



THE FACULTY CORNER

FROM THE ANACAPA SCHOOL FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT. . .

Relax, Get Comfortable, and Learn a Second (or Third) Language!

When your student takes Italian or Spanish at Anacapa, it is almost a certainty that you as parents will be involved, but please don't worry! It won't be painful or embarrassing, and you might even find it fun! What will very likely happen is that your student will ask to tell you a story in the target language (as long as you don't already speak the language), and to help you to understand the story, he or she will show you his or her original cartoon illustration. Afterward you will be asked to sign the illustration to verify that you heard the story because the signed illustration is the student's homework! This might seem like fairly light homework, but it is actually a carefully designed assignment that can maximize student learning!

Research has shown that the portion of the human brain which acquires language works best when we are relaxed. Other research has shown that human brains are hardwired for retaining stories. We have chosen to use the TPRS ("Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling") method of teaching language for our Italian and Spanish classes at Anacapa because it is both based on stories and relatively low stress. Moreover, after nearly ten years of experience with TPRS, Hugo in his Spanish classes and Suzie in her Italian classes have found the method very effective. Not only is it a fun way to learn, but also it lends itself to creative teaching, which makes it fun for us, too.

In Spanish classes this last quarter, students have begun working on a movie project. They collectively wrote the original scripts in Spanish, refined them, and practiced, and now they are filming. Making movies in Spanish class has been a tradition for several years, and before the end of the semester, the whole school will watch our films in Breakfast Club. The project really encourages students to practice the target language in a fun environment, and it also promotes team work. An important part of learning a second language is to be comfortable in using the language and to be able to get past the stage of shyness—and dressing up in costume and saying the words of a character from a script really help. The skills the students practice as actors promote trying to be able to use what has been learned in the classroom in real life, and the work that has to be done by the students for a good movie—to practice as much as they can to master their part—helps them to be able to communicate with other people.

In Italian, two specific activities which enhance proficiency are regularly scheduled while maintaining the low-stress, story-based approach. The first activity is that each class begins with students sharing their news. Students briefly tell the class either something that they did or something that happened either to them personally or out in the world. Suzie writes the translation of their news on the board, and all of the students copy it. Next Suzie reads it out loud, the students repeat it to practice pronunciation, and finally other students in the class choose a few new vocabulary words to add to our "News Vocabulary." An example of news might be as simple as that a student went to the beach with friends and, even though it was foggy, they all went swimming. It might also be some news about movies, or singers, or international events. Students in Italian I through the second semester of Italian III give their news in English, and after that they actually give their news in Italian. We all know how happy people (especially perhaps teenagers) are to share stories of things that are important to them, so our daily "Le notizie" fit perfectly into the criteria for best practices of language acquisition, plus the vocabulary includes words that are meaningful to the students!

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A second great activity in Italian is the weekly cooking class. Each week one class session is spent making a student-chosen Italian recipe. It is a challenge to prepare, eat, and clean up in the designated class period, including making pasta from scratch, but what makes it extra challenging (and an even better learning experience) is that we only speak Italian in the kitchen! For the Italian I students, it means a lot of hand movements, but they very quickly learn the important kitchen words and they also learn how to cook some delicious and even healthy dishes! As an added benefit, the students keep all of the recipes made in class in a notebook so they end up with recipes that they can make outside of school. The Italians have a saying, "Non si invecchia mai alla tavola," which translates as "One never grows old at the table." Suzie maintains that sharing a tasty pasta with your classmates is definitely low stress and therefore also fits the research criteria.

Research has shown, and Suzie and Hugo have seen, that if we can provide an engaging environment that is relatively stress-free, language acquisition is enhanced. We strive to make sure that our Anacapa students have opportunities to really feel comfortable with their work in the classroom and out, so their study can be enjoyable, fun, and very productive.

~ ~ Suzie Sichi and Hugo Macario