

Learning-by-Heart vs. Learning by Thinking: Fostering Thinking in Foreign Language Learning A Comparison of Two Approaches

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Abstract : Turning to learner-centered teaching instead of the teacher-centered approach brought a whole new perspective into the process of teaching and learning and set a new goal for improving the educational process itself. However, recently a tremendous decline in students' performance on various standardized tests can be observed, above all on the PISA-test. The learner-centeredness on its own is not enough anymore: the students' ability to think is deteriorating. Especially in foreign language learning, one can encounter a lot of learning by heart: whether it is grammar or vocabulary, teachers often seem to judge the students' success merely on how well they can recall a specific word, phrase, or grammar rule, but they rarely aim to foster their ability to think. Convinced that foreign language teaching can do both, this research aims to discover how two different approaches to teaching foreign language foster the students' ability to think as well as to what degree they help students get to the state-determined level of foreign language at the end of the semester as defined in the Common European Framework. For this purpose, two different curricula were developed: one is a traditional, learner-centered foreign language curriculum that aims at teaching the four competences as defined in the Common European Framework and serves as a control variable, whereas the second one has been enriched with various thinking routines and aims at teaching the foreign language as a means to communicate ideas and thoughts rather than reducing it to the four competences. Moreover, two types of tests were created for each approach, each based on the content taught during the semester. One aims to test the students' competences as defined in the CER, and the other aims to test the ability of students to draw on the knowledge gained and come to their own conclusions based on the content taught during the semester. As it is an ongoing study, the results are yet to be interpreted.

Keywords : common european framework of reference, foreign language learning, foreign language teaching, testing and assignment

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