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# The Added Value of Developing Learner Autonomy in Vocational Language Classes

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Rod Bolitho  
Norwich, UK

# Overview

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## Part 1

Good Language Learning in the Context of Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

## Part 2

The Impact of Tradition, Standards and Assessment Practices

## Part 3

Challenges and Opportunities for Teachers and Learners



# **Good Language Learning in the Context of Competence-Based Teaching and Learning**

# Good Language Learning



The good language learner *thinks* about how he is learning. He tries to find out what works for him and what doesn't. If he doesn't understand the purpose of a particular exercise, he asks the teacher.



# Good Language Learning

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The good language learner is willing to experiment and *take risks*. For example, she will try out different ways of learning vocabulary until she finds the way that suits her best. She is also not afraid of making mistakes, because she knows that these will help her.



enjoy life  
take risks  
CREATE

# Good Language Learning

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The good language learner is *realistic*. He knows that it will take time and effort to become proficient in English, and that there will be periods where he does not seem to be making much progress.





# Good Language Learning

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The good language learner is *independent*. She does not expect to learn English just by sitting in the classroom, and does not rely on the teacher to totally direct her learning.

# Good Language Learning

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The good language learner is *organised and active*. He uses his time to learn English sensibly, and is always looking for opportunities to develop his language both inside and outside the classroom.





# Good Language Learning

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Good language learners are like *good detectives*. They are always looking for clues that will help them understand how the language works. They make guesses and ask people to correct them if they are wrong. They compare what they say with what others say. They keep a record of what they have learned and think about it. They monitor themselves.



# Good Language Learning

*Common features in nearly all GLL studies:*

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independence

risk-  
taking

self-  
awareness

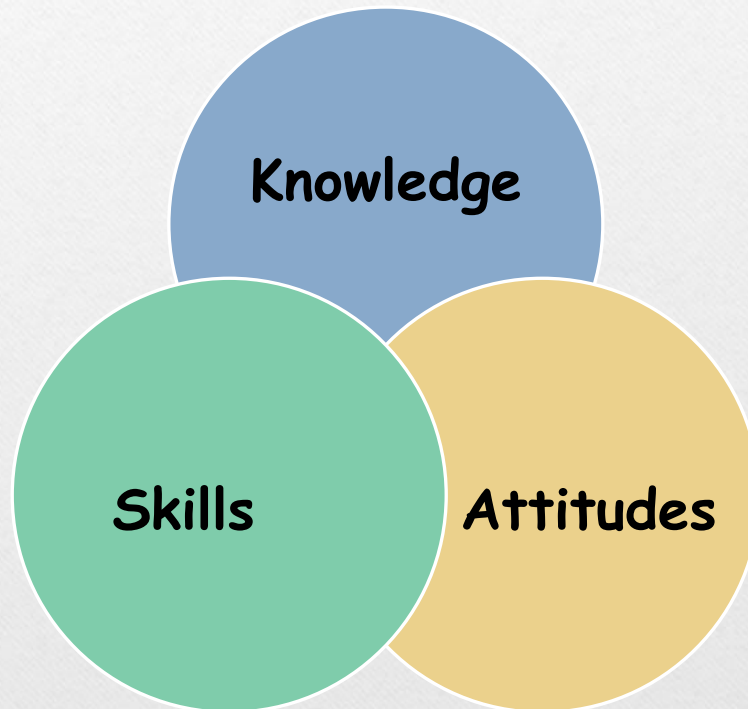
thinking about  
learning

active engagement.



# Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

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# Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

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The Knowledge Dimension in Foreign Language Learning:

Declarative knowledge (knowing the language)

*plus*

Procedural knowledge (knowing how to use it)



# Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

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The Skills Dimension in Foreign Language Learning:

- The five language skills listed in the CEFR  
*plus*
- Pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence  
*plus*
- Transferable or life skills

# Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

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## The Attitude Dimension in Foreign Language Learning:

- Task and performance orientation

*plus*

- Development of positive attitudes to language and culture (and their impact on motivation and performance)

*plus*

- Development of autonomous learning



# Competence-Based Teaching and Learning

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## Implications:

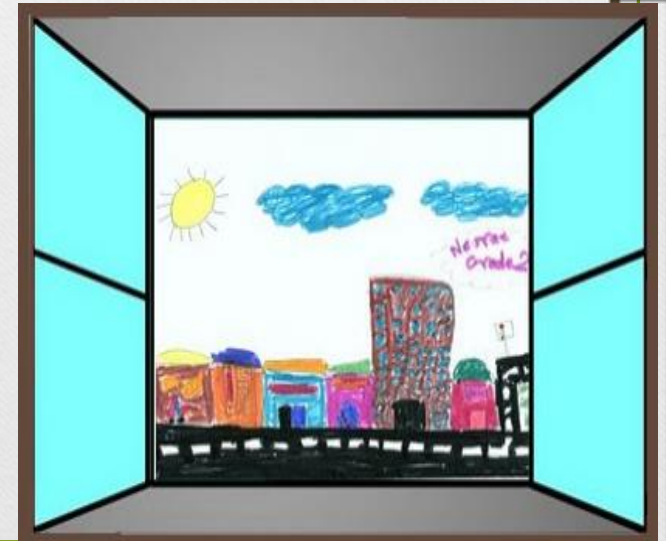
- Beyond a purely subject-based approach
- Beyond behaviours > a holistic view of FLL
- Process and product seen as equally important: learning as a rich experience
- Relevance to the world of work
- A need for reliable means of assessment based on learning processes as well as learning outcomes

# *Discussion Questions:*

*1. To what extent do your own practices inhibit or promote your students as 'good language learners'?*

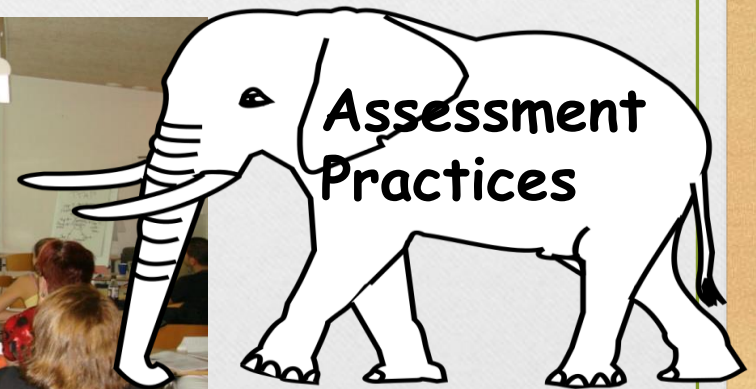
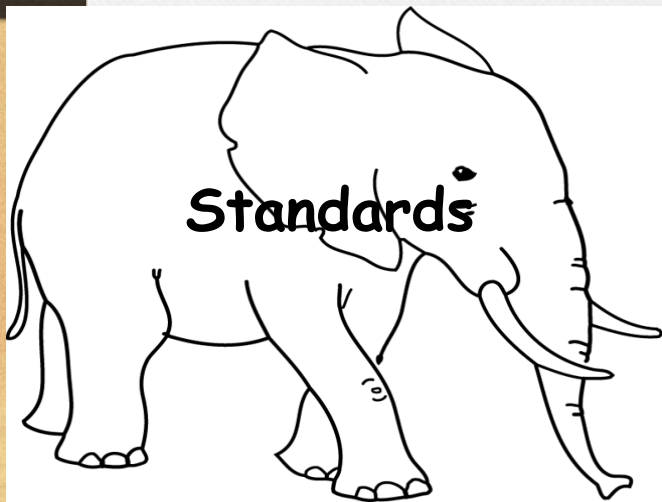


*2. Is your language classroom a closed, inward-looking community, or does it offer a window on a wider world?*





# The Elephants in the Classroom



# Tradition

Which of these practices are still in evidence in Austrian Vocational language classes?

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- Regarding a FL simply as a school subject.
- Textbook as syllabus
- Reading aloud
- Translating
- Teacher asks, student answers, teacher evaluates
- Present > Practice > Produce as a lesson paradigm
- Instant correction of all errors
- Teacher sets and corrects homework

*To what extent are these practices compatible with Competence-Based Teaching and the development of learner autonomy?*



# Standards

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Who were the 'Bildungsstandards' written for?

Do students (and parents!) know about them and about their significance? And what about the CEFR?

Do they both need to be more widely explained and understood?

# Assessment Practices

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To what extent do your day-to-day assessment practices support the development of learner competences and learner autonomy?

Are Austrian vocational students capable of self- and peer assessment?

Can any final language examination be complete without a spoken component?



# Discussion Questions:

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1. *Have students, their parents and their future employers and university teachers really got the message about standards and the way they relate to competence-based education? If not, what needs to be done?*
2. *What does it mean to be a language teacher within the broader context of the vocational schools curriculum? Where do your responsibilities lie when it comes to teaching transferable skills such as problem-solving, team-work, time management and critical thinking? And in what ways do you approach the development of your students' attitudes towards the foreign language they are learning, to cultures and to 'otherness'? What opportunities do you have as a language teacher which some of your colleagues teaching mainstream vocational subjects may not have?*

# Challenges and Opportunities for Teachers and Learners



# A challenge from learners

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'A good language teacher....

..... is fair (especially in tests).'

..... doesn't scold me if I make mistakes.'

..... knows the language and the culture very well.'

..... trusts me to work by myself.'

..... is there to help me when I need it.'

..... gives me targets to aim at.'

..... gives us interesting tasks about real situations.'

..... doesn't only use the book.'

# The challenge in a nutshell.....

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How can teachers best develop learners' autonomy and genuinely put competence-based teaching into practice while dealing with the deep-rooted orientation towards performance and results which pervades the system from top to bottom?



## .... and some ways of responding

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- negotiate realistic learning goals for stronger and weaker students
- give sts choices in class and for homework
- set groupwork and individual tasks (clear instructions) and get out of the way unless called on
- (reading and listening) give sts texts and get them to set their own comprehension items, following the formats prescribed in the tests
- (writing) use a process writing approach, starting with group writing and working with peer editing/correction through to individual drafting and self-correction

## ... some more ways of responding

- 
- encouraging self- and peer assessment using agreed criteria
  - getting sts to maintain a language portfolio
  - encouraging sts to reflect on learning and progress
  - at B1 and B2 level, helping sts to understand that progress in a FL is no longer purely linear, as in a traditional grammatical syllabus, but is all about extending options available them, e.g. different ways of apologising or explaining, according to situation, relationships etc, developing pragmatic competence through working on skills such as paraphrasing, defining, exemplifying or backing up a point with evidence.....



## Another, very important, way of responding

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- liaising very closely with vocational subject teachers to prepare tasks and experiences that are of direct relevance to the sts' future career contexts.



# But above all .....

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..... trust your learners

..... use every opportunity to boost their confidence

..... allow them the space and time they need to learn

..... help them to feel good about their emerging FL selves

.....and make yourself redundant!



# On the relationship between teaching and learning 1

You can lead a horse to water.....



.....but you can't make it drink.

# On the relationship between teaching and learning 2





# On the relationship between teaching and learning 3

‘Learning results from what the student does and thinks, and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.’

*Herbert Simon*

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Thank you  
very much  
for listening

*Contact details for comments and questions:*

[rodbol44@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rodbol44@yahoo.co.uk)