had failed him. I also knew Berhard, Mannfred, and Willie with whom I had developed friendly relationships in German I. While I didn’t know any of the girls assigned to the class, I was relieved to know that there were only 16 students in this class, which would make record keeping just a bit more manageable. I started to count down the days until this study would begin with the uneasy feeling that I was not ready to take on such a responsibility.

On the first day, I had to wait until eighth period to finally meet these students with whom I was about to take this journey. When they finally arrived I greeted each of them with a smile and told them to sit wherever they pleased. I

was surprised that most of them sat toward the front of the classroom. I wanted to have my desks arranged into sets of four to encourage face-to-face communication for my students, but I found out early that morning that this arrangement would not work with my freshman homeroom. I settled for arranging the desks in an arrow formation so that the students would not be sitting in traditional rows. After they got settled I introduced myself and handed out my course guidelines. After this, I told them about this study, explaining how I had gone to a workshop at Sweet Briar College in Virginia during the summer in order to learn more about some of the strategies that I wanted to use with them. Willie quickly asked me why I would waste my time during the summer and even pay with my own money. I told him that I was trying to become a better teacher and that I wanted to find ways to help students be more successful with German. I felt Damien's presence and disapproval the whole time that I was explaining this to the class, and I hoped that he would start to sense my good intentions.

Then I handed out a permission letter for them to take home and get signed. I made sure to mention they were not obligated to participate in this study and they could withdraw at any time without penalty. I told them I needed to have their signed consent forms before I could start. Wolfgang asked if my teachers at Moravian would see what I wrote about them and I told him they would but that I would give each of them a different German name so they would

remain anonymous. As Ulrika said, “That’s kind of creepy,” the bell rang and off they went.

When the students came into class the next day, I was anxious to see if anyone had their consent form, and I was pleased to collect all letters except for two. The rest of the students returned their letters by the end of the first week and all students in the class agreed to serve as research study participants. This long awaited study started, and I was embarking into an unknown territory, filled with hope and fear.

Student Questionnaire

The first step for me was to learn more about how the students viewed themselves as learners. In the questionnaire I gave them (Appendix A,) I was not surprised to find out that for the most part the students did not like or feel adept at learning grammar. They especially complained about the grammar they studied during the latter part of German I, which was “modal” verbs. Katarina wrote on her survey, that “motels (sic)- new words “was the hardest thing for her to learn last year.” After I read their answers, I asked the students what modal verbs were. Bernhard could name five out of the six verbs but he could not tell me how they were used. Melanie commented as one of her answers it was hard for her “to put complete sentences together with that reverse thing.” Willie complained about “der”, “die”, and “das”, and Pierre shared frustration about having to remember when a noun was nominative and when it was accusative. I told them I wanted to

teach them how to use some strategies this year that might make grammar easier to understand. As I was making this lofty promise to these students, I was grappling with conflicting thoughts that I would also have to “teach” them in the traditional way about grammar so that they could take the common assessments that we give in German II at my high school. This was the grammarian coming out in me. I still struggled with the idea that students were not thrilled to learn grammar.

When the students responded to how well they thought they learned German, 38% of the students reported they were not good, 50% reported they were average and 12% reported they were good at learning.

On the same questionnaire, I asked the students what their favorite thing was about learning German. The majority of them reported that it was learning new words. Pierre especially liked to learn “dirty words”. I said I was glad to have read this because the strategies that I planned on showing them were meant to help with vocabulary acquisition. Students already reported about strategies they used to learn new vocabulary by looking at their lists, writing the words down and memorizing them. I praised them that they already knew *how* they approached their vocabulary words, and then I challenged them to start to think about what worked and what did not work for them.

As a warm-up during the first several days of school, the students played vocabulary games where I thematically listed last year’s vocabulary words on a

piece of paper. The students paired up, each student having a different color pen or pencil. When I said the word in English, the students had to find the translation and be the first to circle it or underline it. At the end of the game, whoever had the most words in their color chose a German sticker or a lollipop. We played this game for six days.

Waltraud came in every day and said, “Are we playing that game again?”

I said yes and asked if she liked it.

She replied, “Yea, I like games. That’s how I learn best.”

I said I was glad to hear this. Waltraud’s German teacher from last year told me that he had many problems with her and even asked me during last year if she could transfer over to my class, which never happened. I hoped that I could gain Waltraud’s trust during this study and considered her eager participation a good sign.

Mein Buch über Mich

During the second week of school, I started a project with the students where they made a book in German about themselves. I supplied construction paper, yarn, markers and colored pencils for them to get started. The only thing they had to do was bring in items from home so that they could personalize their books. I gave them an instruction sheet and a rubric for completing this assignment. Each page of their book was meant as a review for what they had learned in German I. They introduced themselves and told where they lived,

talked about school, family, their favorite foods and what the weather was like where they lived. I was excited about this project because I thought it would be a fun way to review vocabulary from German I.

After a few days, I realized that some of the students were not as thrilled about the book project and acted indifferently. I noted in my field log at the time “the students took a long time to get settled into this project and did not refer to their books.”

Bernhard waltzed into the classroom at the beginning of a class and said, “*Guten Nachmittag!* I forgot my stuff. You can mark me down as a zero for today.”

Waltraud said, “You might as well give me a zero because I don’t remember any of this. Nothing is coming back. How do you spell *Jahre?*”

I started to walk over to her to help but had noticed that she had taken her book out and had started to look things up without my help.

Wolfgang was finally in class on that day. He had not been to class for several days because he had been serving in school suspension for skipping school. He had nothing started and it seemed that he had no intention in beginning his “*Buch über mich.*” I reminded him to get the materials that he needed for this project and that it was due at the end of the following Monday’s class. He went and got some materials but did not begin. Waltraud became frustrated and concluded that she “does not know anyone in her family.” I tried to

diffuse her frustration by telling her just to try to remember any vocabulary from last year and just to draw stick figures.

After a period of calm she burst out again with, “I don’t know any of this!”

I asked why and she said, “I didn’t learn German last year cuz I didn’t listen!”

Waltraud had initially been placed in my German I class last year at the beginning of the year and I remember being sad when she was transferred out of my class. My impression of her during those initial days was that she was very bright and eager to learn. I asked her if she remembered being there, and I got no response. I said to her, “You were so sharp and quick to learn!” After I said that she looked piercingly into my eyes and said, “I don’t know. I have a problem.”

When this class period was almost over, I overheard Wolfgang talk about his job at the Lehigh Valley Zoo, so I decided to engage in conversation with him. I told him I remember seeing giraffes at the zoo. He disagreed with me and said there were none at this zoo.

Immediately Waltraud jumped in and said, “There are so giraffes at the zoo!”

Wolfgang sharply retorted, “There are not and just shut your mouth you little whore!”

I apologized to Waltraud for Wolfgang's words and I made Wolfgang apologize.

It was after this class period that I knew I was not going to have an easy road ahead of me with Waltraud or with Wolfgang. Having these two boisterous students demanding so much attention from me already increased my worry about the quiet students who were doing what they were supposed to do. I started to ask myself how I could improve our community in this classroom, and I feared that it might already be too late to build the type of classroom community I desired.

The weekend was a healing time. Pierre and Wolfgang were having a conversation as they were arriving to class about how cool they thought the German language sounded, which immediately gave me a burst of energy. Almost all of the students handed their "*Buch über Mich*" in to me. It was not a surprise that neither Wolfgang nor Waltraud had completed the project. Ingo did not hand in his work either. He had been absent during the previous week for three days and simply needed more time. I found out from his guidance counselor that he had been in trouble with the law. I approached him and asked him when he thought he could complete his work and he said he would have it by the end of the week. He was true to his word and submitted his book to me later that week. I was relieved this project was over and done with and I was ready to get started with the new unit. Several of the students did not follow the rubric that I handed out when they started and I questioned myself if it was too open ended or whether

the students were ready for it. It did not serve the purpose for review that I thought it would and I accepted the blame for what I considered bad planning.

Why do you have the Suitcase out?

After I collected the projects, I gave the students a vocabulary list for the new unit. I pulled out my suitcase that was filled with clothing in order to present this vocabulary. Waltraud said, “Why do you have the suitcase out?” I told her it was full of my props for this unit. I reminded them about my study and that we were going to play with words and use them in context. I began to show them the outdated and unusual clothing items. I used a technique called circling as I showed them this vocabulary. It sounded like this:

Teacher: *Das ist das Hemd.. Schüler, ist das das Hemd?*

Ulrika: *Ja*

Teacher: *Ja, das ist das Hemd. Ist das das Papier?*

Ingo: *Nein*

Teacher: *Nein, das ist absurd. Das ist nicht das Papier. Das ist das Hemd. Ist das ein Buch oder das Hemd?*

Willie: *Das ist Hemd*

Teacher: *Ja, Willie, das ist das Hemd. Das ist nicht das Buch. Es ist das Hemd. Was ist das?*

Ute: *Das ist das Hemd*

Teacher: *Richtig, Ute, das ist das Hemd.*

Teacher: *Wo ist das?*

Bernhard: *in der Schule*

Teacher: *Ja, Bernhard, sehr gut das Hemd ist in der Schule.*

The purpose of circling was to provide copious comprehensible input for the students, and so they would hear the new words as many times as possible and begin to acquire them. In between each statement, the students responded with yes or no and then finally used the word at the end of the circling. After each round of circling I would either introduce a new clothing item or expand on the same word by adding details (e.g. size), especially if it was a difficult word. After we worked our way through all the items in my suitcase, I gave novel commands to the students. I asked for a volunteer to come to the front. Pierre volunteered and came up so I asked him to grab a couple of different items. Then I asked him to hand clothing items to Damien and to Jörg. After this activity, we played a game called “*Schnapp die Puppe*”. In this game, students from each team (two teams) stood on either side of a desk on which I had placed a stuffed animal. When I said the English vocabulary word, the first student who knew the German equivalent grabbed the stuffed animal. If the answer was correct, that team earned a point. After we went through all of the new vocabulary, class was almost over so I decided to address the outburst that happened on Friday. I told the students that I wanted us to be like a family in this classroom and that I only

wanted to hear kind words when they spoke to each other. As they sat in silence, I assigned homework for the students to make a tri-fold with the new vocabulary.

The next day when the students came in I assigned as a warm up to work on their vocabulary tri-fold and practice writing the words that they did for homework. Willie walked into the room and said, "I hate Waltraud!" I acted as though I had not heard his comment. As I circulated and checked homework Melanie said to me "Why do we have to do these tri-folds?" I told her it was another way to practice the vocabulary and that she should think about the words as she wrote them; otherwise it was a waste of time. At that point, Katarina noted that that made sense to her. Melanie told me flash cards helped her learn more than a tri-fold. I asked the rest of the class how they felt and almost everyone said they would rather do flash cards. I told them we would switch to flash cards for vocabulary homework. Ulrika said "*Darf ich auf die Toilette?*" and I silently gave thanks to the gods that I heard unsolicited German.

On that day, I introduced German words for colors. I used the circling technique again to point to clothing that the students were wearing and I asked what colors the clothing items were from my suitcase. Colors are mostly cognates in English and German so I did not need to spend a lot of time on them. It was another way to use comprehensible input and to provide more repetitions.

I told the students they should organize their vocabulary in ways that helped them to remember the genders of the nouns. I recommended they use

different colored flash cards or pencils to symbolize masculine, feminine and neuter nouns. Katarina asked me “Where do genders come from?” I tried to explain to her that most of the time genders have little to do with the meaning of the word, and rather than having been arbitrarily assigned to each word, they evolved along with the language. I completely understood her frustration about the purpose of genders because I had also agonized over the same thing. Ute raised her hand and said, “Maybe we can imagine a wife tying her husband’s tie for him and then we will know that tie in German is feminine.” I praised her for such a good idea and told her that we were going to learn about a strategy where we use those kinds of associations with words to help us remember. I was so happy for this type of feedback from the students and hoped they would continue to respond well to the new strategies we would be learning.

After this conversation, I told the students that we were going to keep working with this new vocabulary in different ways. I taught them *zeig auf* (point to), *nimm* (take), and *stell auf* (place on). I used gestures for each of these commands. After practicing with them for several minutes I asked them to close their eyes as I gave the commands. When all of the students could perform the gestures with eyes closed, I knew I could use these commands with our new vocabulary. All students with the exception of Waltraud eagerly participated. She was looking at the other students with what seemed like disbelief to see if they were performing the gestures. I chose to ignore her at this point. Wolfgang

was not in my class on that day and I later discovered that he was skipping the school day again.

With our new commands, we had fun during the rest of this class. I gave commands for the students to put a glove on their head, put the blouse on their neighbor's head or to point to an item of clothing with their elbow or with their knee. It was a way to provide further comprehensible input with the vocabulary. During this activity, I walked to Damien's desk and asked him *stell den Handschuh auf Mannfreds Kopf!* He leaned back and away from me and shook his head no. This immediately reminded me of research studies I had read during the previous summer about body language. I thought Damien was demonstrating a high affective filter at that moment. I hoped that the use of comprehensible input would help to lower his anxiety level. The bell rang and the students happily left yelling *Tschüs!*, on their way out. I allowed myself to feel a modicum of hope for our new approach to vocabulary acquisition.

Personalized Questions and Answers with New Grammar

After we worked on clothing vocabulary for several days, I planned several new lessons to introduce the grammar in this unit. During one of them, students read an advertisement from a department store in Germany and answered questions about clothing items as a warm up. As I circulated through the classroom, I saw that Waltraud was working on her biology homework. I asked her to put this assignment away, and she replied with "Wait, I have to finish this."

When I took her book and placed it on my desk, she turned to Ulrika and said loudly, “Is it too late to drop this class?” Ulrika squirmed in her chair and smiled but did not reply.

After this, I wrote the following structures on the board: *ich sehe, du siehst, Er/sie sieht, die Jacke gefällt mir/dir/ihm/ihr*. Underneath them I wrote the English translation. These were the last two structures that I wanted to use with personalized questioning, comprehensible input and repetition before I started to use them in a story that we would create together.

With the structures on the board, I showed various pictures of clothing from magazines and referred to the structures. Once again I used the circling technique to provide comprehensible input and repetition, but this time I asked the students to use these structures in their replies. I noted in my field log entry on this class period that, “Students had smiles on their faces during this activity. Students were responding and understanding what I was saying. Comprehensible input!” I purposely chose pictures that I thought would elicit students’ opinions. At one point during this lesson the students began to argue with each other about whether the clothing was “cool.” I steered them back to the structures and German in the following way:

Teacher: *Melanie, gefällt dir dieser Rock?*

Melanie: *Ja, es gefällt mir sehr!*

Teacher: *Was siehst du auf diesem Bild?* (I held up the picture and pointed to the structures on the board)

Melanie: *Ich sehe Schuhe.*

Teacher: *Du siehst Schuhe! Gut! Welche Farbe sind die Schuhe?*

Melanie: *Schwarz.*

Teacher: *Ja, gut! Gefallen dir die Schuhe?*

Melanie: *Nein, die Schuhe gefällt mir nicht.*

Teacher: *Das ist Schade!, Die Schuhe gefallen mir sehr!*

Melanie: *Nein, die Schuhe gefallen mir nicht!*

I was glad that she was beginning to use the pronoun “mir” correctly but I repeated what she said with the correct plural use of the verb, which she corrected in her next utterance. I showed several more pictures from the magazines and provided more comprehensible input. I asked the students for their opinions knowing they had to use the new grammar (structures) to respond. At the end of this class, I prepared them for Monday when they would create their first story using all structures we had worked with. I told them I wrote my own story and they would be able to vote for which story they liked more after they had created their own story.

During this class period, Waltraud asked several times if she could have her books back and I replied that she could not. At the end of class, I showed my anger to her by telling her to stop interrupting the entire class during instruction

and to bring her German books and I asked her to apologize to me, which she did. I wanted to understand her, but found this increasingly difficult to do with each passing day. To help me try to understand how to support Waltraud, I composed the layered story in Figure 1.

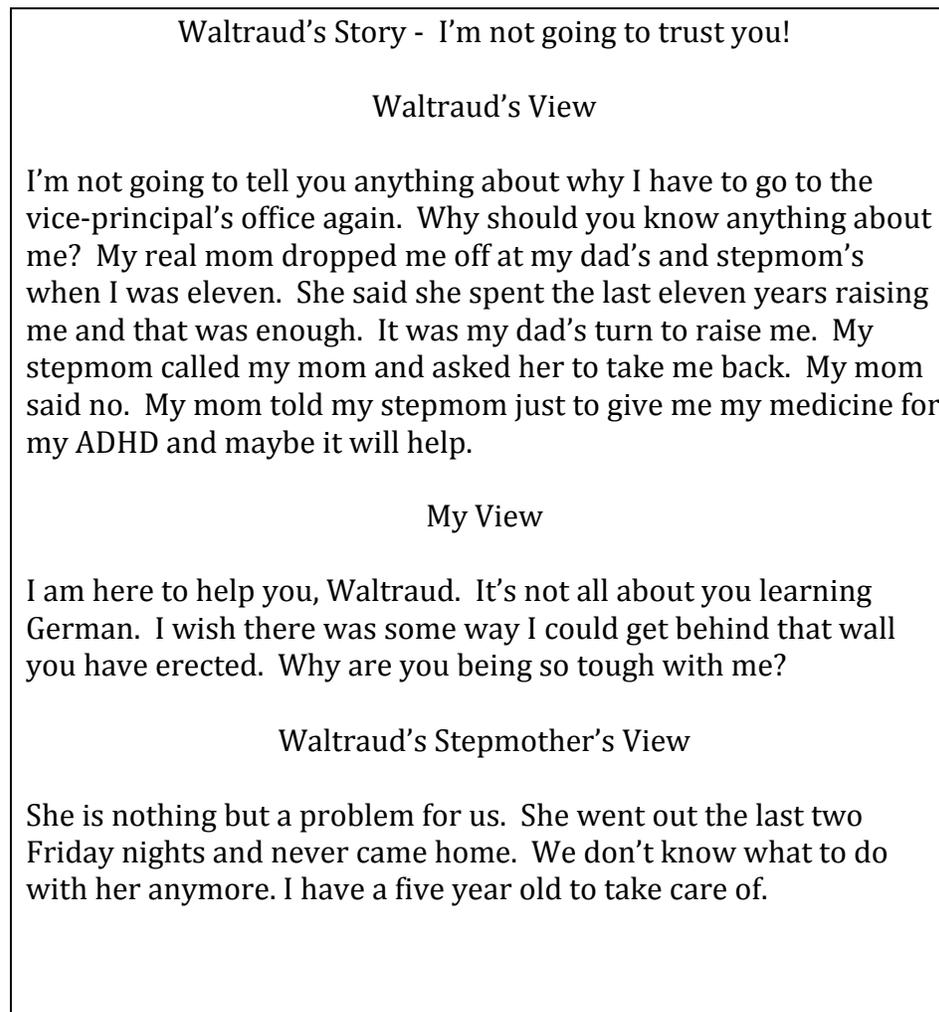


Figure 1: *Waltraud's Layered Story*

After I had several conversations with Waltraud's father and stepmother, I was better able to understand her situation and I resolved to employ as much patience with her as I could. I hoped that our relationship would improve if I would be able to show her that she was a worthwhile individual whom I wanted in my classroom.

Die Pistole

The following Monday, I came in ready to start our long-awaited story. Before the students arrived, I put three structures on the board that I wanted them to acquire. They were: *es gefällt mir/dir/ihr/ihm*, *er sieht/du siehst/sie sieht* and *er/sie nimmt*. Once again, I established meaning for these phrases by putting the English translations next to each phrase. Everyone with the exception of Waltraud, Damien and Heidi performed gestures in pairs for these structures. Heidi appeared to be confused during this activity. I stopped and re-explained what we were doing and then performed the gestures again and asked Heidi what they meant. She was then able to perform the gestures with Willie. With the assurance that the students understood these structures, we started our story. I started the story off by stating that a boy is in a store and sees something that he likes. After that, I began to *ask* the story, where students fill in details surrounding the targeted structures as I ask for the details. Ulrika, Ulla, Bernhard, Manfred and Ute were very engaged and eagerly added to the story. At one point, Wolfgang said to Ulrika, "You sound like a robot!" She was leaning

forward and repeating the structures and vocabulary as I was asking the questions. I sensed after Wolfgang said this that it was as if I was programming this vocabulary into the students' brains. The story the students created using the structures (in bold letters) was as follows:

*Bernhard geht zu Victoria's Secret und **sieht** schöne schwarze Unterhose. Er **sieht** die Unterhose und **sie gefällt ihm**. Er **nimmt** die Unterhose und geht an die Kasse, aber es gibt ein Problem! Er hat kein Geld. Zunächst, geht Bernhard auf die Bank um Geld zu holen. Auf der Bank **sieht Bernhard** einen Räuber. Der Räuber hat eine Pistole. **Bernhard nimmt** die Pistole von dem Räuber. Bernhard ist ein Held! Aber dann **nimmt Bernhard** das Geld von dem Räuber. Er ist nicht mehr ein Held. Bernhard geht zu Victoria's Secret mit dem Geld und kauft die schwarze Unterhose. Er **nimmt** die Unterhose nach Hause und **die Unterhose gefällt ihm**.*

*Bernhard goes to Victoria's Secret and **sees** beautiful, black underwear. He sees them and **he likes them**. He decides to buy the underwear and goes to the cash register but there is a problem. He has no money. Bernhard decides to go to the bank to get money. At the bank he **sees** a thief and the thief has a gun. **Bernhard takes** the gun from the thief and becomes a hero. He does not remain a hero very long because **he takes** the money from the thief. He goes back to Victoria's Secret and buys his underwear. He goes home and **he likes the underwear**.*

Figure 2: Die Pistole

Throughout the story as we added new details, I repeated the story to the students at regular intervals. After it was completed, I retold it one last time and asked the students to try to retell the story with a partner. I walked around and listened to how the students were doing. Heidi, Willie and Ingo looked confused so I asked them if they understood what to do. They quickly replied they did not. I asked them if it would help if I retold the story once more and they replied that it would. I realized that the students were not ready to retell the story, so I asked

them to take out a piece of paper and to draw the story as I told it. When I collected the drawings, I was surprised to see that they had also written on their drawings. Figures 3-5 contain several student examples.

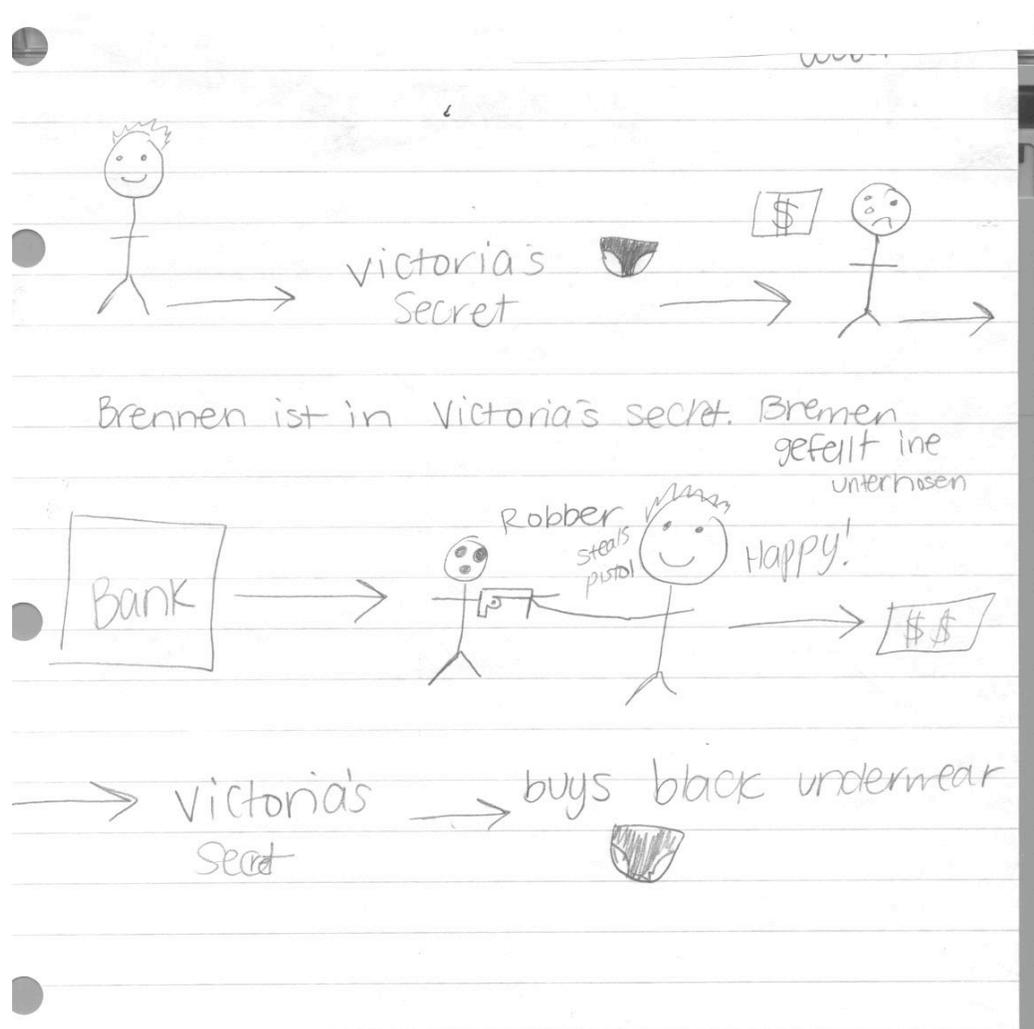
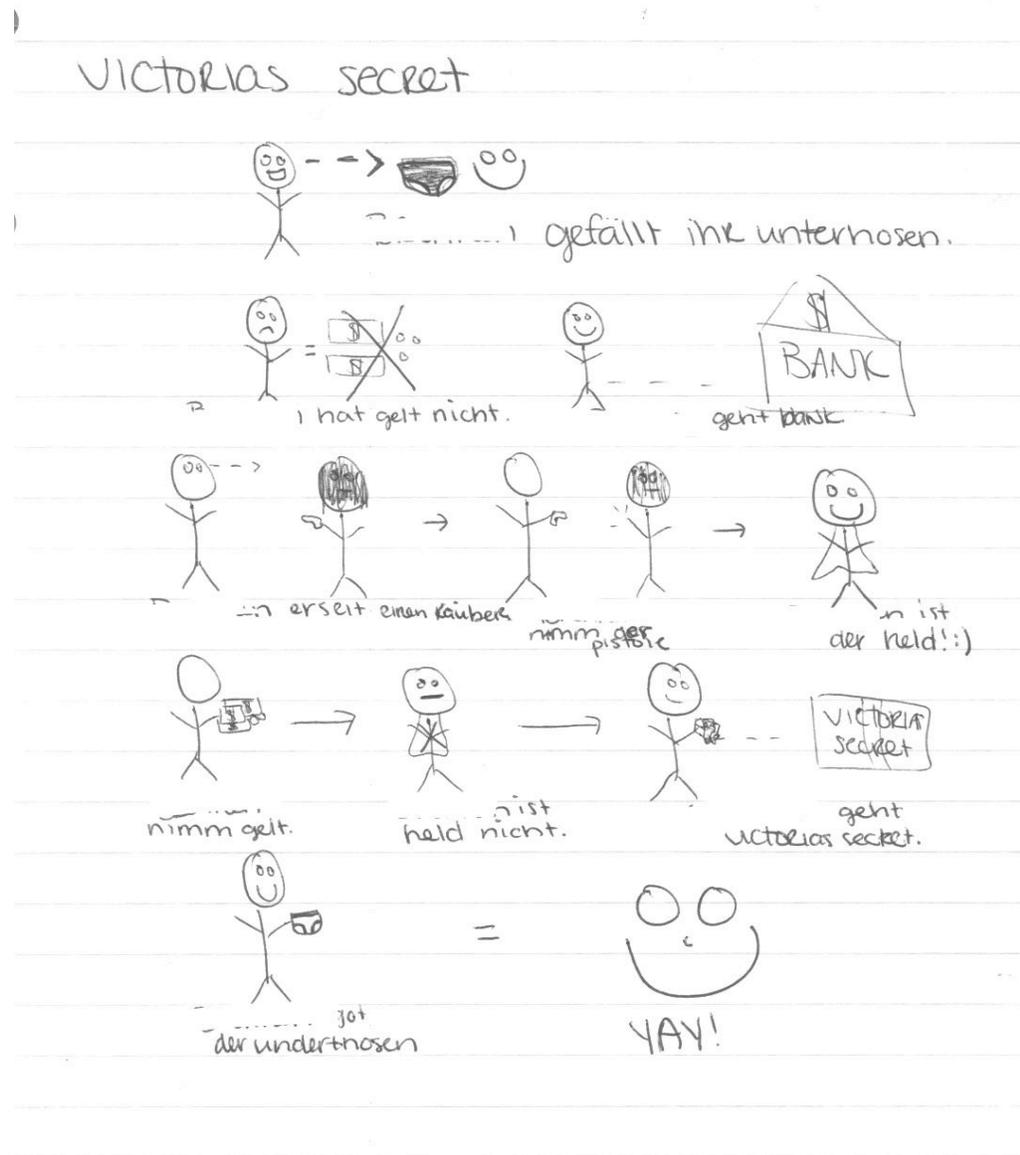


Figure 3: Katarina's Drawing

In this sample, Katarina demonstrated that she followed the story but she did not provide many details. She used mostly English to label her pictures but she used the verb *gefällt* correctly even though she misspelled it.



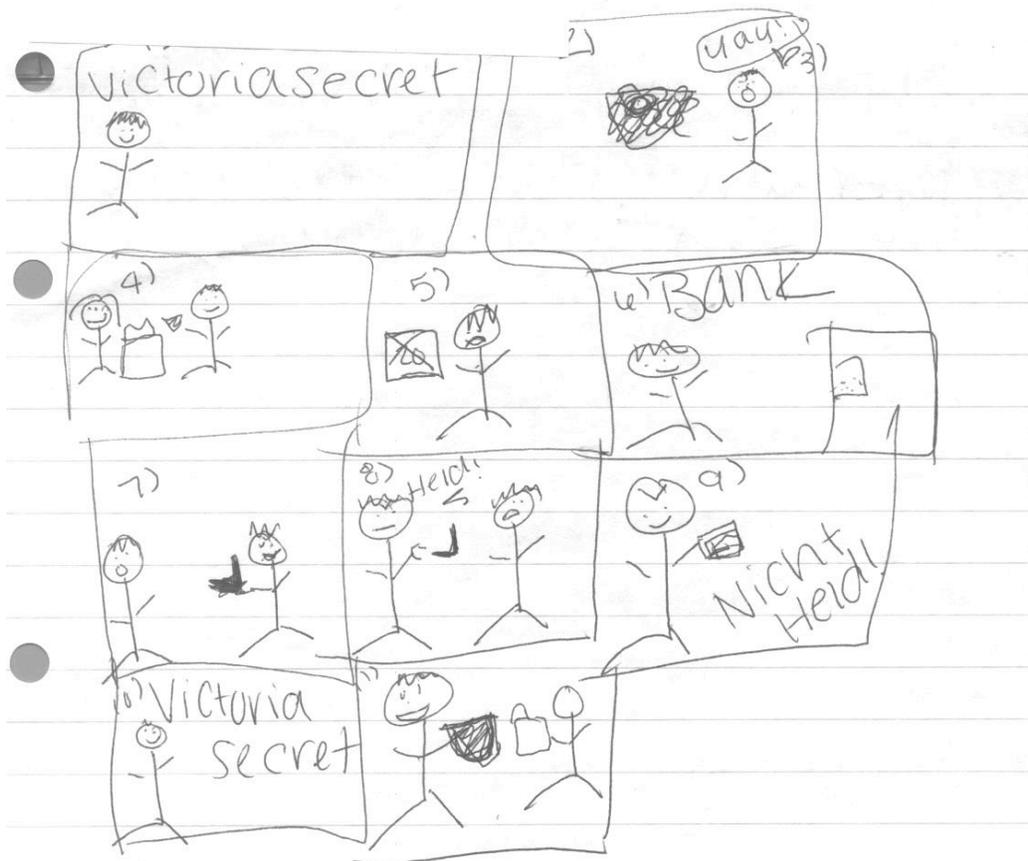
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Figure 4: Ulrika's Drawing

Ulrika went into more detail when she summarized the story and used German to label her pictures (Figure 4). It was encouraging to see how she began to change the stem vowel in the verbs even though they contained misspellings. She spelled *gefällt* correctly but did not use this verb with the correct dative pronoun.

In Figure 5, Angelika numbered her pictures and wrote a sentence about each one. She was the most accurate and even shows how she self corrects her word order in sentence number three. She spelled *sieht* correctly but forgot the umlauts on *gefällt*. It is also encouraging to see that she uses the correct ending on *einen* when it is in the accusative case in sentence number seven.

The next day when class started I gave the students a pop quiz to see how much of the vocabulary they remembered. I gave them 10 German words and asked them to write the English word. When I corrected the quiz, I discovered that 80% of the students achieved an 80% or above after using this TPRS strategy. I was encouraged by these results. That was the first time I ever gave a pop quiz so I was pleasantly surprised that none of the students complained.



- 1) ist in victoria secret
- 2) sieht die ~~blaue~~ schwarze Unterhosen
- ~~3) ~~Bank~~ gefällt~~
- 3) Ge fällt ihm die unterhosen
- 4) Er hat geld nicht f
- 5) Er kauft die unterhosen
- 6) an gene die Bank
- 7) Er sieht einen rauber
- 8) Der rauber hat ein pistole

Figure 5: Angelika's Drawing

After the quiz, I handed the students the story that I had written using the same structures and asked them to translate it and answer questions in English. Wolfgang was not in class again and I found out later he had once again skipped the entire school day. The rest of the class stayed on task and worked in groups to complete the reading. This reminded me of Vgotsky's words "But the teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something" (p. 117) because I told them before they read this story that they would choose which version of the story they liked better, theirs or mine, which gave them a purpose for completing this assignment. After they completed the reading and questions, I asked them for their vote and it seemed like everyone replied in unison "ours!" The story I wrote is shown in Figure 6.

*Michael Jackson ist in der Abercrombie & Fitch Boutique in Lehigh Valley Mall. Er sieht einen schönen Anzug. Er will den Anzug kaufen. Der Anzug ist grün und rot. **Er sieht** auch eine schwarze Krawatte. AHHH, **der Anzug gefällt ihm** und **die Krawatte gefällt ihm**. Er will sie kaufen. Das Kleidungsstück **gefällt ihm**.*

*Es gibt ein Problem. Er hat kein Geld. Was soll er machen? Oh, das ist ein Problem. **Er sieht** den Anzug und **er sieht** die Krawatte und er hat kein Geld! Er hat ein Rockkonzert bei Stabler Arena morgen und er muss den Anzug und die Krawatte haben.*

*Er geht auf die Bank. Er will Geld holen ABER was **sieht er**? Er **sieht** einen Räuber. Ein Räuber ist bei der Bank. Der Räuber hat das Geld! Was soll Michael Jackson machen? **Er nimmt** das Geld!!! **Er nimmt** das Geld und er geht zu Abercrombie & Fitch und er kauft den Anzug und die Krawatte, Jetzt ist er sehr froh.*

*Michael Jackson is in Abercrombie & Fitch at the Lehigh Valley Mall and **sees** a nice suit. He wants to buy it because it is green and red. He also **sees** a black tie that **he likes** and wants to buy it. He likes the piece of clothing. He realizes*

that he does not have money to pay for these items. He has a rock concert at Stabler the next day and he must buy these clothing items. He goes to the bank to get money and sees a thief. **He takes** the money from the thief and goes back to Abercrombie & Fitch to buy the clothing. He is then happy.

Figure 6: Die Kleidungsstücke

During class on the next day, we had a lock down situation, which lasted into the ninth period. The students were lined up and seated against the wall and I had the lights turned off. My mind was not on the story that we composed two days earlier but as we were sitting there I overheard Pierre and Ulrika talking:

Pierre: I think there is a *Räuber* in the school and he has a *Pistole*.

Ulrika: Yea, that's funny. I love those words. There is a *Räuber* with a *Pistole*.

That was the best start to the weekend that I could have hoped for. When the lock down was called off, the students exited and yelled *Tschüs!*

Time for “Official” Learning

We were nearing the halfway mark of this unit and I knew I had to get the students ready for a unit assessment. I planned to use a more traditional grammar teaching method so that the students would have more practice to fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb on the test that was coming up.

When they got to class I noticed that Waltraud had a pretend baby that she had received in her health class. She sat down and gave the baby to Ulrika. I immediately started to ask questions in German about the baby. I asked Waltraud if the baby was a boy or a girl and she answered it was a boy. She looked over at

Ulrika and told her to move his hat away from his eyes because it was covering them.

I asked her if she likes having this baby and she said, “No, it’s annoying.”

Then I asked Ingo and Jörg, *Gefällt euch das Baby?*

They both said yes.

This conversation led into my teaching about stem-vowel changing verbs.

I asked the students to open their texts to the section that had drills with these verbs. I gave the examples of *sehen* and *gefallen* and told the students that the verbs we used to create our story last week are stem-vowel changing verbs and now we were going to learn some new ones. As we looked at the new verbs, I explained how to conjugate them and we set off to do the drills in the text. Heidi struggled with pronunciation and with which form of the verb to insert to agree with the subject. I asked her to look for the subject of the sentence and Waltraud asked, “What’s a subject?” I explained that it is the “thing” that is doing the action of the verb. Heidi was able to figure out what the subject was and she chose the correct conjugation for the verb. I felt guilty for asking the students to perform these isolated drills, and I felt like the atmosphere of the class changed, so I decided to forget about any more drills so we could “play” with these verbs.

Teacher: *Ich spreche deutsch. Sprichst du deutsch?*

Katarina: *Ja, ich spreche deutsch.*

Teacher: *Sprichst du deutsch?*

Jörg: *Ja, ich spreche deutsch.*

Teacher: *Sprichst du deutsch?*

Damian: I knew you were gonna try to get me to talk! (and then he said) *Ja.*

Teacher: *Ich esse Kartoffeln. Ißt du Kartoffeln?*

Pierre: *Ja, ich esse Kartoffeln.*

Teacher: *Sprichst du und ißt du Kartoffeln?*

Wolfgang: *Ja, ich esse und spreche Kartoffeln.*

Wolfgang, Pierre and Ute laughed because they understood that Wolfgang said he eats and speaks potatoes. Wolfgang seemed happy that he was able to understand how we were using the language in a humorous way.

The class was near its end, so I assigned a grammar practice exercise. I was far more pleased with our use of the new verb forms in context, but I still felt that students needed to practice these constructions within a traditional homework assignment. I had not yet succeeded in convincing myself that grammar drills were not the best method for the students to learn and practice the language. It was hard to let this old habit die. I still felt that I needed more proof that teaching grammar in a natural context really worked.

On the following day when Waltraud came into class she announced that she flunked taking care of her baby. "I had 13 neglects with the baby." I observed Katarina rolling her eyes and moving away from Waltraud. Her body language led me to feel another pang of guilt for not being able to start each class

session by immediately creating a positive environment. I hoped that the atmosphere would lighten once I started to play the review game that I had planned for later in that lesson.

The first activity for this lesson was for the students to complete a worksheet using these stem-vowel change verbs, which we did together as a class. Ulrika caught on quickly and was eager to volunteer. Ingo raised his hand to complete the next fill in the blank. I needed to help him identify the subject of the sentence and to match the correct verb form, but eventually he got it. I remembered him telling me during an earlier lesson that, “I try and try but the words just won’t go into my head.” I was glad that I remembered to praise him for attempting to answer and for being correct. I reminded him that that is what we were attempting this year, to look for better ways to help him learn the vocabulary and grammar. For the rest of this class period we played a vocabulary review game in order to prepare for a quiz on the next day.

Before I handed out the quiz, Ulrika raised her hand and asked if I was going to give extra credit. I answered that she could earn some extra points by preparing a German dessert and writing a description of it in German for our upcoming Oktoberfest. She replied, “No, I mean like other extra credit.” She shared her concern that she does not do well and that she needs this extra credit to help. This was the first time I noticed her not feeling confident about her ability in German. I noted in my field log that all of her formative assessments have

been positive. I was puzzled that she had this negative self-image. I later interviewed her and asked her about her negative self-perception and she revealed to me that she gets very nervous when it comes to tests and her grades. She was feeling that nervousness before this quiz.

After the students took this first “official” quiz, I noticed that the majority of the students were using the structure *gefällt mir* correctly in the writing section, which was encouraging. In my past experience with these quizzes, students had not performed well using this verb. The students did not perform well and lost several points on the listening section, however, which was not a surprise. In my experience, I have found that the listening activities and assessments that are available from the text that I use are isolated and difficult to understand for most German students.

The Keyword Method

It was time to introduce new vocabulary from *Lektion B* of this unit. I asked the students to look at the German words and to make an association with a similar sounding English word. I gave the example of *der Teller* in German. I told them to think of a male bank teller who is holding a plate up over his head on his outstretched hand. The male teller signified that the noun is masculine and the out of the ordinary idea of him carrying a plate would help them remember the German meaning, plate.

We got to work on making some new associations. Pierre quickly said for the word *das Geschäft*, “Think of *Geschichte*, which means story and then think of store for *Geschäft*. Both the English and the German words are similar.” Ulrika said, “Think of a chef who goes into a store and buys spices.” Pierre chimed in again and said for the word *Verkäuferin*, “Think of my last name and that’s what the word means.” After he said this, Damien raised his hand and said “Frau Wenck, isn’t that the feminine form of the word?” I was pleasantly surprised that Damien raised his hand to contribute. I praised him for noticing this and I pointed out his astute observation to the class. Ute said for the word *Größe*, “Think of growing.” We all laughed when we came to the word *die Quittung* when Pierre said, “That’s when you quit shopping and the receipt comes out of the cash register and it looks like a tongue.” (*Quittung* means receipt.) It was close to the end of class, so I assigned flashcards for homework. I reminded the students to try to make their own associations between German and English words when they used the keyword method because that is when it works best. I suggested they think of using this method in some of their other classes to see if it would help. I was pleased with the response from the students after I introduced this method and was eager to find out if it would help them to better remember vocabulary.

The next day as a warm up, the students quizzed each other using their flashcards. Then we reviewed the vocabulary words where we thought of

keyword associations during the previous lesson. As soon as we came to *Quittung*, it seemed that everyone said the meaning of the word in unison. Waltraud said gleefully “This method works for me!” and I told her I was very glad to hear that.

I had written a story using most of the new vocabulary that we were learning, and so I read it to the students as they drew what they heard. As I read the story two times, I observed the students drawing the entire time. When we were done, I asked if anyone could retell the story in English. Ulla, Pierre, Ulrika, Bernhard and Willie were able to retell it up until the end of the story, where they got stuck. I later discovered that the reason for their difficulty at the end was that I had used verbs that were presented during German I, and the students could not remember what they meant. Later, when I analyzed the drawings I could see how many of the new vocabulary words the students understood and drew. I was disappointed to see, though, that only five students scored 77% or better. Below are a few examples of how the students completed this formative assessment, based on the following story:

*Die berühmte **Reise***

*Frau Wenck und Deutsch II machen eine **Campingreise im Schwarzwald**. Wir campen bei dem **Schluchsee**. Oh, es wird schön sein. Zuerst müssen wir zum **Geschäft** gehen aber nicht zum **Musikgeschäft**. Da, sprechen wir mit der **Verkäuferin** über die große **Wahl** von warmen **Kleidungsstücke**. Die **Farben** sind so schön. Meine **Lieblingsfarben** sind orange und schwarz. Sie sind die **Farben** unserer Schule. Toll! Wir kaufen praktische **Kleidung** für die **Campingreise**. Alles ist **reduziert**!*

*Dann bezahlen wir und wir bekommen eine **Quittung** von der **Verkäuferin**. Wir stehen im **Geschäft** und wir warten. Dann gehen wir los!
Unsere **Campingreise** beginnt!*

*Mrs. Wenck and German II are taking a camping **trip** to the **Black Forrest**. We will be on the **Schluchsee** and it will be so nice. First, however, we must go to a camping **store**, not a **music store**.*

*At the **store** we talked with the **saleslady** about the wonderful **selection** of warm **clothing items** for our camping **trip**. The **colors** are so nice and my **favorite ones** are orange and black because they are the colors of our school. Great! We bought **practical** clothing for **the trip** at a **reduced** cost. We paid and received a **receipt** from the **saleslady**. We stood in the **store** and waited and then left. Our camping **trip** was beginning.*

Figure 7: Die Berühmte Reise

Mannfred (Figure 8) was able to draw 12 out of 13 new vocabulary words from the story after we used the keyword method. He drew the picture accurately according to how I told the story. I asked him why he did not talk about the end of the story during class, and he reported that he was still drawing and he did not hear me.

Katarina's work (Figure 9) showed that she was only able to hear and understand 5 of the 13 new vocabulary words from the story. She stopped drawing after she heard that we were not shopping in a music store.

Wolfgang (Figure 10) was only able to show that he understood 2 out of the 13 new vocabulary words with the keyword method. I seemed that he stopped listening at some point during this story and did not complete the drawing.

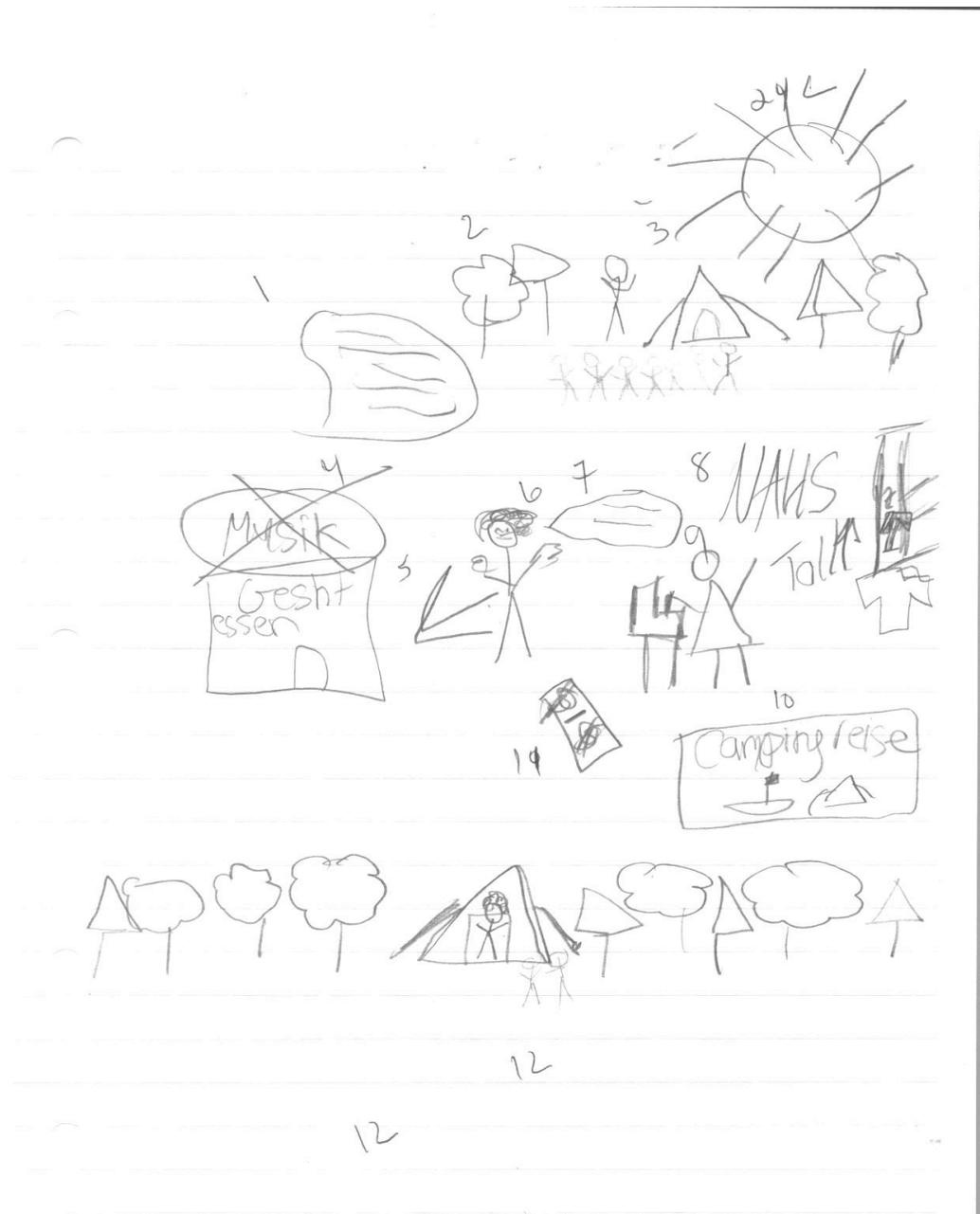


Figure 8: Manfred's drawing

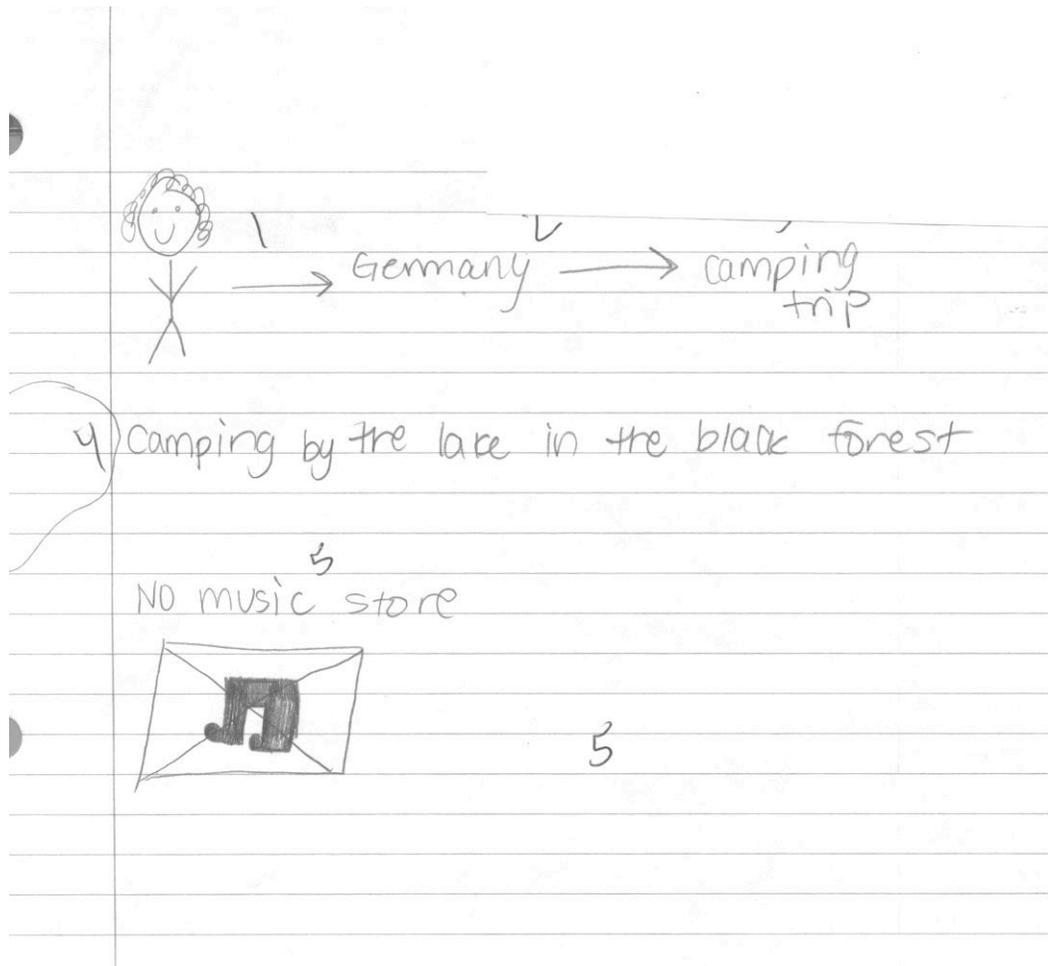


Figure 9: Katarina's Drawing

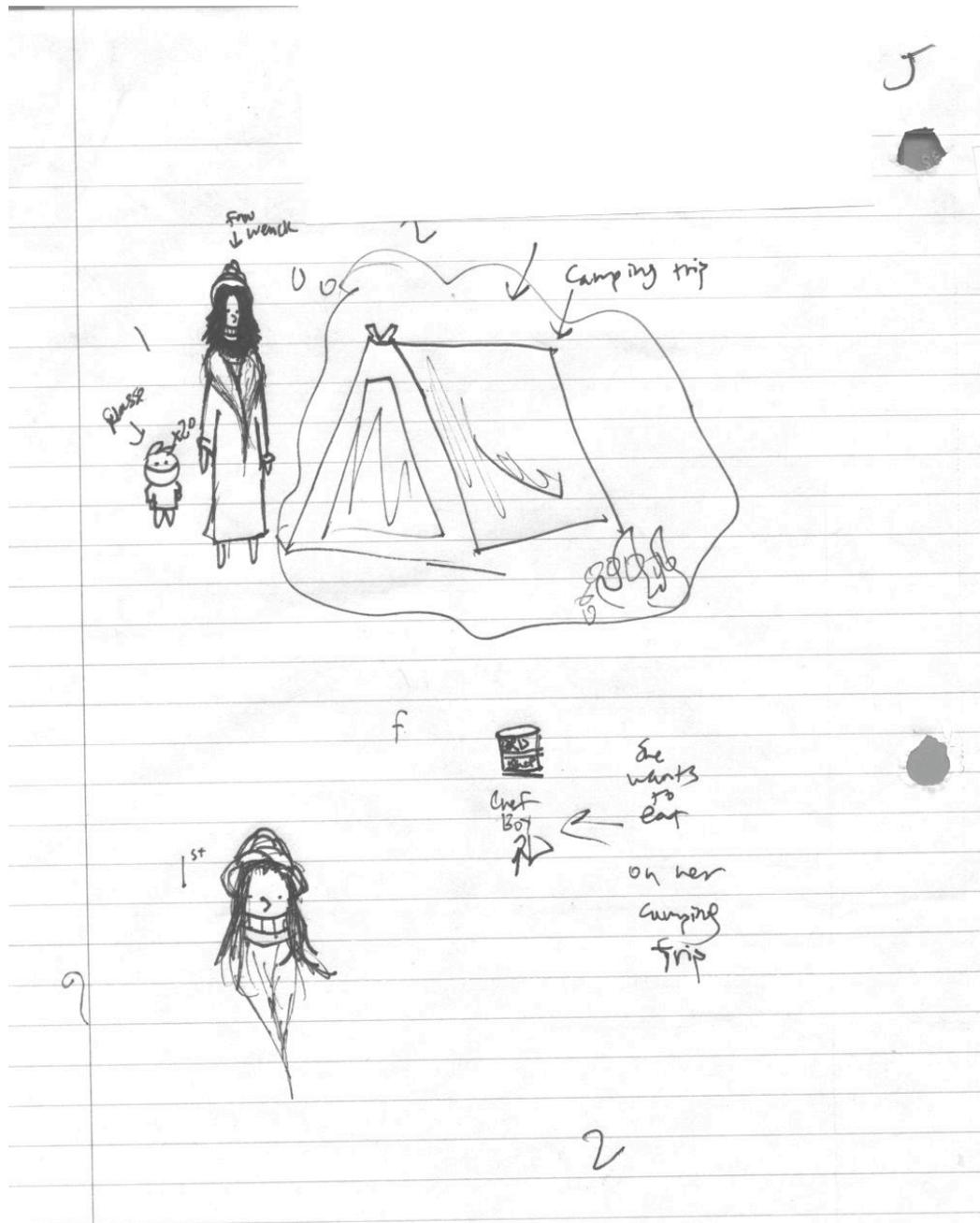


Figure 10: Wolfgang's drawing

In addition to the drawings, the students completed a pop quiz similar to the one that I gave after I used the TPR/TPRS method and I was disappointed to discover that only 42% scored 80% or better. I was beginning to have doubts about this method and started to feel that I should not rely on it for this class.

I used the keyword method once more, however, after the previous activity to see if the method could help the students differentiate between two different verbs in German that mean “to know.” One verb is *wissen*, which means to know a fact and the other verb is *kennen*, which means to know a person. I suggested that the students think of a male name “Ken” and associate this verb with knowing a person. I instructed students to complete an exercise in the textbook where they had to choose between *kennen* and *wissen* and was surprised to see that most students struggled with standard usage of these verb forms. This cast further doubt on the use of this strategy.

It’s too much to remember

At the end of this lesson Ingo asked to speak with me about his concern using the keyword method. I asked him to explain. He said, “It’s just too much to remember. How am I supposed to remember a word and then be able to associate it with another word?” I tried to explain to him that when he used word associations, he was just trying to connect new information to information that he already had in his brain. After we had this conversation the bell rang and I sensed that I failed to convince him.

During the next class period because there were many students at home sick with a virus that had been circulating through our school, I decided to play a vocabulary review game. I wrote vocabulary words on a beach ball and we tossed the ball around the classroom. Whoever caught the ball had to translate the word underneath his or her right thumb. When the ball came to Willie, the word was *Geschäft*. He could not remember what the translation was until I observed Ingo leaning over and whispering into Willie's ear that the word is store. Ingo caught my eye at that moment and I asked him if he still thinks the keyword method does not work for him. We both laughed and he said that maybe it is a better method than he thought.

Wolfgang had not been in my classroom for two whole weeks and I began to worry that he might not ever come back. I asked Pierre if he could tell me anything about Wolfgang, and he explained that Wolfgang would likely be dropping out. I felt sad for both Wolfgang and Pierre, his closest friend in our class, and I could sense Pierre's disappointment.

Bob der Pirat

We were ready to create another story with the new set of vocabulary and grammar structures from this unit and I was thankful the virus that had hit our school seemed to be subsiding. Before the students came to class I wrote two new structures on the board and one of the older structures that we had used with the previous story. They were; *Die Kleidung steht ihm/ihr gut*, *Die Kleidung passt*

ihm/ihr, and *Die Kleidung gefällt ihm/ihr*. The students started to filter in and noticed these structures on the board. Ute asked if we were doing a story and I said that we were. She replied that she was happy because she liked the stories. Waltraud came in late and when I asked her why she was late, she replied, “Cuz I was in guidance, God!” I did not pursue any further discussion with her sensing that she was upset about something. I noticed that she was pulling at her hair and shaking her arms, which was out of character for her. This led me to believe that she truly was upset about something, and I started wondering if the visit to guidance had something to do with the referral that I had made for her to be evaluated in the Student Assistance Program.

The story began to take shape when the students decided to make the main character Bob the pirate. Waltraud came up with the name for our pirate, which amazed me that she so quickly switched her focus and decided to participate. I was thrilled that students chose to create a story about a pirate, because I happened to have pirate puppets in my desk. I quickly pulled them out and it seemed to add even more dimension to the story. The students were smiling and eagerly adding more details to the story. I made sure I did comprehension checks with Heidi and Ingo, whom I considered my barometer students. If they did not understand the German, then I knew I needed to slow down. Every time I checked with them for a quick translation into English they were able to, so I continued.

When we finished this story, I asked the students to retell it in English.

Ute quickly raised her hand and asked to retell the entire story. I told her that she should start and then we would call on other students to continue. Pierre continued after Ute to tell more about the story. When we were close to the end of the story, Waltraud said, “Can I finish the story?” I said she certainly could, and she did. The students knew what the stories were like by now and I felt this story went well. The following is the story that they created.

Bob, der Pirat steht im Geschäft. Das Geschäft heißt Target. Er sieht Lederhosen. Die Lederhosen **gefallen ihm**. Er zieht sie an und **sie passen ihm**. **Sie gefallen ihm**. **Sie stehen ihm gut**. Er geht zu Verkäuferin und will sie kaufen. Sie heisst Hilda und sie war sehr dick und nicht nett. Bob kann sie nicht kaufen. Er geht zu Walmart und sieht keine Lederhosen. Er sieht Socken und sie **gefallen ihm**. Er zieht sie an und **sie passen nicht**. Sie sind zu eng. Dann sieht er heisse, rose, enge Unterhosen. **Sie gefallen ihm** sehr gut. Er zieht sie an. Sie **passen ihm** nicht. Sie sind zu eng. Aber er will sie. **Sie stehen ihm**. Er geht zu Verkäuferin und sie heisst Shakaya. Sie ist nett. Dann kommt Hilda und schlägt Shakaya. Shakaya ist jetzt tot. Hilda sieht Bob und verliebt sich in ihm. Sie gehen zu Taco Bell.

*Bob, the pirate is standing in Target. He sees Lederhosen (German leather pants often worn in Bavaria) and **he likes them**. He tries them on and **they fit**. **They look good on him and he likes them**. He goes to the saleslady named Hilda to buy them but she was not nice and she was very heavy so he could not buy them. Bob then goes to Walmart but cannot find any Lederhosen. He sees socks that he likes but they **do not fit**. They are too tight. After this, he sees hot pink tight underwear. **He really likes them!** He tries them on but they **don't fit** and are too tight but he still wants them. He thinks **they look good on him**. He goes to the saleslady whose name is Shakaya who is nice. Before you know it, Hilda shows up and hits Shakaya. Shakaya is now dead. Hilda falls in love with Bob and Bob falls in love with her. They run away to Taco Bell.*

Figure 11: Bob der Pirat

Ich mag die Schule nicht

After this, I told the students to draw out the story without me retelling it. Ute asked if she could write it out in German. That was delightful to hear and I told her she could. I asked students to label the pictures from the story they drew and to write a sentence from the story about each picture. Students were working for around 10 minutes when Waltraud looked at me and said, "Ich mag die Schule nicht."

I said, "That's okay. I am glad you said that in German."

When I passed by Damien's desk, I could not help but notice that he did not lean away from me as he had done in the past. He was drawing the pictures accurately but still had not labeled them or written in German.

Pierre said "We should break up into groups on Monday with the skeleton story and write our own stories and then perform them." I told him that was a great idea and that is what I had in mind for this class.

Willie and Waltraud were working together on this story when Willie said "What time is this class over?"

Waltraud responded "Not soon enough. Ich mag deutsch nicht."

I pretended not to hear this conversation and I observed that she looked over at me when she made this statement.

At this moment Heidi said, "How does the story end?"

Before anyone could answer, Waltraud blurted out ,“The sales lady kills the other sales lady, and then Bob and the first saleslady run away to Taco Bell.” Waltraud was right on and had been paying attention during this story. Her words seemed to belie her actions on that day. I perceived that as a positive development even though her words were negative.

After I collected the drawings I was disappointed to see that no one had labeled the pictures with German or had written any sentences. I decided that I had not yet provided enough time to do so and would ask them to add their sentences the next day.

Entering the classroom, students were already talking about the pirate puppets. Pierre asked if we were going to act the story out, which we did with the puppets as soon as everyone got to class. Pierre was Bob, Ute was the first saleslady and Ulla was the second saleslady. I narrated the story and the students followed along acting out as I narrated. The students chuckled and smiled throughout this activity.

Then I explained to the students that I needed them to get together with a partner to rewrite the story with the structures that were on the board again. They got to work and completed the task. When I examined their writings, I looked for the accuracy and flow of the story and for how they used the grammatical structures. I could not help but to compare these writings with German II writing assignments from my previous years of teaching this level and I was quite pleased

with the results. The following are several samples of how the students rewrote the story.

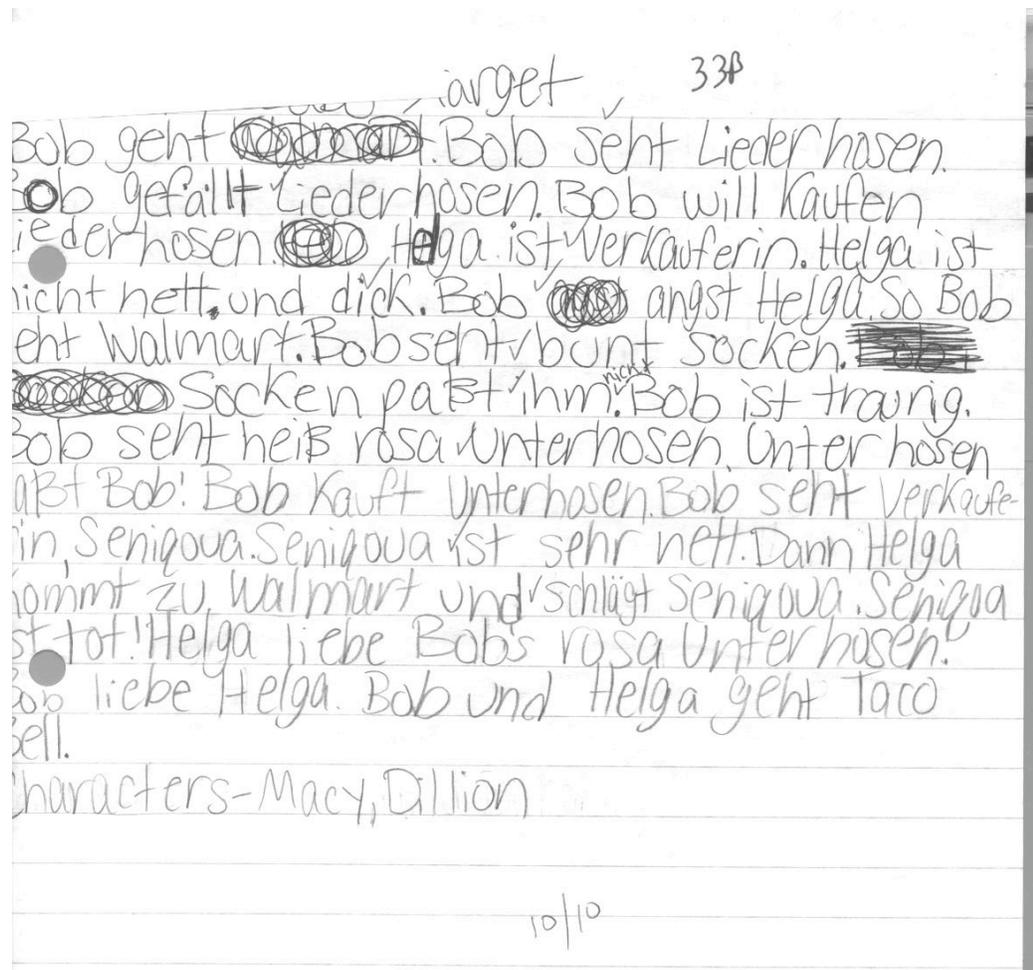


Figure 12: Ute's Writing

Ute wrote with the most accuracy and retold the story with the most detail. She even remembered new words that we introduced during this story, such as *Angst* and *tot*. She used the correct construction of the verb *paßt* and *gefällt*,

which I had not observed in previous years of teaching this level. She seemed to forget several articles before nouns and misspelled *sieht* but these errors did not impede meaning in her writing.

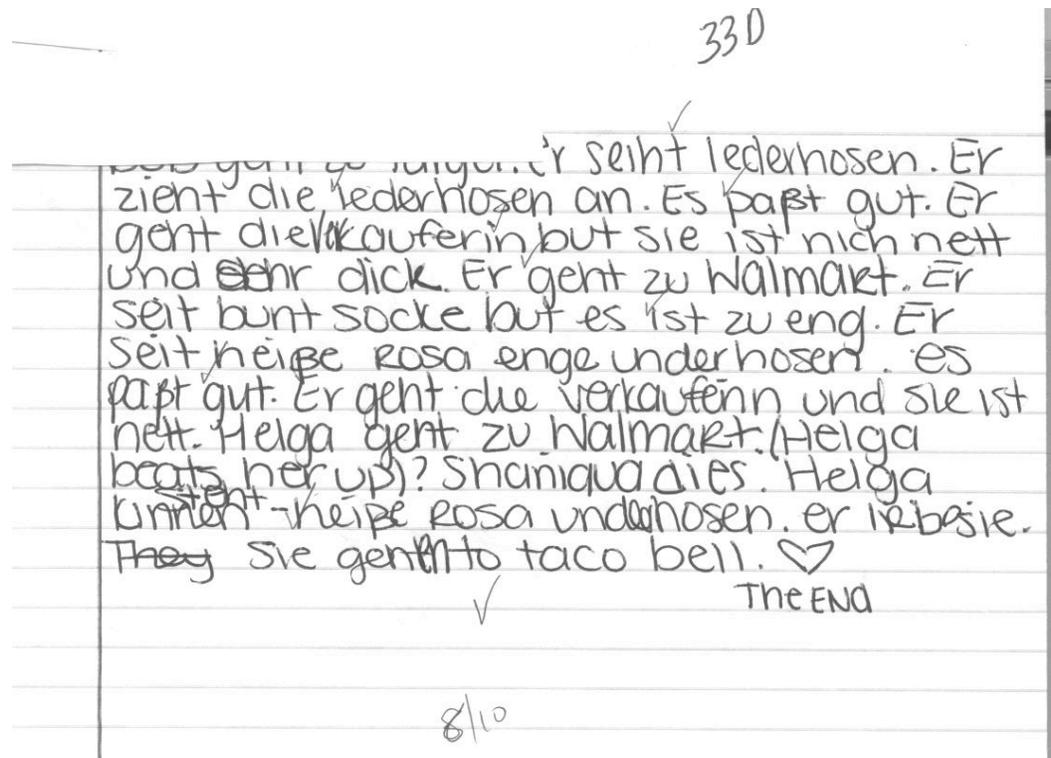


Figure 13: Melanie, Angelika and Jörg's Writing

These students provided lesser details about the story but for the most part, their writing was accurate and they used the structures correctly. It was encouraging to see how they used the separable prefix verb *anziehen* correctly but they made a minor error using the verb *passen* by forgetting to use dative case. This work was sub-par for Angelika, which caused me to suspect that she might not have taken a large role in this composition. On the other hand, this work was

better than what Jörg and Melanie usually produce, which was encouraging.

Overall, the meaning was not impeded because of their use of language.

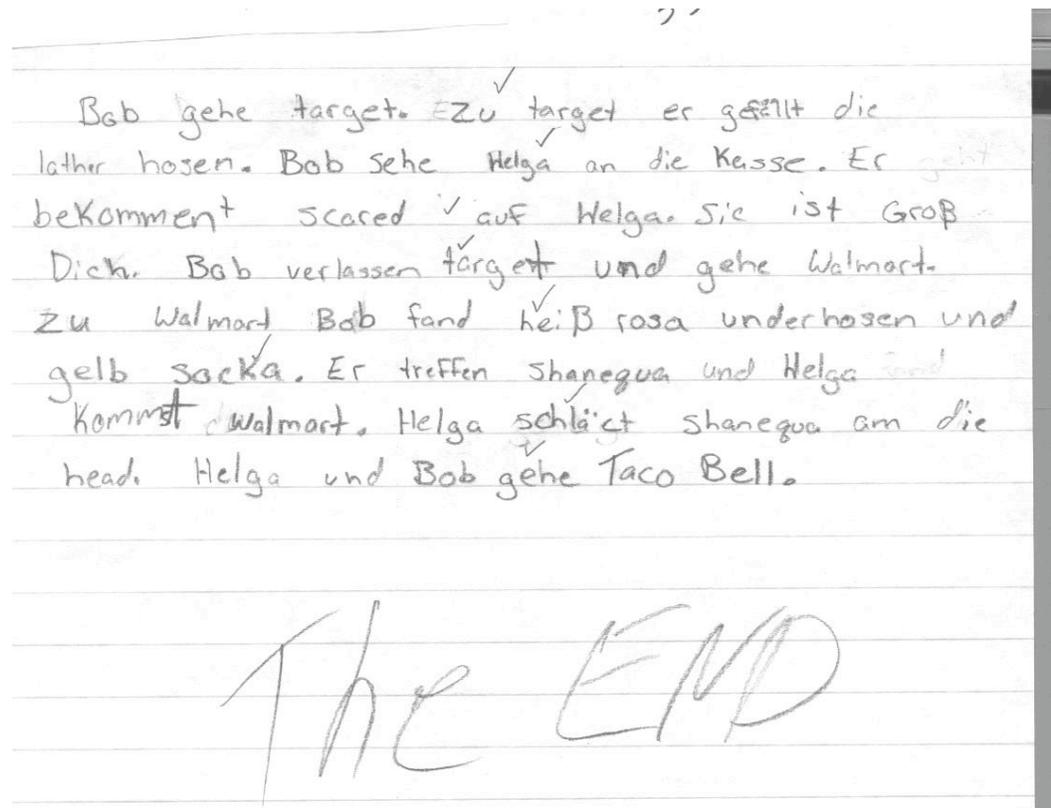


Figure 14: Willie and Ingo's Writing

There were many spelling errors in this writing, and the writers defaulted to English on several occasions. They used the first person singular form of the verb for most sentences. One exception was *gefällt*, which was in the correct conjugated form but was not used properly with the dative case. Their retell of the story was sketchy but it showed that they understood much of what they

heard. That was encouraging when compared to previous work from these students.

I further analyzed the students' writings and determined that 8 out of 10 who completed this writing scored 80% or better on this formative assessment. The procedure that I used to obtain this information was to determine 10 criteria that I was looking for in these writings, including verb structures, story line and new vocabulary. I rated the writings by looking for whether or not these students had included these correctly. This was a pleasant surprise and I praised the class during the next session and told them that it was the best writing I had seen from my German II classes since I started teaching.

An epiphany

Setting: German II classroom, late autumn 2009

Characters: Melanie and Pierre

Melanie: What was that? Ihm? How do you spell that?

Pierre: *i- h- m*

Melanie: Oh my God! That's similar to him. How come I didn't see that before?

Pierre: Yea and did you notice *i- h- r*, similar to her? And did you notice *d- i- r* is similar to du?

Melanie: Oh, that makes it so much easier!

And on that same warm, wonderful fall day Waltraud looked at me beatifically and asked if she could act out the next story and if she could read a

dialogue from our textbook.

I heard these conversations as the students worked harmoniously with partners and composed questions for each other from the pictures I had provided. I felt thankful Melanie finally made this connection with the dative personal pronoun by herself, even though I had pointed out the relationship between the words *ihm* and him before she had her own revelation. When I heard the students on that day, I felt propelled to keep moving forward.

It just makes more sense

It was time for a formal quiz on *Lektion B* of the unit. During the listening section Melanie complained that the speakers were talking too fast, even after I had replayed these sections more than once. I agreed with her as I lamented that I could not find a better way to test them on their listening skills. After the formal quiz on *Lektion B* in this unit, I asked the students to jot down on the back of their quiz answers to the following four questions:

- 1) What are you good at in German?
- 2) What are you not so good at in German?
- 3) What can you do to get better?
- 4) Are you better now than at the beginning of the year at learning German?

Heidi wrote on her paper that she is good at writing words on a piece of paper and then playing with those words. Pierre translated all of my questions into German and then answered them in English. Ingo wrote in German that he is

nicht so gut as his answer to number one. Out of 14 students who were present on that day to answer the questionnaire, 12 of them, 85%, felt they were better at learning German compared to the beginning of the year. I felt hopeful that the students were seeing themselves as better learners even though the class average for this quiz had not changed from the first quiz.

After the students finished the survey, I asked Manfred if he felt German was easier this year and he said, “Yes, last year I was lost. This year is a lot easier. It just makes more sense, with the stories and everything.” It was another hopeful statement for me to hear.

After this conversation, I showed them my field log and shared with them that I was very happy that I now have more plus marks than negative marks. (I used plus signs for positive happenings in this study and minus signs for negative happenings.) They asked if we could have a party to celebrate and I noted that we could as long as I keep seeing more positives than negatives. Waltraud exclaimed, “We are your best class.”

Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)

It was the end of Unit II and soon time for a summative assessment. As part of our common assessments we tested for oral proficiency by conducting mini-interviews with the students in German. I gave the students a list of questions and we reviewed possible answers for each one. The students practiced with a partner and then I asked each student individually. While I was conducting

the OPI with each student, the rest of the class worked in groups to make up questions from magazine pictures and then passed their questions to another group for them to answer. They wrote everything down so I could see their questions and answers. In between interviews with the students I heard the conversations in the groups and I was pleased. Jörg, Waltraud and Heidi were working together and I heard Waltraud trying to figure out how to say that the dress fit the woman well. Jörg jumped in and said, *es paßt ihr gut*. He turned to me and asked if that was correct and I told him it was perfect. I was pleased that the students were on task and that they were coming up with good questions. When I quizzed the students on their OPI questions, everyone except for Ingo got *es gefällt mir gut*, correct. Ingo was very nervous during this interview and could not even understand my questions the first time I asked them. I told him I was not grading him on his grammar and that he only had to understand the question and answer it as best as he could in German. This helped him to relax. The structures on these OPI questions had been introduced in class lessons two weeks previously and for the most part, the students were still using them correctly. That was encouraging.

He sounds like an alien

A unit test was scheduled for the following day so I played a review game with the students. I placed three columns each with five lines on the board and we played the ladder game. One member from each of the three teams stood in

front of one of the columns ready with a marker. I gave questions to them and whoever wrote the correct answer quickest on the bottom rung of the ladder kept their answer. The other teams had to erase their answer from the bottom rung. The first team to fill in correct answers on each of the rungs won the game. It became very noisy and the students took this game seriously. At one point during the game Waltraud said, “Who’s that girl? The girl with the black shirt on?” Waltraud wanted to tell Ulla something about the game and did not know her name. I felt my heart sink once again that the classroom community was not stronger at this point in the year and pondered what I might do to strengthen it.

The next day the students came in for the test and I started with the listening section. While I was playing the CD, Ingo said to me “He sounds like an alien.” I had to laugh and I struggled to restart the CD because of my laughter. Later when I reflected on his comment, I thought how right Ingo was. The listening section was isolated and out of context and it was no surprise that the students complained about it. It was indeed alien to them.

Waltraud complained that she did not know any of the material on the test, but then surprised me with a grade of B. Ulrika also expressed her fear that she knew nothing for the test and achieved a B. I was puzzled because of the negative self-talk from both girls and then I was surprised that they performed better than they had predicted.

Once again, the students performed best in the writing sections but still struggled with the listening sections and the grammar sections. It was encouraging to see improvement in the students' writing and I became more hopeful that the learning strategies were having a positive effect.

Frau Wenck, I'm back!

Wolfgang had not been to class for quite some time when I suddenly saw him walking down the corridor on his way to my class. When he came closer he said, "Frau Wenck, I'm back!" I told him I was glad and I asked him if he planned on staying. He answered, "Yes, I learned my lesson" and walked into the classroom. I could not help but to notice that Pierre looked happy that Wolfgang was back and I felt happy for them both. I constructed a first person narrative in an attempt to understand Wolfgang better and it follows.

- I cannot skip even one more period, or I will be expelled from school, I get it. I started to do it last year and it was so much fun that it got to be a problem this year.

- I just don't see the sense of some of the classes that I have to take in high school. Don't get me wrong, I didn't just skip your class, I skipped the whole day.

- I like German and I love the way it sounds and I want to keep taking it. I am not worried about catching up. I know I will be able.

- Sometimes I say things that are inappropriate because I want to shock

people. I just see through people when they are fake and I like to see their reactions, or I like to make people laugh.

-Hey, Frau Wenck! Do you like classical music? You do! That's great! Guess what music I fell asleep to last night? Mozart. I love his music.

-When I get out of high school, I want to be a doctor. I want to help people and I enjoy being with people. I also love animals. I work at the Lehigh Valley Zoo and I love helping the animals.

-Don't worry, Mrs. Wenck I'm back and I'm going to do well in German. I promise!

-Hey, Frau Wenck I drew a picture of you. Do you want to see it?



Figure 15: Wolfgang's I- Story and his caricature of Frau Wenck

After Wolfgang handed me the caricature he drew, I thought I saw an unsure look on his face until I smiled and told him that I liked it and I thought it

was funny, especially with the question mark over my head, which I felt portrayed at times my uncertainty about this entire class.

I handed students vocabulary sheets for the new unit that we were starting that had a theme of birthdays. The grammar included in was ordinal numbers and possessive adjectives, making a full unit with some difficult grammar.

Fortunately, the vocabulary introduced during *Lektion A* was not complicated and the number of new words to learn was not overwhelming. I brought in more props, types of birthday gifts, to present this vocabulary. I used the circling technique to present the vocabulary and the students seemed ready to move on to the structures. When I presented this new vocabulary, I also asked the students to keep in mind the keyword method. When the students heard the word *Geschenk*, which means present, they immediately thought of the slang word *shank*, which means to stab someone. I told them I do not like that association, but the students remembered the meaning of the word *Geschenk* by using this association.

After that first day of vocabulary, I put a structure on the board in order to ask personalized questions about ordinal numbers. It was:

Ich habe am _____ Geburtstag. I also put on the board *am ersten, am zweiten, am dritten* and *am neunundzwanzigsten*. I explained that these were dates for birthdays.

I told the students when my birthday was and Manfred exclaimed, “Oh, that’s when my birthday is!”

Waltraud raised her hand and said, “Can I go next?”

I asked her when her birthday was and she answered in German. I felt happy that she showed interest on this topic. After I asked five or six students when their birthday was, I explained how to form ordinal numbers. The students tried to guess how old I was in German and there was a wonderful light-hearted atmosphere in the classroom that day.

The next day I placed two structures on the board and used circling and personalized questioning. They were: *Ich habe am _____ Geburtstag* and *Ich kaufe ihm/ihr ein Geschenk*. Waltraud, Wolfgang and Bernhard were not in class on that day and I found out that Waltraud had skipped school. Bernhard was ill and Wolfgang was serving in school suspension because of his previous class cuts. When I learned that Wolfgang was not skipping again, I was relieved. We spent that class period using the structures and talking about when students had birthdays and presents that we could buy for them. I asked Pierre for the date of his birthday and after he answered, I lightheartedly told him that I would buy him a present (including the structures in this conversation). Ulrika protested that that was not fair just to buy him a present, so I told her I would buy her a present too. Manfred and Willie chimed in and protested saying they also want a present, so I used this opportunity to play with the structures and asked other students if I should buy *him* and *her* and *them* a present. I was glad to be able to use so many repetitions. After I reflected about this lesson, however, I realized that I

completely forgot to point to the structures when I was repeating them. Part of the technique in using this type of questioning is to point to structures and to the question words in order for the students to constantly see and hear them. I was still learning this technique and I had to constantly remind myself how to do the questioning and the pointing.

Class Interview

At the end of this class period, I interviewed the entire class and created a brief dramatization to recount what the students said:

Teacher: What strategies have we been working with this year?

Pierre: Well, we did stories and hands on listening. We did repetition and we connected new words to other things.

Ingo: We remembered German words by thinking of similar English words.

Ute: We just spoke and heard in class. We had class discussions.

Angelika: We are telling stories and repeating words and we are talking in German. We're also coming up with clues to remember words.

Teacher: Thanks so much. You all gave good answers. Which strategy is the best?

Angelika: I don't know.

Jörg: The stories

Katarina: The vocabulary and the little stories

Damien: Listening, memorization and vocabulary

Teacher: Do you think you could ever use any of these strategies in other classes?

Angelika: Yes, I am learning new ways to learn. I already use it in my English class.

Damien: I don't know

Ulla: Yes, it's good to know ways to study words and important events.

Ulrika: I don't learn fast enough and I stink at German so I can't use any strategies in other classes.

The bell rang so our conversation stopped. I pulled Ulrika aside after class and I asked her why she thinks so negatively about her ability in German, especially because her grade was very good. She told me that last year she did really well in class but then she flunked tests. The only thing that saved her was her class participation grade. I tried to encourage her to think more highly of her ability but I doubted she had changed her thinking. When I later checked her class average for last year, I found out that she achieved an 85%.

Der Fall der Mauer (not Waltraud's)

It was the 20th celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, so I prepared a power point presentation and found some videos showing East German citizens successfully escaping communism. I showed the celebration in Berlin where large dominos were set to fall to symbolize where the Wall had surrounded the city. Ulrika asked what communism was and Waltraud announced that the Germans were weird.

“That lady looks like she’s gonna cry,” She said, referring to Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany, who was witnessing the dominos as they fell during the celebration.

I told Waltraud that Angela Merkel was a citizen of former East Germany and that she understood the significance of the celebration, but Waltraud had lost interest and started to work on another subject. I took her books from her and set them on my desk.

Waltraud turned to Ulrika and announced that she had been written up in another class for using profanity in the classroom. After she said this, I noticed Manfred, Katarina and Melanie roll their eyes and look away. Again, I wished that Waltraud would let her own wall topple that she has erected around herself.

Amelia and the DC sniper

It was time for another story using the structures that we were playing with during class. I put on the board: *Das Mädchen hat am....Geburtstag, Er/sie kauft ihm/ihr ein Geschenk, and Er/sie bekommt....zum Geburtstag.* These structures practiced ordinal numbers and dative pronouns. When we got started with the story, Katarina wanted to name the girl Amelia, so we did. Below is the story that the students created during that class period.

*Es gibt ein Mädchen das Amelia heißt. Amelia hat **am fünften April** Geburtstag. Ihr Vaters Name ist DC Sniper und er hat **am neunundzwanzigsten Februar** Geburtstag. Amelia ist 99 Jahre alt und DC ist 116 Jahre alt. **DC kauft Amelia** ein Handy zum Geburtstag. Amelia bekommt das Handy zum Geburtstag und sie ist sehr froh. Es gibt ein Problem. Handys sind illegal in Deutschland. Die*

*Polizei kommen und nehmen Amelia ins Gefängnis. DC ist traurig. Er geht zum Oktoberfest und trinkt zuviel Bier. Er ist krank. Er stirbt. Horton geht zum Gefängnis und rettet Amelia. Er nimmt Amelia und sie gehen zu Neverland Ranch und Horton **kauft Ameilia** 1000 Handys zum Geburtstag.*

*There is a girl whose name is Amelia and her birthday is on the **fifth of April**. Her father's name is DC Sniper and his birthday is **on February 29th**. Amelia is 99 years old and DC is 116 years old. DC **bought his daughter** a cell phone for her birthday, which made her happy. There is, however, a problem. Cell phones are illegal in Germany. The police come and took Amelia to jail. DC is sad and goes to the Oktoberfest and drinks too much beer. He gets sick and dies. Horton goes to the jail and saves Amelia. He takes Amelia and they go to Neverland Ranch where Horton **buys her** 1000 cell phones for her birthday.*

Figure 16: Amelia and the DC Sniper

As we were creating this story together, Willie had his head down and after I reminded him to listen he told me he was tired. Waltraud was reading notes. She became annoyed when I took them away and said, "I was reading them." I placed them on my desk and gave them to her after the class was over.

When we completed the story, we retold it together as a class. I assigned drawing the story for homework. There were a few extra minutes of class so I told them they could start it right then. Everyone started the assignment except for Wolfgang, Waltraud, Pierre and Willie. As they were talking among themselves, I heard Angelika say, "This class is very angry. People yell at each other." I agreed with her and noted this comment in my field log.

The next day I asked the students to get into groups and to rewrite our story from the previous day. Below are examples of how the students completed this assignment. I saw Jörg working alone and when I asked him if I could find a

partner for him he said he would rather work alone. He worked quietly as he looked around the classroom at the places where we staged acting out the story. After he was finished he sat quietly by himself and did not interact with other students.

Following are three examples of how the students rewrote this story.

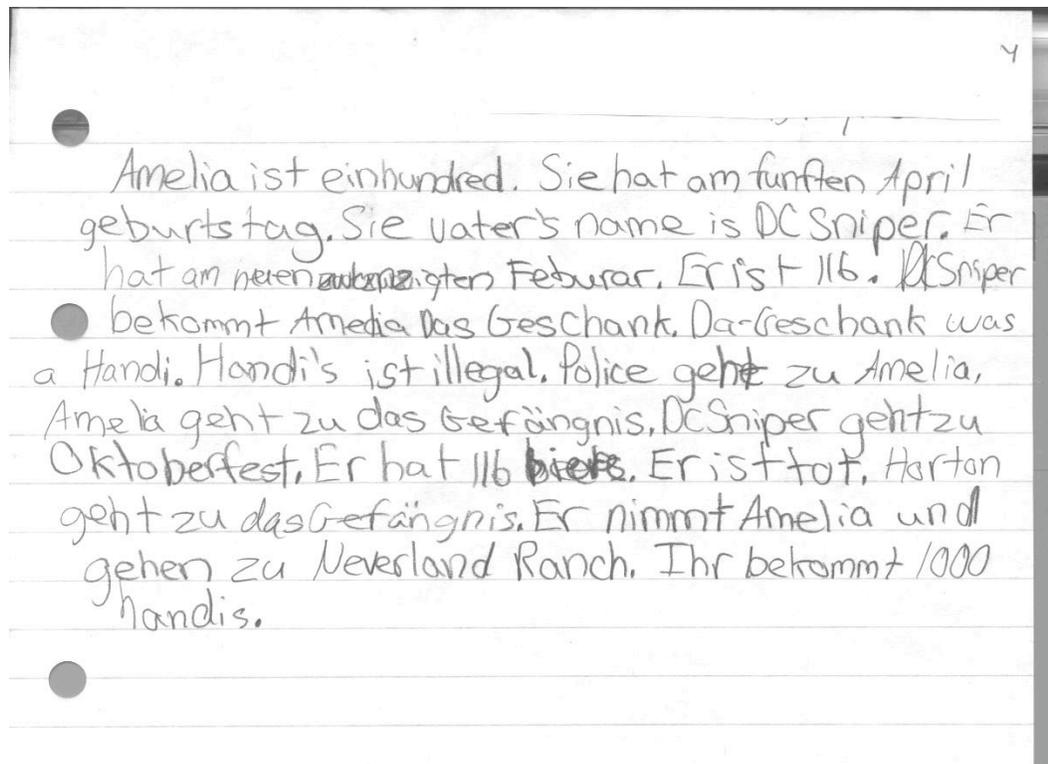


Figure 17: Manfred and Damien's Writing

In this example (Figure 17), Manfred and Damien rewrote the story accurately and used ordinal numbers correctly. They used one stem-vowel change verb correctly. They used the verb *bekommen* correctly at the end of the

story, but incorrectly at the beginning of the story. It was interesting to see at the end of their writing that they used *ihr* instead of *sie* to indicate she. At the beginning of their writing they substituted *sie* for the possessive adjective *ihr*, which was understandable because I had not yet introduced possessive adjectives. The language they used did not impede the flow of the story in a major way.

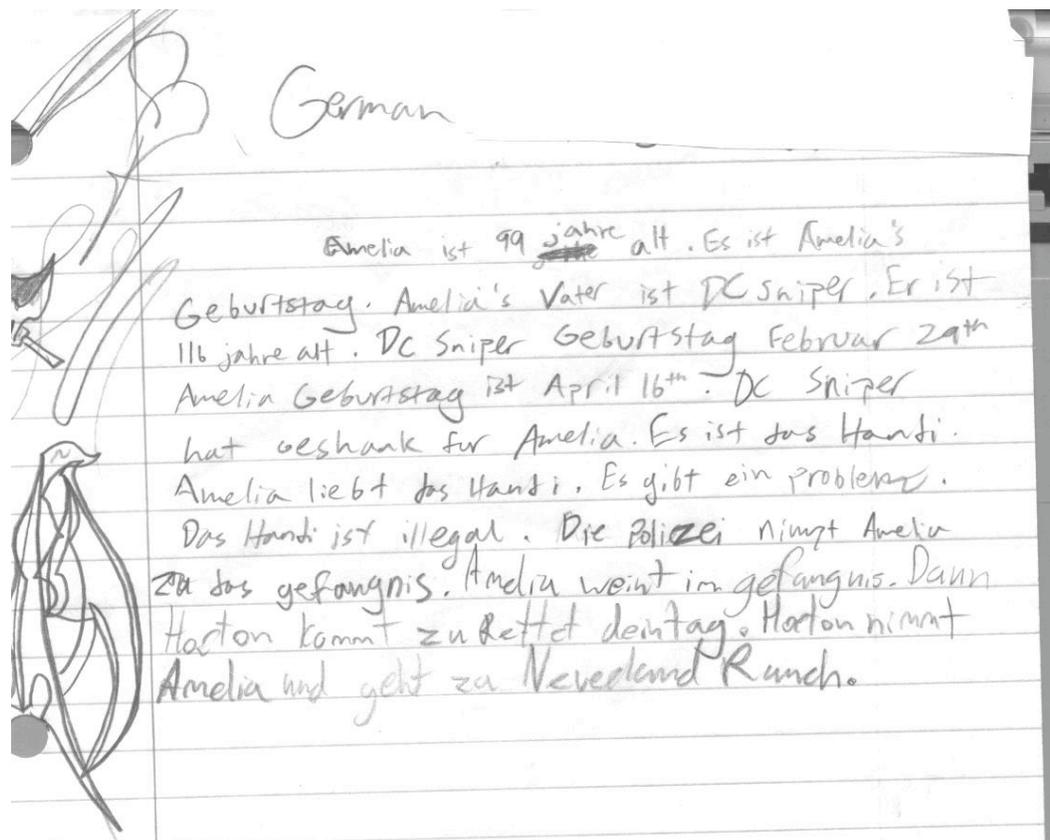


Figure 18: Pierre's and Wolfgang's Writing

In Figure 18, Pierre and Wolfgang avoided writing out the ordinal numbers that we were working on but used the previously introduced stem vowel changing verb *nimmt* correctly. They used new vocabulary introduced during this

story, *weint* and *Polizei* correctly. Their use of language did not impede the storyline but I was unable to see if they could use the ordinal numbers correctly in German based on this writing.

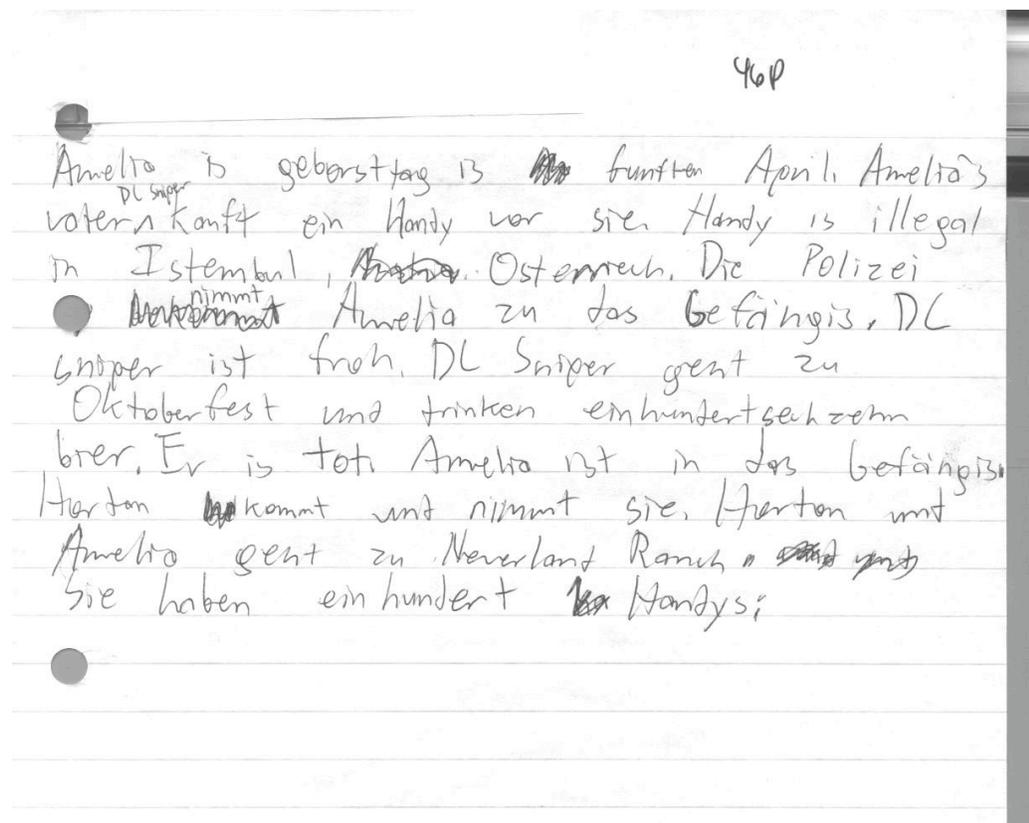


Figure 19: Jörg's Writing

Jörg used one ordinal number in Figure 19 correctly but misspelled it. He did not list when Amelia's father's birthday was. It was encouraging to also see how he was using the stem vowel changing verb *nimmt* correctly. He missed details, such as how old Amelia was and how old her father was but remembered

that we had spoken at some point during our story that they were in Istanbul and Austria. I had forgotten those details when I rewrote the story after we created it in class. Jörg does not conjugate his verbs correctly but his writing gives a general idea of what the story was about. This was the weakest example of student work, which I thought was encouraging.

Countdown

On the following day, I planned to give the students a quiz, but when they arrived I realized that I had forgotten to make copies. I knew I wanted to teach possessive adjectives, so I nervously plunged right into them. I told the students to open their books to the appropriate page where this new grammar was and that we were going to learn the new grammar.

Pierre immediately said, “Oh I hate grammar. Last year when we did it, I fell asleep every time.”

I told him that I understand but still proceeded to teach it traditionally. I reviewed nominative and accusative cases and showed students the possessive adjectives in the textbook. Instead of starting the drills in the textbook, I decided to use the gift props that I used earlier in this unit for vocabulary to play with these possessive adjectives. The props changed the mood of the class, and Pierre became fully engaged and participated in this activity. Ulrika also asked to talk about the gift props using possessive adjectives. I started to relax and wrote in my

field log later that day that I noticed I was starting to shift my way of teaching to a more contextualized, natural way but that it was harder than I thought it would be.

After several minutes of using the new grammar and vocabulary for this type of activity, I decided to do a grammar exercise in the textbook with possessive adjectives. I told the students to stop me three minutes before the end of class period so I could check their homework. As soon as I made this announcement and we started doing the exercise in the book, I could almost see the students begin to disengage. I insisted we struggle through this grammar exercise and as we got closer to the time I asked the students to end, I noticed Pierre, Wolfgang and Melanie looking at the clock. In unison, they began to count down “5,4,3,2,1” until that golden moment when they could stop me. When I officially ended the drill, I heard sighs of relief and when I reflected on this moment, I realized that I felt that same relief that the students experienced. Because I lost many of the students’ attention when I resorted to this traditional style of teaching, I suspected again how the use of grammar drills out of context was not best practice. I started to trust my instinct more that the style of teaching that I was defaulting to where I used TPRS and TPR was more effective.

At the end of class Melanie said “Frau Wenck, it’s Friday the 13th. We can’t have a quiz today,” and I told her not to worry about the quiz until next week.

Defaulting to a More Natural Teaching Style

In mid-November I made plans to complete my data collection. As I re-read my field log, I made note on 11/21/2009 that, “I am naturally beginning to shift my teaching practices to a more contextualized and less isolated method.” It was clear to me that I had become more comfortable teaching by providing the students with comprehensible input and repetition of the words and structures. I sensed strongly that when I used new vocabulary and grammatical structures in ways that involved the students personally, their engagement in the lesson increased. As I further reflected on student reaction that when I switched to isolated and decontextualized drills from the text or from worksheets, I realized that many of the students disengaged and the energy in the classroom seemed to wane.

I wrote further, “I am very excited about this self-discovery. I have strived for this for a long time.” My field log was proof that I was making progress toward teaching students in a natural way. I was happy for this but I realized that I have a long path ahead of me where I would need to hone the teaching strategies that I used during this action research study. My question, “What will be the observed and reported experiences when I use various language acquisition approaches in my German class?” was getting a little closer to an answer.

Table 1: Final Survey (N=15)

Statement	Agree Strongly	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I am good at learning German.	11	3	1
I think using strategies for learning v vocabulary is helpful.	13	2	0
My grade is better this year than last year.	5	7	3
I think I can have a conversation in German.	6	6	3
I will continue with German next year.	12	2	1
Learning another language is useful for my future.	10	2	3

I prepared a summary of the final survey that I conducted with the students where I was pleased to see that the students saw themselves as better learners and they wished to continue to study German (see Table 1.)

I was thankful to the students in this class whom I constantly underestimated and described as “the island of misfit toys.” I considered my study a success for my students, who were speaking and understanding more German. I also recognized this study as proof that it was possible to shift my teaching style and see progress in students’ proficiency.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Memo Analysis

As I was gathering data, I read key works by John Dewey (1997), Paulo Freire (2003), Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Lisa Delpit (2002), and then made direct connections between each theorist and my study by writing separate reflective memos. I followed advice from Gee (1999) and wrote a figurative language analysis, which provided another lens for me to analyze figurative and literal statements made by students and by me throughout the study. At the mid-point of my study, I prepared a reflective methodological memo, where I identified not only my research question but also new sub-questions that began to emerge. I provided a chronological list of field log entries and my reflections on how I thought I needed to proceed with the study. I followed the same reflective procedure to examine student interviews, surveys, grades, and student work.

Surveys and Interviews

As mentioned in my research design, I administered surveys and interviews throughout my study. If I was unsure of an answer provided by a student, I asked for clarification. I read and re-read the answers the students provided and followed Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) advice by assigning codes in order to be able to “identify a meaning unit” (p.162). I regularly revised my codes and looked for similar codes from other data I

collected, which I placed into larger thematic bins. This process enabled me to begin to see themes that were emerging.

Student Work

I considered my observations of students' performance and body language to be important throughout this study. I examined and recorded several students' body language throughout, and used this information as an indicator of affective filter. I observed and recorded student performance while I used the TPR strategy, and then collected drawings made by the students after we created new stories using the TPRS strategy. I recorded in my field log associations students made for new vocabulary when they used the keyword method strategy. Importantly, I coded all of these observations in my field log.

After each new strategy was used, I used formative assessments to analyze potential effectiveness for each strategy. I checked for vocabulary acquisition and accuracy of grammatical structures. I assigned a numerical grade to each assessment and kept these records in my field log.

I analyzed students' writing after the third story by comparing it to my previous experience with students' ability to write at that level. I discussed these findings with another German teacher at my school to gain additional insights.

Field Log Analysis

I maintained all of my data in chronological order in a field log binder. I made sure to differentiate what I observed in the classroom with how I felt about it by creating double-sided entries. As mentioned previously, I re-read my field log regularly and assigned codes “Finding patterns in experience facilitates learning. Noticing patterns in experience, from the simplest to the most complex, enables us to draw our data together in new ways” (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2001, p. 206). As I created codes, I looked for similar ones and placed them into named, separate bins. Toward the end of the study, after I re-read and revised my codes and bins, I followed the recommendation of Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) and depicted them on a graphic organizer (Figure 17). Finally, after examining the codes and bins, I wrote out emerging theme statements (Figure 18).

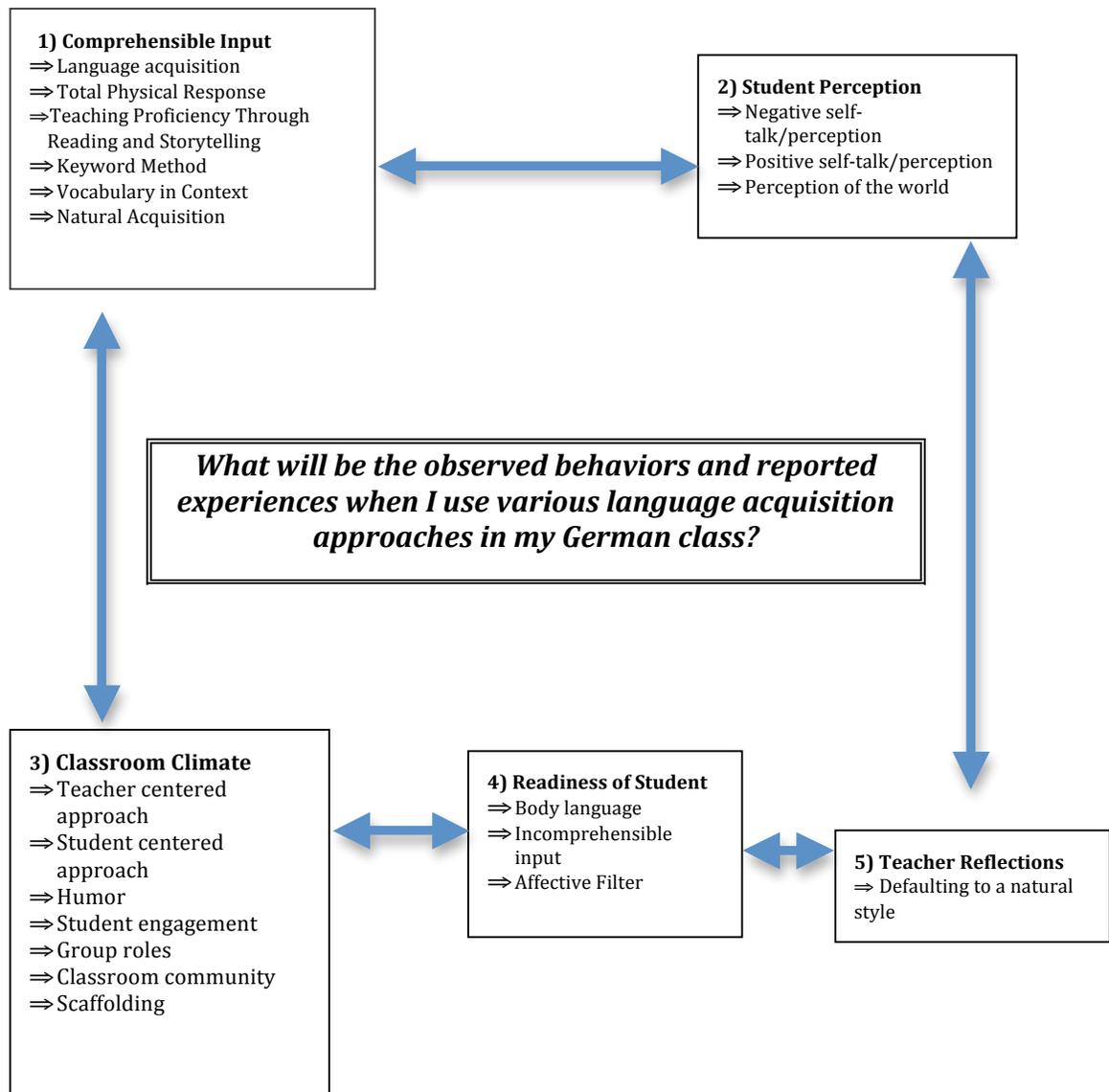


Figure 20: Bins and Codes Graphic Organizer

Theme Statements

Comprehensible Input

Strategies that ensure student understanding of a second language are imperative in order for these students to start believing that they are capable of communicating in that language.

Student Perception

Students need to perceive themselves as capable of learning another language in order to view it as a worthwhile endeavor.

Classroom Climate

Student centered approaches are necessary to set the stage for an atmosphere where the students are the most important component for beginning to progress in the language.

Readiness of Students

Students who demonstrate a lack of confidence and who are pre-occupied with personal issues struggle to learn another language.

Teacher Reflections

Over time, the use of natural language acquisition strategies results in less dependence upon isolated grammar drills and textbook activities.

Figure 21: Theme Statements

Findings

“Es hört doch jeder nur, was er versteht.”
-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Comprehensible Input

Strategies that ensure student understanding of a second language are imperative in order for these students to start believing that they are capable of communicating with that language.

As mentioned before, at the beginning of this study I asked the students to complete a *Buch über Mich* project, which was meant as a review for the material that they learned during the previous year in German I. It quickly became clear to me that this project was a failure, and I became embarrassed.

Waltraud stated, “You might as well give me a zero because I don’t remember any of this. Nothing is coming back. How do you spell Jahre?”

This reminded me of Dewey (1938), when he said:

it was put, as it were, in a watertight compartment. When the question is asked, then what has become of it, where has it gone to, the right answer is that it is still there in the special compartment in which it was originally stowed away. (p. 48)

The students learned the vocabulary in isolation and because I had not asked them to recall it within the exact same context in which they learned it, they were unable to recall much of it. At the end of this teacher action research study, I asked the students to reflect upon what they had learned by doing the *Buch über*

Mich project, and they agreed that it had not been successful in helping them remember what they had learned in German I. They felt that such a project would have benefited them more if they would have completed it at the end of last year, just as they were about to complete the course and close to the same context in which they learned it.

As I reflected in my field log, it seemed this study did not begin until I began to use strategies that provided the students with large amounts of comprehensible input. I used actual clothing items along with TPR, and I used a technique called circling to ensure constant repetition of the new vocabulary. Ray and Seely (1999) stressed the importance for students to focus on the meaning rather than trying to memorize words and grammar rules. Bernhard answered my question about where the shirt was because he was engaged in a conversation and answered “in der Schule”. After I completed several rounds of circling and when I asked the students what the new clothing item was, many were able to say the German word without hesitation. Most of the students demonstrated understanding by placing a glove on their neighbor’s head or by pointing to a clothing item with their knee. This made me think of Vgotsky’s (1978) words,

We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. (p. 90)

The students were operating in their zone of proximal development during this activity, cooperating with their peers and stretching their understanding of new words with my help. This activity was “awakening” their language acquisition device (LAD).

When the students became familiar with using gestures and novel commands, I presented new grammatical structures using the same strategies. I began to notice that some students were using *es gefällt mir* in spoken language correctly, as follows:

Teacher: Melanie, gefällt dir dieser Rock?

Melanie: Ja, es gefällt mir sehr!

In my past experience, students were not able to use this verb correctly after such a short amount of time.

I used the same strategies to present other key grammar points from this unit and kept building on students’ understanding by presenting a “skeleton” story on the board. I wrote the grammatical structures that I targeted on the board, along with their meanings. After the students created their own story and acted it out, they began to demonstrate written proficiency of vocabulary and grammatical structures in a pre-writing activity where they drew pictures of the story and labeled them (Figures 3, 4 and 5). Even though students misspelled stem-vowel changing verbs, they were beginning to pay attention to the changes in the vowels in the verbs. Again, from my past experience, I had not seen students paying

attention to the stem-vowel change as quickly as they did after using TPR and TPRS strategies.

Further evidence that TPR and TPRS strategies were beginning to work was gleaned from a pop quiz on vocabulary shortly after we created the story where 80% of the students scored 80% or better. I was also able to see the students experiencing what Krashen (1982) referred to in his Monitor Theory as the *subconscious acquisition of language* when the students were using German from our stories in other settings even applying the words *Räuber* and *Pistole* from our story later during a lock-down in the school.

When I introduced the keyword method, the students did not fare as well, even though as noted in my field log, some of them seemed to enjoy it. For example, we all laughed when we came to the word *die Quittung* when Pierre said, “That’s when you quit shopping and the receipt comes out of the cash register and it looks like a tongue.” The results of a similar pop quiz given several days after introducing this strategy were that only 42% of the students scored 80% or better. Because of these results, I decided to use this method in a peripheral way because I suspected students would benefit from using it as a peripheral rather than a main vocabulary acquisition strategy.

As the study progressed, I started to see some of the positive results from using language acquisition approaches on how my students perceived themselves as learners. At the beginning of the study in a survey, 38% of the students

reported that they were not good at learning German, 50% reported they were average at learning and 12% reported they were good at learning. At the midpoint of the study, 85% of the students reported they were good at learning German. As part of a summative assessment from the first unit of instruction all except three students were still using the verb structure *es gefällt mir* correctly during the speaking test (OPI).

As the study progressed, some students became more aware of using strategies for learning and started to evaluate which strategy helped them the most. This reminded me of Oxford's (1990) advice for students to be able to self-direct with useful strategies in order to become more proficient in a language.

Teacher: Thanks, you all gave good answers. Which strategy is the best?

Jörg: The stories

Katarina: The vocabulary and the little stories

Damien: Listening, memorization and vocabulary

Teacher: Do you think you could ever use any of these strategies in other classes?

Angelika: Yes, I am learning new ways to learn. I already use it in my English class.

Damien: I don't know

Ulla: Yes, it's good to know ways to study words and important events.

Ulrika: I don't learn fast enough and I stink at German so I can't use any strategies in other classes.

The student survey at the end of the study was remarkable. 80% of the students reported that they would continue with their study of German past the mandatory two years for college entrance. 67% reported that the language acquisition strategies were helpful to them, and 67% felt that learning German would be important for their futures. A relatively high percentage, 73%, felt they were good at learning German, compared to 12% at the beginning of the study.

Mannfred said to me during the study, after I asked him if he thought German was easier this year, "Last year I was lost. This year is a lot easier. It all just makes more sense, with the stories and everything." This led me to believe that he was beginning to form as Dewey referred to an "enduring attitude" about his capability and his desire to go on. As Dewey (1938) stated,

Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is more important than the spelling lesson or the lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning. (p.48)

Student Perception

Students need to perceive themselves as capable of learning another language in order to view it as a worthwhile endeavor.

Throughout this study I listened to how students talked about themselves as learners of German and how they, for the most part, fulfilled their own expectations. Freire (2007/1970) spoke about how the observer (me) must be sympathetic and aware of the history and the perception of reality that each student possesses and then encourage students to emerge to a higher consciousness and to transform this perception of reality. These words rang true for me repeatedly throughout the study, including when I learned more about Waltraud's home life. When she was 11 years old, her mother dropped her off at her father's house to a new reality where her stepmother did not want to deal with her anymore. After I learned her story, I could understand why she became so upset creating her family page in the *Buch über Mich* project at the start of the study. She was upset and proclaimed, "I don't know any of this!" Throughout the entire study, I felt as though Waltraud was struggling with herself and debating with herself whether or not she should trust me. When it seemed as if she was not listening, she would ask questions such as, "What's a subject?" and my hopes increased that one more brick on the unfinished bridge between us was laid. By the end of the study, she was still not passing the course, which belied her untapped abilities to learn German, and her negative self-talk turned into reality as

Oxford (1990) had warned. She wrote on her final survey that she would not continue to study German. For Waltraud, I was unable to create the type of dialogue with her that would help transform her reality.

Ulrika remained an exception, or negative case, in regards to this theme statement and was a mystery to me because of her negative self-talk. I became aware of her self-doubt when I gave the first “official” quiz. She asked if there would be extra credit because she really needed it. Her performance up until then had been stellar. I noted in my field log how “Ulrika caught on quickly and was eager to volunteer.” When I interviewed her later, I learned that she felt that she had only passed in the previous year because she always did her homework and participated often in class. When I checked later what her final grade in German I was, I learned it was an 85%, which did not prove to me that she struggled during the previous year. I remembered Gregersen’s (2005) words and paid close attention to her body language because I thought that perhaps her affective filter was high, but I observed the opposite. She looked me straight in the eyes and leaned forward very often, especially when I was personalizing the vocabulary and grammar during circling. Even though she felt she was not good at learning German, she wrote on the final survey that she “strongly agrees” that she will continue her study of the language.

The rest of the participants noted on their final survey that if they thought they were good at learning German, they would continue their study of it. Willie

and Wolfgang had failing grades, but still perceived themselves as good at learning German and wanted to go to the next level. Damien said he was not good at learning German and would not go on. One of the goals of my study was to help students have a better attitude about learning German that would cause them to have the desire to move onto to higher levels. It appears hopeful that by using strategies to make vocabulary and grammar acquisition more enjoyable that I have come closer to this goal.

Classroom Climate

Student centered approaches are necessary to set the stage for an atmosphere where the students are the most important component for beginning to progress in the language.

Throughout most of this study, I struggled with the fear that the climate in my classroom was not as good as I wanted it to be. The mixture of personalities and their realities made it very difficult to establish a harmonious atmosphere. After an outburst early in the study between Waltraud and Wolfgang, I made the statement later to the entire class that, “I wanted us to be like a family in this classroom and that I only wanted to hear kind words when they spoke to each other.” I feared that the climate would disintegrate and have an adverse affect on student engagement and achievement. Because I had the benefit of re-examining my classroom, I realized that we were like a family, a real family that sometimes argues and does not always agree on everything. I consciously tried the to use

student-centered approaches in alignment with the Withall (1979) Social-Emotional Climate Index in order to turn the climate in this classroom into something positive, and when I resorted to teacher-centered comments according to Withall's index, I felt guilt. "I felt badly about having to resort to a strong teacher centered approach with her," I wrote in my log at the time.

Again, I realized halfway into my study that the climate in this classroom was not as bad as I had originally feared. As I wrote in my story, "I showed them my field log and shared with them that I now have more plus marks than negative marks. (I used plus signs for positive happenings in this study and minus signs for negative happenings.) They asked if we could have a party when I am done with this project and I said we could as long as we keep having more positive signs." This reminded me of Kohl's words in Delpit and Dowdy (2002) "Small things—comments, questions, responses, phrases, tone—often make big differences in student attitudes, not merely toward their teachers, but toward what their teachers teach." (p. 153) Waltraud made the comment after I showed them the field log that "We are your best class" and at that moment I was glad that I did make the decision to show it to them.

The strategies I used during this study also helped the classroom climate because they were student centered. When I did PQA (personalized questions and answers) activities, these activities always revolved around the students. I asked Pierre for the date of his birthday and after he answered, I lightheartedly told him

that I would buy him a present (including the structures in this conversation). Ulrika protested that that was not fair just to buy him a present, so I told her I would buy her a present. Manfred and Willie chimed in and protested saying they wanted a present too, so I used this opportunity to play with the structures and asked other students if I should buy *him* or *her* or *them* a present. Most of the students were engaged during this activity that revolved around them and were beginning to use the grammatical structures correctly. This brought to mind Ray and Seely (1999) because I personalized the entire activity around the students' interests. One difference in my study to Ray and Seely, however, is that the students' grades did not show a clear increase after I used TPRS. I attributed this to the fact that I am still not experienced enough in using this strategy for it to make such an impact on student grades and will continue to refine my use of this important practice.

Readiness of Students

Students who demonstrate a lack of confidence and who are pre-occupied with personal issues struggle to learn another language.

As mentioned before, when I saw that Damien was in my class at the beginning of the year, I was filled with trepidation because he expressed his frustration when he was in my German I class. His weakness in German surprised me because he spoke Ukrainian at home and in my experience, students

who were already adept in a second language usually did well. I hoped the learning strategies I was going to use would help him.

Early in the study when I asked Damien to perform a TPR activity, he leaned back and away from me and shook his head no. It seemed he was demonstrating a high affective filter, and I remembered Gregersen's (2005) study where she spoke about students who communicate negative messages via body language. Furthermore, this reminded me of Krashen's (1982) research about affective filter where he theorized if a learner's affective filter is high, the message cannot be received by the LAD, and the message is incomprehensible, preventing language acquisition. After this incident, when I reflected on how he acted the previous year, I remembered that his body language was similar.

As the study progressed, Damien showed some improvement and even started to participate during class, "Frau Wenck", he asked, "isn't that the feminine form of the word?"

I was so pleased that he noticed and praised him for his efforts. Later in the study when I passed by Damien's desk, I could not help but notice that he did not lean away from me as he had done in the past. I became hopeful that Damien would start to participate more in class, but that did not happen. He still reported negatively at the end of the study stating he was "not good at learning German." His words illustrate Dewey's (1938) "For some experiences are mis-educative.

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting growth of further experience” (p.25).

Oxford (1990) warned that negative self-talk can lead to self-fulfillment, and this seemed to ring true with Ingo throughout this study. He stated, “I try and try but the words just won’t go into my head.” I found it interesting that he used the verb “won’t” when he made this statement, as if the words actually have their own will and refuse to “go into my head.” Ingo expressed his concern about the keyword method after I introduced it. He said, “It’s just too much to remember. How am I supposed to remember a word and then be able to associate it with another word?” It seemed that he lacked the confidence to do that. He contradicted himself later during that same class period when helping a fellow student remember the English translation for *Geschäft*. He caught my eye at that moment and smiled.

Ingo was absent for more than half of this study due to personal issues and was unable to experience the full effect of the strategies I employed. I am left with the question of how he would have fared had he been present for more of our class sessions, and wondered if his personal issues prevented him from being more successful during this study.

Wolfgang was another student who struggled to learn German because he seemed to be wrestling with personal issues. “I just don’t see the sense of some of the classes that I have to take in high school.” This reminded me of Freire’s

(1970) admonition to “never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears” (p. 96). As mentioned earlier, Wolfgang skipped school for almost half of the study. When he returned, he was so far behind that it was difficult for him to achieve a passing grade in the first quarter. Wolfgang said to me “I cannot skip even one more period, or I will be expelled from school I get it” which again made me think about Freire’s words:

The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better “fit” for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. (p. 76)

I was glad that Wolfgang would not be expelled from school, but at same time I felt the gnawing sensation that he was losing some of his fierce individuality. I felt encouraged, however, when Wolfgang reported on his final survey that he was going to keep studying German and toward the end of the study, his grade began to get better. This occurrence led me to hope that Wolfgang was beginning to reflect on his own reality and was starting to change. In Freire’s words, “Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist” (p.109).

I hoped that Wolfgang would view his situation in an “objective-problematic” way and that he would commit to change his reality to one that was more successful for his future studies.

Teacher Reflections

Over time, the use of natural language acquisition strategies results in less dependence upon isolated grammar drills and textbook activities.

To be honest I was not surprised that the language acquisition strategies that I implemented showed promise in helping students become more successful. I had been experimenting with these strategies for several years and was encouraged. I was, however, surprised to see how I was beginning to change as a teacher because of this study. I have always battled with the grammarian inside of me and felt that if I did not “teach” this grammar in a fairly traditional manner that I was doing a disservice to my students. I often proudly announced that learning German would help students with their English grammar (and silently shook my head in disgust when students did not seem to care about grammar).

Re-reading my field log revealed to me how this was changing. “I steered them back to the structures and German in the following way:

Teacher: Melanie, gefällt dir dieser Rock?

Melanie: Ja, es gefällt mir sehr!

Teacher: Was siehst du auf diesem Bild? (I held up the picture and pointed to the structures on the board.)

It was becoming my instinct to use comprehensible input to steer the students back on track, which would not have happened in my teaching a year ago.

At a later date when I felt I had to “officially” teach the grammar in order to prepare the students for a quiz, I seemed to naturally default to using comprehensible input with my students. I wrote in my log “When they got to class I noticed that Waltraud had a pretend baby that she received in her health class. She sat down and gave the baby to Ulrika. I immediately started to ask questions in German about the baby. I asked Waltraud if the baby was a boy or a girl and she answered it was a boy.” During that same class period I made note that “I felt guilty for asking the students to perform these isolated drills and I felt like the atmosphere of the class changed, so I decided to forget about any more drills so we could “play” with these verbs.” Once again, a year ago, my solution to a class atmosphere that seemed dead would have been to ask the students to perform the drills with a partner only to realize that often students would not complete the drills and would use that time to socialize with each other.

As the study progressed, my traditional “grammar teaching” waned. I wrote in my field log:

I told the students to open their books to the appropriate page where this new grammar was and that we were going to learn new grammar. Pierre immediately said ‘Oh I hate grammar. Last year when we did it, I fell asleep every time.’ I told him that I understand but still proceeded to teach it. I reviewed nominative and accusative cases and showed them the possessive adjectives in the textbook. Then I started to use the gift props that I used earlier in this unit for vocabulary to play with these possessive

adjectives. Pierre was engaged and participated in this activity. Ulrika also asked to talk about the gift props using possessive adjectives. I started to relax and not to feel so flustered about the quiz during this activity.” I did not even make it to the grammar drills during that lesson.

When I think of how the class atmosphere changed, and not for the better, every time I tried to do drills with my students, I realize that I *can* teach them grammar just by using it in personalized ways during instruction. The students might not know they are doing grammar, but they will know that they are listening to and understanding German.

The Road Ahead

“The sailor does not pray for wind, he learns to sail.”

-Gustaf Lindborg

The use of language acquisition strategies enabled me to see how when students focused on the meaning of a conversation, they used vocabulary and grammar more correctly than they had in the past. The analysis of the data I collected convinced me this study was a success and that I am on the right path where I can look for more strategies and refine the ones I experimented with to help learners acquire German.

I saw positive results when I used TPRS but I have unanswered questions about whether this method should be used exclusively, as some of my colleagues feel. I still would like to know if this method could be used with all levels of students and how this method could possibly encompass all German grammar. I would also like to expand the use of the TPR method at very early stages of language acquisition to see if building a vocabulary base could increase learning at later stages when the TPRS method comes to play.

I plan to explore ways that I can begin to assess student in alignment with the use of the strategies that I use in the classroom, and to find ways to assess them on their listening skills that are less isolated and decontextualized. My colleague and I have already launched this

investigation for ways to search for more authentic ways to assess the students based on these natural strategies used for language acquisition.

I want to explore how reading in another language can improve students' vocabulary and then continue to collect different types of readings for my classroom library. I will consult with my students and my colleagues on what types of literature to bring back from my upcoming trip to Germany. I will also get support from our English department by attending a reading workshop this summer, where I hope to learn more about ways to help students have more success with reading.

I will have more Wolfgangs and Waltrauds who will come into my classroom in the coming years with whom I hope to have better dialogues. This action research study has reminded me that I am not just teaching German, but that I am teaching people, who come into my classroom with various backgrounds and experiences. Dr. Shosh made the statement during one of our discussions that as teachers, we must "meet the students where they are", which brought home to me that it is important for me to accept each student as he or she is, and after I have done that I can then begin to carve a path to the future with each student based on their reality.

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APPENDIX A

Deutsch II Frau Wenck Interview Questions

Name: _____

- 1) What was the hardest thing for you to learn last year in German?

- 2) How do you learn vocabulary in German?

- 3) What is your favorite thing about learning German?

- 4) What is your least favorite thing about learning German?

- 5) How do you think a teacher can help you to become better at German?

- 6) What was your grade last year in German?

- 7) Do you think you are good at learning German?

APPENDIX B

Questions for students asked orally:

- 1) What are you good at with German?
- 2) What are you not so good at with German?
- 3) What can you do to get better at German?
- 4) Are you better now at learning German compared to the beginning of the year?

APPREDIX C

Third survey/interview:

- 1) Can you understand the stories?
- 2) Do you understand what you read?
- 3) What is your best skill in German?
- 4) What strategies have we used so far this year to learn German?
- 5) Which strategy is the best for you?
- 6) How do you feel this study is progressing?
- 7) Do you think you could use any of the strategies that we have used for German class in any other class?

APPENDIX D

Deutsch II Frau Wenck Final Survey Questions

Name: _____

5- Agree strongly

3- No opinion

1- Disagree

Use the above numbers to rate the following statements

1) I am good at learning German.

5 4 3 2 1

2) I think using strategies for learning vocabulary is helpful.

5 4 3 2 1

3) My grade is better this year than it was last year.

5 4 3 2 1

4) I think I am able to start having conversations in German.

5 4 3 2 1

5) I will continue with my study of German next year.

5 4 3 2 1

6) Learning another language is useful for my future.

5 4 3 2 1

APPENDIX E



July 16, 2009

Theresa Wenck
1254 North 27th Street
Allentown, PA 18104

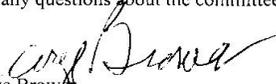
Dear Theresa Wenck:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Using Language Acquisition Strategies in the Secondary German Classroom." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1379) or through e-mail (browerg@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.


George Brower
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College

APPENDIX F

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. Based on current research in the language acquisition field, I am focusing my research on helping students achieve more success in learning German by introducing different learning strategies to the students. The title of my research is *Using Language Acquisition Strategies in the Secondary German Classroom*. My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning new ways and strategies to become more proficient in German.

As part of this study, students will be asked to reflect on how they learn, try out different language learning strategies, answer interview questions and surveys, and participate in classroom activities, such as games and mini-stories. I will gather information during this time on which strategies help students achieve a higher proficiency in German. The study will take place from the last week of August 2009 until December 23rd, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms – no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a secure, locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

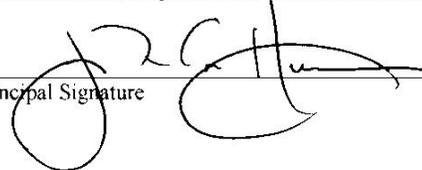
A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular activities and take all of the assessments. These activities and assessments include quizzes and tests, oral performance assessments, participating in all classroom activities where new strategies are introduced and completing homework assignments and projects. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on student grades or classroom relationships.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions and concerns. If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in my classroom, please sign below.

Sincerely,



I agree to allow Mrs. Theresa Wenck to conduct her action research study in Level II German between August 30 and December 23, 2009.

 _____
Principal Signature

8-24-09
Date

APPENDIX G

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. Based on current research in the language acquisition field, I am focusing my research on helping students achieve more success in learning German by introducing different learning strategies to the students. The title of my research is *Using Language Acquisition Strategies in the Secondary German Classroom*. My students will benefit from participating in this study by learning new ways and strategies to become more proficient in German.

As part of this study, students will be asked to reflect on how they learn, try out different language learning strategies, answer interview questions and surveys, and participate in classroom activities, such as games and mini-stories. I will gather information during this time on which strategies help students achieve a higher proficiency in German. The study will take place from the last week of August 2009 until December 23rd, 2009.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms – no one's identity will be used. I will store the data in a secure, locked cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular activities and take all of the assessments. These activities and assessments include quizzes and tests, oral performance assessments, participating in all classroom activities where new strategies are introduced and completing homework assignments and projects. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on student grades or classroom relationships.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about this research or about the process for withdrawing can be directed to me, Theresa Wenck, 610-262-7812, extension 1333, wenckt@northampton.k12.pa.us or my advisor, Dr Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-7858, czales@moravian.edu. If you have any further questions about any aspect of this study, you can also contact the principal of Northampton High School, Mr. William Hume or the Department Chair of the Guidance Department, Mrs. Nadine Rupp, both who can be reached at 610-262-7812.

Sincerely, 

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Student's Signature

Date