

New Perspectives

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# Teaching Myself

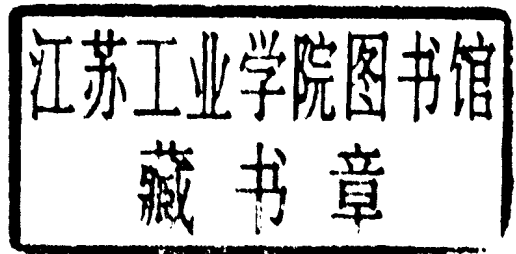
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# Teaching Myself

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# 1 Towards a pedagogy of being

## 1.1 From a pedagogy of having ...

The history of language teaching has seen many different approaches and methods (Howatt 1984). Whatever their apparent differences however, most of them share a similar view of the relationship between the learner and what is to be learnt. Essentially, the language is seen as knowledge to be transferred or transmitted to the learner.

This transfer is most often carried out through the use of a textbook. This has a dominant function, since it determines the situations, topics, structures, and vocabulary the learners will use. The main responsibility of the teacher is then to act as mediator between the learners and the textbook and to control the process.

The learners have no say in the process: they simply follow what has been pre-determined by others—textbook writers, publishers, etc. They therefore experience a twofold alienation: the language they

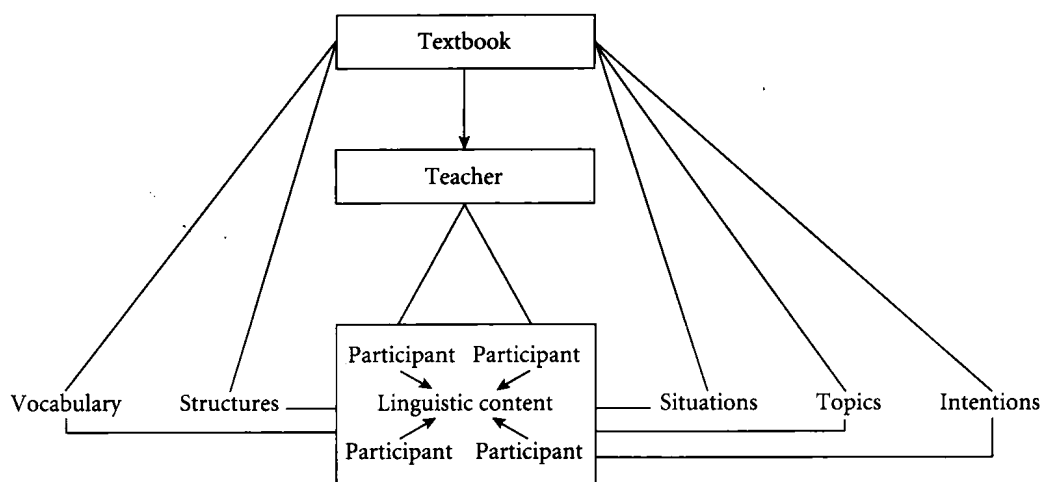


FIGURE 1 *The structure of teaching in a pedagogy of having*

are learning is not their own mother tongue, and what they say in it is not in their own words.

Characteristically, teaching takes place in two stages: learn first, then try to communicate. After understanding the text and carrying out the exercises, the learners are expected to use the language 'freely'. But, although in theory they have the right to express themselves at the end of the lesson, they can only use the words and structures which they have just learnt.

Memorization, based on the notion that 'the more you repeat, the more you retain', is a feature of most such approaches. Material is recycled in various ways ranging from the pattern drill to less obvious forms of repetition such as controlled role play.

Generally speaking, there is a set of learning objectives which are most often expressed in linguistic terms. The teaching/learning process is then directed towards finding the best way of achieving these objectives.

## 1.2 ... towards a pedagogy of being

Some would argue that the characteristics described above apply chiefly to *traditional* methods and that in the *communicative approach* they are less relevant.

While it is true that the communicative approach puts communication at the centre of the learning process<sup>1</sup> (i.e. learners are provided with the language as they need it), there are problems none the less:

- Excellent techniques are suggested, but in general there is a lack of a sense of unity in the activities: they do not link together to form a coherent learning progression. As a result, only a small minority of particularly creative teachers can use them in a sustained way.
- Creativity is often confused with absence of discipline, resulting in unprincipled eclecticism. In many cases, the activities are used simply as light relief or as a back-up to more traditional activities.
- Some teachers view the activity as good in itself without regard to its suitability for the group in question or the best time to use it.
- Some activities are based on mutually incompatible views of learning, which may foster contradictory attitudes.<sup>2</sup>
- Many activities are linear in nature and give insufficient opportunities for learners to express themselves in varied ways or to extend their repertoire. Teachers complain that 'they talk a lot but they don't seem to learn much'.

<sup>1</sup> Some approaches have inaccurately been called communicative because they have retained a traditional methodology, and have simply added some communicative intentions and speech acts in order to help learners to master certain situations which are considered important. This is restricted to the linguistic aspect without any changes to how a language is learnt.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in *The Q Book* by Morgan and Rinvoglucr, an exercise such as that on p.11 is a grammatical one with a veneer of personal involvement.

- The techniques are disconnected from a coherent and internally consistent methodology of language learning. This will be dealt with in Chapter 2.

Clearly, there is a need to introduce a note of rigour into this whole area without losing the creative energy which the communicative approach has undoubtedly sparked off. Equally, there is a need for training in the use of the approach—its methodology, techniques, and human relations implications. We will return to this in Chapters 8 and 9.

### 1.3 Characteristics of a pedagogy of being

*To educate a child is not to fill a vase, it is to kindle a fire.*

[MONTAIGNE]

Let us take one activity to illustrate the characteristics of this pedagogy. It is a technique drawn from Michel Fustier, called *L'année sabbatique* (*The year off*) in which each participant in the class describes what he or she would do with a year entirely free of work (Fustier 1978: 9). After trying out this exercise several times in order to find out how it might be developed, we have made it both broader and narrower: for example, participants are free to spend as much money as they like—but not to go on a world tour.

To introduce this activity, we invite the participants to close their eyes and spend five minutes imagining what they would do during their year off. Then, when they have reopened their eyes, we tell them that their year has ended. Readers interested in grammar will notice at this point that the participants will speak in the past tense throughout. The reason for this transposition into the past has no grammatical purpose; the imagination is more strongly stimulated when we talk about something that is supposed to have happened than when we talk about something that might happen in the future: for example, no one can answer 'I don't know' because the action has already taken place. Thanks to this device, the imagination is strongly reinforced.

We then ask a participant to choose two 'radio journalists' from the class to interview him or her about what happened during the past year. While the others listen to the 'broadcast' they can phone in to ask questions of their own. A third journalist makes a note of problems as they crop up (language errors, new vocabulary, words used by a participant which others may not know, etc.). These

language problems are discussed after the interview, which gives everyone the chance to make notes without holding up the exercise. Then another participant is interviewed, and so on.

This exercise can lead equally well to a written exercise, for instance, to an article about the interview, or an account of one day's events as if described in a diary.

At this stage we use an outline activity, that is, an activity that provides a frame for words only: participants decide for themselves what goes inside. Contact with the language comes from the contact between each other in the chosen activity. *The individual participants and the group as a whole produce their own study plan from within themselves.* Whatever linguistic resources individuals may lack are provided by other participants or the teacher as 'animator'. So language develops in proportion to the students' needs and wishes of expression, and instead of eliciting responses we respond to a demand.

The language becomes relational, not functional. It enables the participants to express themselves and identify where they are in relation to themselves, to others, and their surroundings; it helps interpersonal communication between members of the group.

Dialogue begins as everyone reacts to the situation that arises out of the outline activity. The questions are true questions because the only person who knows the answer is the person to whom they are addressed; they have a real function in asking for precision, clarification, or information, so the means of communication takes on an authentic character.

As far as possible, the outline activity suggested by the 'animator' will be based on their assessment of the physical, affective, and intellectual life of the group. The activity will therefore reflect the dynamism, sensibility, and interests of the participants and offer the opportunity of a direct or symbolic transposition of the topics the participants introduce. The participants can involve themselves according to their perception of their real and their imaginary worlds (using personal experience and knowledge but also their potential at the time for projecting themselves).

A pedagogy of being concerns *the present* and *the presence* and tries to take account of the circumstances of participants in the group. It does not aim to provide a never-ending preparation for being, but direct and immediate action, and language is used as *a means of meeting in the here and now*, whether in the real world or in the world of the imagination.

Content is not imposed on participants from outside, it rises up

from within them. It is not defined in the past by other people, but in the present by the participants themselves.

The activities include a double interest: the first which is intrinsic, so that we can enjoy the activities for what they are, even in our own language, outside the context of learning a foreign language; the other which is linguistic, because the activities allow participants to broaden their linguistic competence. Their interest in the activities is as people, not just as learners.

In this way, we can awaken or stimulate in the participants the needs, desires, and interests they have inside them. To be creative signifies above all to be in contact with one's desires, so that creativity can build a bridge to the other banks of the self.

Listening to one another is a very intense activity since no one can predict what will be said, and a topic is interesting in itself. Listening is directed towards the speaker but also towards the meaning of that person's message; it is not merely a case of listening to *someone's words* but to *someone*. The message is therefore understood in relation to the speaker. There is space for the unexpected, the surprising, and for originality, all of which encourages an awakening of curiosity.

Participants are affected by what they say and by what is said to them. There is a link between the interlocutors and their own speech because they are directly implicated. They can also feel themselves challenged by the speech of others. Each of us is the creator and therefore the author of his or her own speech.<sup>3</sup> Language is, among other things, a symbolic reflection and expression of the interior world of each participant, as well as of the group and the reactions between its members.

Language cannot be separated from its use; it has a personal resonance for each user. Participants can therefore take possession of a language and integrate it so well that it becomes their own. The language is then no longer entirely foreign even if they do not know the words, because when they experience it they are in direct contact with the words.

Rather than being identified as the objective of teaching, language thus becomes a medium of expression and communication. It contributes to the personal expression of the participants and the group, and facilitates contact between them. It is lived and experienced instead of being learnt in an abstract and alienating way. Contact with the language occurs through contact between the interlocutors. In other words, it is learnt through relation and interaction.

From the anonymity of the interlocutor who can be changed at will according to the didactic needs of the teacher, we move on to a

<sup>3</sup> In order to encourage participants to express themselves it is not necessary, it seems to us, to resort to some Moskowitz-style exercises (Moskowitz 1978) which can transform the pedagogic setting into one of therapy, chiefly in order to satisfy the quest for sensation of some teachers who are carried away because they have been able to 'make something happen'.



style of communication where the participants express themselves because they have something to say to each other, and the dialogue is based on a real or imaginary situation, expression that is *direct* or *symbolic*.

Similarly, the connotative values of the language are taken into account, because they constitute an important part of the message. The tonality of what is said and the order in which things are said influences the meaning of the message. Comprehension is conveyed more forcibly through the *meaning of the message* than the sense of the words. The suprasegmental elements of the message (rhythm, melody, etc.) contribute to this comprehension (Chapter 2: 2.6 and Chapter 4).

The following example may help to illustrate the difference between sense and meaning.

The *sense* of a statement such as 'Are you coming this evening?' corresponds to a question asking whether or not the interlocutor is able or wants to come. Its *meaning* can be quite different, depending on the relations between the people concerned. If the phrase is spoken by someone in a higher position of authority, it may have the value of an order. If it is spoken by a close friend, it can be an invitation to spend a pleasant evening together. If there has been a disagreement, it may represent an offer of reconciliation. *Meaning* is defined by the context and the relationship between the speakers. The statement is an exchange, not just of words, but of a message.

Coming to understand what the message means is made easier by the fact that there is a close relationship between the speaker and his or her words, between the situation in the group and the expression of the participants, and by the fact that there is a close correspondence between what is said and what is expressed. Once signification has been reintroduced, the language is complete and comes fully to life.

The process of comprehension is itself modified and partly reversed. In traditional teaching it is largely the student's responsibility to learn what the teacher, or textbook, chooses. But, in a pedagogy of being it is mainly up to the 'animator' to grasp what the participants want to say. This is not just linguistic; the 'animator' must take a lead from the participants, instead of expecting them to follow the programme he or she, or the author of a textbook, has worked out.

The participants acquire the language by using it to express themselves and communicate. It is an *acquisition process* and not an act of learning. Just as we acquired, rather than learnt, our mother tongue, this process takes place, not in disorder, but in another order—one which meets the needs of expression of the participants.

The hierarchial, and therefore vertical transmission of *intellectual understanding* is replaced by a horizontal expansion of *practical knowledge* based on experience—horizontal because the participants contribute directly to its development. By this means, the *quality* of what is communicated is of another order, since it depends on another mode of apprehension.

We can illustrate this difference by comparing the intellectual understanding we have about a country after reading a book about it, and the practical knowledge we acquire from travelling in that country. This difference plays an important role in relation to language. It is also significant in relation to the retention of language since the type of initial contact one has with something unknown or new affects how one remembers it. Indeed, in certain cases we cannot know things unless we experience them. I cannot have an intellectual understanding of good wine. I can experience it as good; then I know it and I can remember it.

With this approach we begin to see the transition from a pedagogy of having, centred on an accumulation of intellectual understanding, to a pedagogy of being, directed towards knowledge from experience. The members of a class merely function as learners in a pedagogy of having, but they become *participants* in a pedagogy of being since it is with their person and their personality that they participate in the agreed activities.

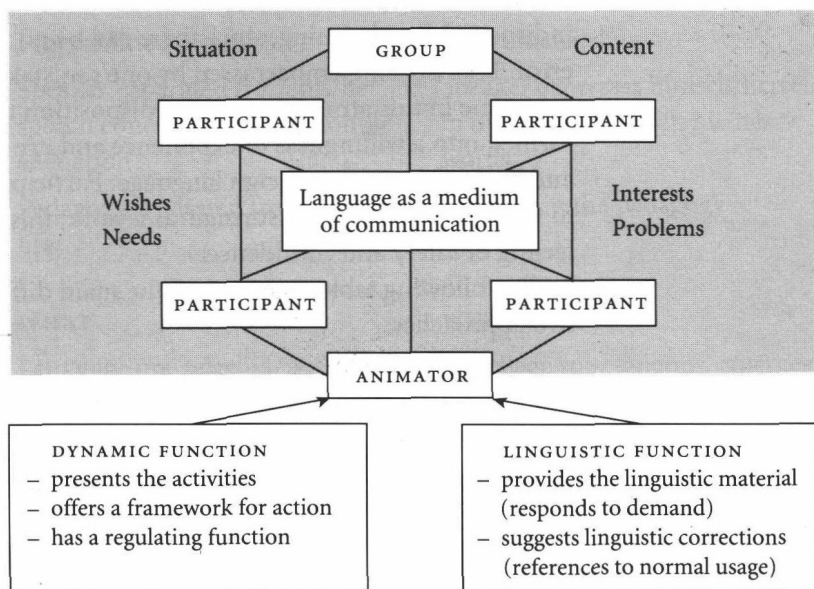


FIGURE 2 *The structure of learning in a pedagogy of being*

Responsibility for the course content and its development are shared because the participants have joint responsibility: the teacher no longer bears the weight of a fixed programme that has to be carried out. The teacher's role is transformed from principal and leading actor to producer, no longer teaching but animating. This is why we talk of 'animators' rather than 'teachers', in the etymological sense of the word (*Anima* = breath, life) because animators breathe life into language and contribute to the dynamism of the group's life. The animator has a dual role, dynamic on the one hand, linguistic on the other.

The atmosphere on the course allows creativity to germinate and blossom. Participants can feel more at ease in the group because there is a climate of personal and linguistic acceptance.

In fact, in the world of the imagination there is no right, wrong, or better response—just personal response. It is as if, for instance, each participant preferred a different colour according to their own taste and without reference to any external influence: blue would not be considered better than red.

The group comes to accept the absence of positive or negative value judgements in response to what is expressed 'It isn't good, or bad, or better—it just *is*!' Each participant has a personal response to the situation presented, which leads to a general atmosphere of 'That's OK'.

So far as linguistic accuracy is concerned, errors are viewed as indispensable to learning, since there can be no learning without error. Fear of being embarrassed by one's mistakes can be reduced or overcome in this atmosphere. A predisposition to learn can be transformed into a willingness to experience and explore the possibilities and limitations of the foreign language. Participants are encouraged to take risks within a reassuring framework; this inspires in them a feeling of safety and confidence.

The following table summarizes the main differences between the two approaches:

a pedagogy of having	a pedagogy of being
WHO	WHO
Learner	Participant
Teacher	Animator

## HOW

Hierarchical relationship

Teacher imposes, controls,  
demands responses

Vertical transmission of  
intellectual understanding

Teaching on a conscious level

Voluntary act of learning

Act of memorizing, repetition

Language learnt, transmitted  
by textbooks

Teacher responsible for course  
programme and content

Learner responsible for his/her  
mistakes

Situation imposed from outside  
and constructed according to  
didactic criteria

Programmed

Speaker, separated from his/her  
speech content, results in double  
alienation

Pedagogy separated from (real)  
life

## WHAT

Language pre-selected, remote  
from group, programmed

Language of 'he', 'she', 'they' on  
meaning of the words

Language has referential and  
metalinguistic function

## HOW

Empathetic relationship

Animator suggests, accompanies,  
responds to demand

Horizontal expansion of  
practical knowledge

Conscious and unconscious  
learning

Acquisition process

Process of discovery,  
exploration, experimenting

Language lived, approached  
through experience

Animator and participants share  
responsibility for development of  
the programme and content

Mistakes indispensable to  
acquisition

Real or imaginary situation  
emerges from within the group

Individualized

Speaker expresses himself/herself  
in direct contact with his/her  
words

Life within the pedagogy

## WHAT

Language spontaneous, emerges  
from within the group,  
individualized

Language of 'I', 'we', 'you', centred  
on the significance of the message

Language has expressive,  
communicative, investigative, and  
symbolic function

PURPOSE	PURPOSE
Linguistic objectives	Personal and linguistic objectives
Functional	Development of the individual
Directed towards past or future	Directed towards the group
Pedagogy focused on an objective, on results	Pedagogy focused on a process

FIGURE 3 *From a pedagogy of having ... to a pedagogy of being*

1.4 The concept of the person in a pedagogy of being

*A passer-by asks three bricklayers what they are doing.  
The first says 'I'm putting bricks one on top of the other'.  
The second declares 'I'm building a wall'.  
The third replies 'I'm making a home for a family'. [ANON]*

What we teach is not limited to content: we also teach communication and therefore human relations. It is important that we ask ourselves what sorts of relationships we are fostering, what image we have of people and of the self in the learning process.

1.4.1 The concept of the relationship between the self and pedagogy

Acquiring a language cannot be dissociated from the individual who is its subject. We cannot behave as though we were simply transferring content, and leave the participant's personality to one side on the pretext that he or she is 'in a learning situation'. What we do as teachers has an impact on the participants and therefore on their learning. The pedagogic act is always more than a simple act of teaching. Whatever approach we take to the foreign language, even the most traditional, we are always teaching more than just the language. What is at stake goes beyond linguistic learning: it relates to the self-confidence of the participants as well as their intellectual and personal development. We exert an influence by reinforcing, developing, or taking away from their attitudes and behaviour.

Every learning process is a process of change. It follows that we can develop or reinforce those forms of communication which lead to

increased conformism and fixed ways of thinking. Alternatively, we can contribute to a process of personal discovery and development. It is, therefore, very important to consider what types of behaviour we create or encourage in the way we teach. It would be inappropriate, for example, to use alienating methodological procedures, based on a mechanistic concept of learning, to encourage the participants' autonomous personal development.

Our pedagogic approach, therefore, does not separate learning from living. The process of learning plays an integral part in the overall development process of the individual. Life does not stop as we enter the classroom door; there is no artificial frontier between life on the outside and life inside the classroom. Learning is a living act which encompasses the life of those who take part in it. So we cannot maintain a sort of professional myopia, and consider only the linguistic aspects of what we teach. The participant's individuality is at the centre of this pedagogy. The participant engages in the learning process as an individual, and the act of learning contributes to his or her personal development.

The participant is a unique being and his or her speech will reflect this. Activities must allow each participant to contribute a personal response by giving expression to his or her uniqueness. The activities should respect and encourage the development of the participant's individuality and so contribute to the individual process of personal evolution. This pedagogy, then, is founded on a dynamic concept of the individual in evolution.

All individuals are known and accepted with their polarities, including doubts and certainties, weaknesses and strengths, self-denial and expectations, fears and desires, terrors and dreams, a wish for both stability and movement, a need to be both dependent and autonomous. The conjunction of all these forces reveals the richness of the individual and the dynamism of his or her action. It is by integrating these forces that each person accepts all aspects of his or her own personality.

Some learning processes have the effect of removing an individual's 'shadows', those personal traits which are precisely what can give relief. At the same time, they claim the right to question the person as a whole. But this image of mankind is sterilized and stunted. They create an atmosphere of artificial happiness in which the student is treated like a child. It is not surprising that so much emphasis is placed on surface appearances, and such learning processes are often characterized by frenzied activities in an attempt to enliven the class.

The process of acquisition through experience is a process of personal development. A dancer does not just learn the steps and movements of a dance: the main task is at a deeper level, to develop suppleness, flexibility of harmony, and equilibrium. It is the same in pedagogy: what we do is not purely linguistic in character, it relates to behaviour. We have to develop the attitudes, aptitudes, and forms of behaviour needed to learn a language, above all receptiveness and a capacity for expression (Chapter 2: 2.6). We each have these aptitudes but sometimes they have been locked away or buried as a result of our education or social surroundings. Sometimes they have remained inside us waiting for the chance to grow. As we shall see in the second part of this book, many activities can be used to develop these key aptitudes, and while this is happening the participants are simultaneously acquiring the language.

A pedagogy of being is concerned far less with the question 'How do I teach a defined content?' than with two other questions:

- 'How do I create the necessary conditions for acquiring a language?'
- 'How can I facilitate the development of each participant's receptiveness and capacity of expression in order that they can acquire the foreign language?'

Our approach is trying to create a pedagogy free from narrow functional objectives, in which each participant follows a personal path using a personal rhythm, and is accepted at whatever stage he or she happens to be in personal and linguistic development. There are no external norms. In this way, we avoid attempts to stereotype the individuals or the group. We move from a ready-made to a made-to-measure pedagogy, in which content changes to suit the person, and not the other way round. There is a shifting of pedagogic values. The process of acquisition becomes more important than the product, the path more important than the destination.

Our aim as 'animators' is to learn alongside the participants, taking care not to impose our own demands concerning some remote or uncertain future, since it is not a matter of pushing participants to reach the end without having first experienced the process. Each participant is the subject of his or her own learning and not the object of our projects, desires, or intentions. Instead of teaching, we educate; instead of imposing, we propose; instead of pointing the way, we accompany. Like mountain guides, we put our knowledge and experience at the service of our clients during the journey they are making. For language acquisition, this approach means that each participant will make progress at a personal rate in

relation to what has already been learnt and the echo from the language expressed in the sessions. Each is therefore free to continue along a private and unique path.

This new perspective explains, among other things, the conceptual changes which occur as a response to difficulties found in learning. In a pedagogy of having, the learner starts from an assumed or actual standard, and the activities are built around objectives to be achieved; each error is viewed as an obstacle in relation to those objectives. In our pedagogy, error is an integral part of the acquisition process. Wanting to avoid error can interrupt acquisition, and can even prevent it. This is why we try to create an atmosphere which not only allows people to experiment without fear of error, but in which error is valued, since it is the means by which people become aware of the possibilities and limitations of the language.

#### 1.4.2 An approach to the whole person

In the acquisition process each participant is involved physically, affectively, and intellectually within a social and spiritual context.

##### *Physical involvement*

The body is directly involved in a number of exercises: relaxation (Chapter 3), breathing, vocalization, rhythm, and poetry with movement (Chapter 4). In some warm-ups we use a progression which goes from gesture to the voice (sounds and interjections) to the verbal, as we do in group exercises where the language is strongly supported by gesture, for example, in the group mirror exercise (Chapter 5: 5.2.1).

In addition, exercises such as the variation on *the mirror* (Chapter 5: 5.2.2) or *Dialogue without words* (Chapter 5: 5.3.1), begin with purely physical expression followed by vocal and verbal expression.

##### *Affective involvement*

Talking is, of course, an act of involvement. In linguistic psychodrama, or LPD, this involvement is concerned with both *content* and *relationships*.

*Content* is determined by the participants themselves so that they are directly or symbolically associated with what they and others say. It becomes *their* speech. Directly or symbolically, their inner life finds its own expression in the foreign language. Interestingly, speaking in another language often affords an individual greater freedom of expression than is readily accepted in their own language.



Participants tend to feel particularly vulnerable when learning a foreign language and this can affect *relationships*. They may be afraid of appearing foolish in front of others and feel frustrated if they are not able to express their feelings or thoughts with sufficient nuances. Speaking with a limited vocabulary makes some people feel slow and therefore 'stupid'. It is important to remember that some participants will not speak at all because they are so afraid of failing to speak correctly.

Doubling techniques (Chapter 5: 5.2.1), and other techniques which involve sequences, can be used to support participants in their expression, to enlarge their skills where they feel the need and to progressively build self-confidence.

The small size of groups—never more than twelve members—makes it possible for members to identify strongly with each other, and favours the cohesion of the group while still leaving room for diversity. The atmosphere created by the exercises and the type of relationships encouraged by the style of the animator's guidance, help to build self-confidence further by providing a more relaxed attitude towards errors or 'blind-spots'.

### *Involvement of the intellect*

The intellect is not simply busy with cognitive and conscious activities, the sort which arise with language problems, such as from written exercises or explanations requested by a learner after correction of a language point. Unconscious intellectual activities, subconscious generalization processes, synthesis, organization of knowledge, comprehension by intuition or deduction, are all taking place while acquisition is happening. Conceptual intelligence and intuition are stimulated by an attitude of discovery and experimentation in the foreign language which we try to develop in courses, and in activities which appeal to the participants' imaginations.

When participants 'live' the language directly, for example, as protagonists during an activity, we often notice aspects of conscious work on the language, as in the way they react to a suggested correction; acquisition seems to take place as a more direct process. On the other hand, for participants acting as 'assistants', for example as listeners, conscious cognitive activities through a sensitive observation of the functioning of the language can take place in a more detached way because they are not directly involved in the action taking place. This may explain why linguistic corrections suggested by animators, even when they are not taken up by protagonists who are too caught up in the heat of action, do have an important function; they can have a resonance for other members of the group.