No-Go Pedagogy

There is a limited amount of time available for learning modern foreign languages in schools. It is important to make the most of this contact time between the teacher and the learners. This document lists activities that we consider to be *inefficient* for students aged 11-16.

Many of these activities are simply the reverse of the *positive* recommendations made in other NCELP documents. By defining what is *outside* NCELP's research-informed pedagogy, we hope to better articulate pedagogies that are most likely to be beneficial and efficient.

The activities listed here are highly unlikely to present learners with new language or opportunities for practice.

1. ***Low exposure immersion.*** That is, providing 'floods of input' without comprehension checks, as in the classroom there is insufficient exposure to language to engage the necessary mechanisms to cover the content required by the examination system. For example, singing songs or reciting poems without ensuring that learners comprehend most of, or key aspects of, the content. Although this can help develop sound systems or formulaic phrases, it is *more efficient* if learners are also helped to generalise the sound-spelling connections or the formulaic phrases to understand or create meaningful language in new contexts.

2. ***Teaching and testing low frequency vocabulary.*** This is especially a concern in earlier stages such as Key Stage 3. When learners are presented with a disproportionately high number of rarer words, which they encounter exclusively in one topic, this is inevitably at the expense of a repertoire of high-frequency vocabulary.

3. ***Activities that aim to teach 'x' but only require learners to attend to 'y'.*** Some activities lead teachers to think that grammar will benefit but in fact learners can complete the task by simply spotting or using vocabulary that is already very familiar or easy to guess. For example, matching/ordering pictures to audio or matching written sentences from two lists, where this task can be done without any attention to the grammar in focus (e.g., asking learners to spot one sentence containing the word 'skiing' to put it in an order or to match it with another sentence containing the word 'sport', where in fact verb + infinitive construction is the underlying learning goal).

4. ***No practice prior to expecting accurate production.*** Jumping straight from providing explanations about grammar to expecting accurate production in writing or speech without allowing learners to practise the langugage first (e.g., by understanding its meaning in the input) can lead to insecure production and loss of confidence.

5. ***Banning the use of English*** (or first language of the learner). All students need to understand and have their questions, doubts or misunderstandings addressed promptly. Any student question about the learning is a good question, in English or the foreign language. Furthermore, comparisons with the first language (usually, though not always, English) when learning a foreign language can strengthen the knowledge of both.

6. ***Relying on rote-learnt phrases without analysis.*** Formulaic language needs to be analysed (broken up and manipulated) to help learners to segment and generalise the structure of the language. For example, teaching 'me llamo' (literally, 'to myself I call') as meaning "I am called" or "my names is" without explaining that this pattern actually functions as something else and can be generalised to all sorts of verbs runs the risk of learners misunderstanding the meaning of 'me' (as meaning 'I' or 'my'). They then can use it inappropriately in speaking and writing (see the [practice sequence for reflexive verbs in Spanish](#) on the NCELP resource portal).

7. ***Reliance on classroom 'games' as practice.*** Bingo, battleships, noughts and crosses, slap the board, fruit salad can provide opportunities for (often mechanical) practice – that is, repetition that can help the memorisation of strings of sounds, letters, or words. Such games have a place in the learning process. However, communicating and understanding real 'meaning' is paramount. That is, ensuring that there is a genuine 'gap in information' between those who are communicating with each other is likely to be a more important stage in language learning than mechanical practice. Communicating or understanding meaning requires learners

to connect a meaning (or function) to language they are hearing, seeing or producing. Whilst some games can be (temporarily) motivating, they very often do not provide this meaningful practice, as they can be completed using rote-learned phrases or surface patterns without the learners really understanding their own productions (in speaking and writing) or understanding component parts that they are listening to or reading.

8. *"Form-only" activities without a requirement to connect to meaning or function.* For example, it is possible to complete word searches and acrostics without any comprehension of the language. Similarly, if learners are asked to re-order jumbled sentences whilst also being able to refer to a model of the required pattern, they can provide the correct order without understanding the meaning of the whole or its component parts.

9. *Copying*. Time spent reproducing (often imperfectly) what is on the board, on worksheets or in text books reduces the time available for meaningful practice that counts. In addition, pressure to show examples of extended writing in the early stages may lead teachers to provide over-prescriptive writing frames that enable students to produce paragraphs without understanding how to create sentences themselves.

10. *Colouring and drawing.* Sometimes demonstrating understanding of colour adjectives is done by asking learners to colour things in, but it is usually likely to be faster just to write the colour in English. When asked to draw pictures or symbols to illustrate vocabulary, some students can spend a disproportionate amount of time perfecting their illustrations. Such activities don't make the most of the time in the language classroom and rarely align with the cognitive level of activities that the students do in other school subjects.

In this context, we want to optimise the ratio of language learnt to time spent. This might exclude familiar activities that fail to prompt learners to think about form and meaning, instead allowing them to 'play pretty' or complete language tasks without having to learn the language contained within them.