

Fabio Caon

PLEASURE IN LANGUAGE
LEARNING
A Methodological Challenge

Department of Language Sciences Ca' Foscari University, Venice



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Introduction

The Venetian School has always been characterized by the attention it pays to the person who learns, apart from the language and culture that are the objects of the student's study. Only from the integration of these poles is it possible to generate a methodology that is both respectful of the person and effective in the acquisition of the language in question. In this third *Document*, Fabio Caon offers a reflection on the psychological ways that "open" the mind of the student to learning and then draws the consequences of this in methodological terms.

Traditionally, this theme would be readily inserted into the so called "humanistic-affective approach," but Caon's insightfulness requires us to rethink this definition. If the "humanistic" aspect is undeniable, due to the attention given to the ways in which the human brain and mind works and proceeds, then it is equally true that the adjective "affective" can be understood in a deeper sense. On the one hand, the personal emotional component is preserved by the author acknowledging the *pleasure* of satisfying one's own needs, the pleasure of carrying out one's duty as a student of language, the pleasure of learning, and in the capacity to control one's disappointment and negative emotions. On the other hand, "affective" is connected to the individual *relationships* among the students as they build-up their knowledge (the approach is clearly constructivist), and to the relationship with the teacher who acts as a guide to cognitive growth and the acquisition of the language/culture.

Fabio Caon does not limit himself to merely reflecting on the humanistic, affective, and relational nature of teaching. He also draws methodological implications in his conviction that the LTM is a theoretical-practical science (as G. Freddi, the founder of the Venetian school, defined it, cf. the first *Document* of this series); that is to say, that, the theoretical dimension is "useless" if it is not complemented with an operational dimension, or practice, through which the theoretical premises are either validated or falsified.

Paolo E Balboni
Director of the Series

1. “Meaningful” learning

*“Why don’t learners learn
what teachers teach?”
R.L. Allwright*

In the above witticism, the paradox that Allwright posed in 1984 retains its relevance to this day. However, before engaging his question, so complex in its disarming essentiality, we consider it opportune to emphasize, albeit a quick summary, some aspects that make teaching an activity that is in a certain sense “mysterious” (as George Steiner put it), as well as delicate, and in need of constant renewal. “Mysterious,” for the range of “scenarios or structures of relationship” that it involves, for the uncertainty that concerns its legitimacy, (Moreover, he asks: “What authorises a man or a woman to educate an other human being? Where does the source of teaching authority sit?”); “mysterious,” for the questions that it raises about its procedures – dialectical or authoritarian, as Foucault asserts – and for its purposes. “Delicate” because it involves a need to establish harmonies among moods, psychologies, cultural backgrounds, horizons of expectations that are inevitably different and that demand a whole series of mediations, often difficult to put into practice. Moreover, teaching, as a dynamic relationship, constantly calls into play equilibriums when they are eventually reached.

If we think about the teaching/learning of foreign languages, then, the mysterious and delicate nature of every didactic/educative relationship is even more complex. In that, added to the didactic of a second or foreign language, often taught by mother-tongue teachers, are cultural factors that concern contents (different linguistic structures that reveal different ways to elaborate reality –for instance, time, or the categorization of reality) and relationships (different relational models and different communicative styles, prejudices, ethnocentrism) that together make the task of the teacher extremely delicate. As a matter of fact, the teacher must possess the ability of linguistic-cultural empathy

and mediation in order to explicate, or preferably to make the students discover for themselves, intercultural differences and similarities. The final objective is to make the students aware of differences, to reduce possible ethnocentric visions by making relative and expanding their points of view, and by promoting an interest in otherness.

Keeping in mind these preliminary considerations that indicate some crisis points, so to speak, where teachers and students are confronted, we think that to overcome the apparent paradox contained in Allwright's question it is initially necessary to recall the concept of "meaningful learning" as proposed by such scholars as, Rogers, Ausubel, and Novak. This concept has generated a lot of interest inside the Venetian school of LTM, and from its premise of meaningfulness in the teaching/learning relationship, the school has itself elaborated theoretical studies and planned operational models that underpin the contents of this *Documento*.

1.1 Meaningful learning of languages

According to Carl Rogers, *meaningful* learning must be able to arouse the interest of the student, who, as well as a need to feel totally involved (from the cognitive, affective, and emotional point of view) in the process, is also able to perceive that the experience is capable of filling certain knowledge gaps felt as such by the student. Roger's pillars or basic principles of education science have been adopted and in part redefined by other scholars, notably Ausubel, and more recently, Novak. For Ausubel, *meaningful* learning is a process through which new information enters into relation with pre-existing concepts in the cognitive structure of the brain, but it is only the student who can decide to implement this process. Novak, for his part, while confirming the necessity of a constructive integration of thoughts, feelings, and actions in the pupil, also refers to the necessity of a constructive relationship between pupil and teacher. In his opinion, this educative relationship is based on shared actions that permit an exchange of meanings and emotions between the student and the teacher.

As regards this concept, we can now state some concise observations that make problematic the didactic of second, foreign, and ethnic languages in school: for instance:

- a. the fact that many students feel that the foreign language does not readily connect with their spontaneous need for communication, it is therefore necessary, through choices of contents and/or didactic methodologies, to “create” or contribute to the creation of knowledge gaps in order to promote a need or an interest to learn;
- b. new information is often discordant with the information already existing in the mother-tongue of the student: this discordance can be both grammatical/conceptual (Latin divides the world in masculine and feminine, Teutonic, into masculine, feminine, and neuter), and/or semantic (in Latin cultures, the term *casa* is comprehended either as the concept of the building in which ones lives, or as a shelter, as security, as affection; for a northern-European, *house* and *home*, *haus* and *heim*, refer to different meanings).

The concept of the meaningful learning of languages clearly calls into question many traditional approaches wherein the interest for the form of the language takes priority over the interest for the exchange of personal meanings. Conversely, in fact, it is precisely this latter process that is capable of activating the cognitive, affective, and emotional spheres of those involved in the didactic act.

1.2 Summary

In light of these contributions by the above scholars, albeit briefly noted here for the benefit of those LTM specialists examining this *Documento*, the first step we need to take in engaging Allwright’s paradoxical remark is to specify the concept of “learning” according to a cognitive and humanistic-affective perspective (understanding these terms now as complementary and not alternative) by reflecting on the fact, almost “obvious” in itself, that to activate the mind towards modifying its

own cognitive architecture (also a neurological and biochemical one) learning must be “meaningful.”

The characteristics of “meaningful” learning that we have so far identified may be summarized as follows:

- a. learning is *total*; it involves the cognitive, emotive, affective, and social sphere;
- b. learning is a *constructive* process, one of integrating new information with the student’s pre-existing concepts;
- c. the quality of learning, in terms of memory persistency, is conditioned in a positive or negative way by *motivation*, which in turn largely depends upon factors internal to the student, like, for instance, interest, pleasure, and need.

2. “Motivation” in the Venetian Language Teaching Methodology (LTM) tradition

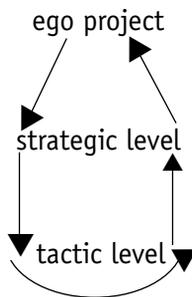
Parallel to the scholastic endeavours referred to in the first chapter, the principal scholars (in chronological order, Titone, Freddi, Balboni) within the Venetian LTM research program have consistently repeated since the '60s and '70s the need to recognise the fundamental value of motivation as a *dynamic-genetic element of learning* (Titone, 1987) along with the importance of developing an intrinsic motivation in the student with the aim to facilitate meaningful learning. In what follows, we will briefly examine the contributions of these three central scholars, (referring the reader to the bibliography for further study).

2.1 *Ego-dynamic model (Renzo Titone)*

In the “ego-dynamic model” of Renzo Titone (1973) the student is placed at the centre of every acquisitive activity because “learning, as a profound and durable acquisition, is especially dependent upon the active presence of the “I” as a subject. It is at this level that the affective factors in general find their rightful place, factors (motivation, attitude, emotive tone, conscious or unconscious deep reactions) that determine, so to speak, the tenacious sedimentation of the acquisitions,” (Titone, 1987: 47-48). In short, the model that Titone defines as “ego-dynamic” is based, as we have already noted, on the principle that it is the *ego* that activates and motivates the acquisitive mechanism. The term *ego*, as used by Titone, refers to the project that every person has for himself, refers to the way he see himself realized in the future. In this project the subject can evaluate the role the second or foreign language can or must play in his self-realization with respect to his initial objectives.

Following the basic motivation of the *ego*, certain strategic choices that the student makes, or rather, certain operative choices lead him to satisfy his particular needs and interests. For example: an Italian student has the objective to travel and believes that English is fundamental for this purpose (ego level). For this reason he decides it is necessary to

join an intensive, English language course (strategic level). It is then necessary for the strategic level to be confirmed in light of the initial project; this is the tactic moment: the direct contact with the English course, with the single lesson, with the didactic materials, with the class, and with the teacher. Only if the “tactic” phase confirms the validity of the “strategic” choices as regards to the *ego* project, will the subject then activate his profound motivational resources, supporting and increasing the motivation and tolerating possible assignments that even if unpleasant are necessary with respect to his particular objective. Schematically, the ego-dynamic model is as follows:



The innovative aspect of this model is to be found in two observations, that assume even greater relevance given that the model dates back three decades:

- a. the entire person is involved in the learning process; in this holistic involvement the affective-motivational aspect is considered fundamental and is based not only on the needs and the interests connected to the *hic et nunc*, but also on his future projects;
- b. by virtue of the long term aspect of the project, the initial motivation is an essential component, but is totally insufficient to guarantee stability and persistence over time unless on a day-by-day basis the teacher, in proposing stimulating activities coupled with the quality of the already established interpersonal relationships, must support, feed and revive the student's motivation in the class. Therefore, if the tactics

confirm the strategies, only then will the ego remain open to the acquisition of a new language.

Even in the indisputable historical value of this model, we note a weak point, namely, that the model can only be applied to those languages that the student *chooses* to study solely based on his personal project. This is often the case in the study of English by adolescents who are generally interested in it merely because it represents the lingua franca of the globalised world, a key to open the doors of international communication. Conversely, unfortunately, there is much less interest within schools for the study of languages like German, French, or Italian, because they do not “naturally” coincide with the generic perspectives, with the “indispensable” competences promoted by our society. The model of Giovanni Freddi, developed in the decade following Titone’s work, highlights this very problem by *focusing*, within the pedagogic-didactic methodology of the teacher, on the development of a motivation based on a curiosity about difference. A motivation, he states, that is innate in every human being.

2.2. Motivation in the LTM theory (Giovanni Freddi)

Giovanni Freddi headed the Venetian School for a quarter of a century, up to 1994. Mindful of the contributions made by linguistics, psychology and psycho-pedagogy, and, in harmony with Titone’s theses, he wrote that, “learning does not exist without an adequate motivation, and therefore without a dynamic interest of the subject that drives him to learn.” The motivation, in Freddi’s view, is included “in the total affective sphere of the subject, with his personality, his feelings, his emotions and his attitudes towards the foreign language and the people who speak it” (Freddi, 1994: 113).

In his Didactic Unit model (1970, 1979), Freddi recognizes that motivation, apart from its total and affective character, is also variable due to personal attitudes and convictions: the induced prejudices, the preceding experiences, importantly etch themselves onto the student’s motivation for selecting a specific language to study. Such convictions

and attitudes can positively or negatively influence the student in his learning process and, consequently, Freddi considers it necessary for the motivation “to be nourished with suitable operations in all...moments of the Didactic Unit, almost like a river running through it and fertilizing it from end to end,” (Freddi, 1994: 113). Therefore, Freddi, while in tune with Titone’s position, further insists– and here is his innovation – on the communicative and cognitive purpose of the motivation by declaring that, “the primary motivation for learning a foreign language consists in the nature of it as an instrument of communication and contact with other ways of living and thinking, with other beings who live out, in a natural fashion, their historical, cultural, and social events” (Freddi, 1993: 61).

The coherent consequence of this is to promote in the student an attitude of curiosity and interest in cultural difference, in the novel and unexpected, offered by any encounter with a different language and culture. On the practical level, this attitude finds declension through a methodology in which particular attention is paid to the communicative and cultural dimension of the language, the starting point of which is the student’s previous knowledge and prejudices. Such previous knowledge and prejudices, in a foreign language class, represent a wealth of material under the condition that they are disassembled and reassembled within a perspective of cultural relativism.

2.3 Tri-polar model (Paolo E. Balboni)

Given the importance of the cultural and social dimensions in the concept of motivation, Paolo E. Balboni has elaborated a model that analyses the motivation for studying in general, (not only languages (1994, 2002)). This model is essentially based on three possible activating factors: duty, need, and pleasure.

2.3.1 Duty

According to Balboni, the motivation for studying, within the ambience of the school, is often not connected to an interest in the contents or to

a methodology capable of making interesting the object being studied. Rather, the motivation is often based on *duty*, which can be:

- a. hetero-directed*, that is induced from external factors such as, for instance, scholastic programs providing the study of a language that is not interesting to the student, or – in the case of languages that could spontaneously give rise to interest – induced by the authoritarian attitudes of the teachers who, with the objective of maintaining the discipline in the class, impose contents and methods without giving any space to negotiation and dialogue or to listening to their student's formative needs and interests; in this perspective, duty does not lead to meaningful learning (cf. 1.1);
- b. self-directed* but not durable (such as, avoiding "cutting a bad figure," or avoiding a low mark and/or avoiding parental punishment).

Therefore, the studying activity, in these situations, is not supported by an actual will-to-know on the part of the student, and thus connects itself with difficulty to any affective and personal involvement by the pupil. Consequently, it rarely generates the intrinsic pleasure of thoroughly studying knowledge and making it independent of external factors.

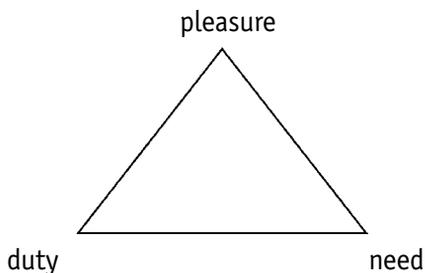
2.3.2 Need

The motivation based on the need to learn a language, according to Balboni, can certainly represent a stable enough motivation, but it is always connected to certain expectations or certain personal objectives that can be ephemeral, that is, connected to a momentary enthusiasm or necessity – a trip: the need to communicate for a limited period of time with people of different nationalities. The risk with such a typology of motivation, if the objective is the meaningfulness of learning, is that the students, once they satisfy their needs, lose interest in any further or deeper study. In the context of teaching a second language, an example is the difference that often occurs among the students between the profound motivation that supports them in learning the language for

basic, interpersonal communication (Cummins' BICS , which satisfies deep and immediate needs) and the one that guides them in the study of micro-languages that are more complex and distant from the urgent needs of communication (CALP, according to Cummins' terminology). Beyond the different complexity of these two areas (in which, at the moment, we will avoid becoming immersed in) it is useful to note how, from the motivational point of view, the acquisition of the CALP, if not felt as necessary for personal self-promotion or academic success, very often generates prejudicial attitudes of disinterest towards any study that the student does not perceive the long term purpose of, or its value in achieving his existential objectives.

2.3.3 Pleasure

The intrinsic pleasure is according to Balboni, the determinant factor for a meaningful acquisition to take place, in terms of stability and duration. It allows the subject to continuously activate and regenerate his motivation by reducing external conditioning. "Pleasure" is a concept to be interpreted not only as a pleasant feeling or emotion but also, (if not especially), as a gratification of a cognitive need and of a desire for participation, as the pleasure of making new experiences, the pleasure of a challenge (not so much concerning others but rather ourselves, our limits), the pleasure of systematizing knowledge by making it into a personal competence, of establishing connections between the new concepts acquired at school and the ones already possessed, (Balboni, 2002). In his publications, Balboni has often used the image of a triangle, on the vertices of which, (the opposite poles, that is), are written "Pleasure", "Need" and "Duty".



2.4 Neurobiological bases of motivation and meaningful learning

Although in continuity with the tradition of Giovanni Freddi, who commissioned, for a science series he directed, publications by Danesi (1988), Job and Tonzar (1993) and Titone (1993), there has been, since Paolo E. Balboni became head of the Venetian school, a considerable scientific interest in the contributions to LTM by the neurobiological and psycholinguistic sciences. In fact, since the mid nineties, there have been several postgraduate researches that focused on this match and in recent years several essays and scientific texts on this subject have been published (Cardona 2001; Caon 2005; Daloiso 2006; Morosin 2006), as well as various essays in the review, *Itals. Didattica e Linguistica dell'italiano a stranieri*, founded by Balboni in 2003 to give voice to the LTM specialists in the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio (Department of Linguistic Science).

Among the most recent contributions from the neurosciences, those directly connected to the concerns in this *Documento di Glottodidattica*, confirm the idea that in negative emotional situations (fear, anxiety, stress) there is the formation of a chemical mechanism that stops the production of adrenalin (a neurotransmitter that favours memorisation) and therefore also prevents the activation of the frontal lobes for any memorisation/learning.

Mario Cardona, a scholar teaching in Bari but educated in Venice, writes that this negative phenomenon occurs,

when the stress is not positive, [but] a feeling of anxiety and discomfort takes place. In this case the suprarenal glands produce a steroid hormone, called the stress hormone, that prepares the body to react to difficult situations. Controlling the production of such a hormone is the palatin tonsil, that in a stressful or dangerous situation signals for an increased production of this hormone, which eventually reaches the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex of the brain.

In essence, in a stressful situation (like, in our case, a language test, an oral examination, dictation, etc.), there is conflict between,

the palatin tonsil, which requests more introduction of the hormone into the blood to cope with the situation, and the hippocampus, that instead tries to regulate and limit the quantity of it.

However, if the situation continues, the hippocampus' control functions can not work properly, nor can it carry out its normal tasks (note that the hippocampus is the appointed area for long-term memory). Therefore, the result is that information is deficiently recovered and the explicit or declarative memory does not work as it should. (Cardona, 2001: 39-40)

Balboni, to bear out the importance of the intrinsic pleasure of the learning process, refers to J. H. Schumann, who, in *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language* (1997), asserts that no cognitive process is generated without an emotional process being generated first and that, also from the neurobiological point of view, the pleasant emotion plays a fundamental role in the activation of the cognitive processes that permits the stable and durable acquisition of information. A confirmation of the value of this statement comes also from within the medical-neurolinguistic discipline: according to Franco Fabbro, who has often supervised Venetian LTM postgraduate students,

the emotive structures of the nervous system of mammals are strongly involved in the process of fixing the memory recollections;

moreover, he notes that,

Mc Ewen and Sapolsky's researches have shown that stressful situations ...determine over time a selective destruction of the median temporal lobe system...with a consequential impoverishment of the capacity of fixing the information in the episodic and semantic memory. (Fabbro, 1996: 110)

2.5 Summary

In this chapter we observed how the concept of motivation has been an

object of reflection and exchange among the many scholars who have headed-up the Venetian school over the years:

- a. in the seventies, Renzo Titone proposed the ego-dynamic model, which is based on the interaction of the project that the person has for himself (*ego*), a project that permits him to elaborate a *strategy* that is then verified on the *tactic* level (in the field, so to speak). If the verification confirms the strategy it gives a feedback to the ego and keeps in action the motivational mechanism;
- b. Giovanni Freddi, the scholar who created the connection between the Venetian LTM and the pedagogy, linguistics, psychology, psycho-pedagogy, psycho-linguistics and neurobiological sciences, coherently includes the motivation as a initial, necessary moment in the didactic unit;
- c. Paolo Balboni draws from the social psychology studies that are applied to marketing a tri-polar model of motivation, according to which people act either for duty, or for need, or for pleasure, and he studies the function of these three origins of motivation in the various phases of linguistic teaching.

Finally, we briefly noted the work in recent years, conducted by both scholars and postgraduate students, concerning the neurological and psychological matrixes of the motivation with regard to its biochemical nature, referring also to the fact that the motivating and de-motivating mechanisms have not only a psychological dimension but are also part of the biological structure of the brain.

3. “Meaningful relationship” and the development of a motivation based on a “sense of duty”

In the above chapters we spoke about the concepts of meaningful relationship and motivation, lingering over its bio-psychological mechanisms and by analysing Balboni’s model, in which one of the three motivating forces (the “duty,” omnipresent in school and especially felt when the students study languages they consider “useless.”) offers only a temporary motivation that does not lead to a stable acquisition but only to a temporary learning, thereby producing the so-called “*scholastic knowledge*” of a language. If we pause to think about the nature and the role not only of the *learning* but also of the meaningful *relationship*, perhaps we can find a way for an evolution of Balboni’s model, precisely the role of duty and how it may become a “sense of duty” and therefore highly motivating.

3.1 *Essential characteristics of a meaningful relationship*

Briefly recalling what has been stated thus far, by meaningful relationship we mean a teacher-student relationship that presumes:

- a. an attention to the student’s needs, e.g. academic success, the valorisation of different abilities, not just linguistic ones, that every student possesses;
- b. an attention to the needs and the interests of the person, e.g. the personal projects and the role that a competence in a foreign language can have for their realisation;
- c. a capacity to clearly explain the educative principles that constitute the basis of the LTM (the concept of linguistic education, cf. Balboni, 1994) and the motivations that are subjected to certain methodological choices;
- d. a capacity to negotiate the choices by welcoming the student’s requests without neglecting the necessities dictated by curricula or by school directives. Making certain, of course, that such negotiation heads in the direction of integration and not of renunciation, of resources enrichment and not the

- impoverishment of the possibilities for accessing disciplinary knowledge;
- e. a capacity to make transparent the didactic action through the negotiation and the adoption, progressively, of a joint-responsibility by all the students;
 - f. a capacity to create teaching contexts that are complex and rich in opportunities for the development of both linguistic-cognitive competences (by using various typologies of didactic techniques) and social competences (by using various organizational models and social mediation methodologies: individual, pair, cooperative group activities, cooperative and competitive playful activities, meta-cognitive and peer-tutoring activities -cf. Caon, 2006).

A relationship based on these presumptions can work on “duty” understanding this now as an intrinsic “sense of duty,” that, by virtue of being meaningful, can then generate a stable motivation. Such stability is not meant in a static way but rather in a flexible manner, as a capacity to maintain as well as regenerate itself, to change when the context changes (e.g. from the BICS to CALP) by adapting and renewing itself according to the different situations at hand.

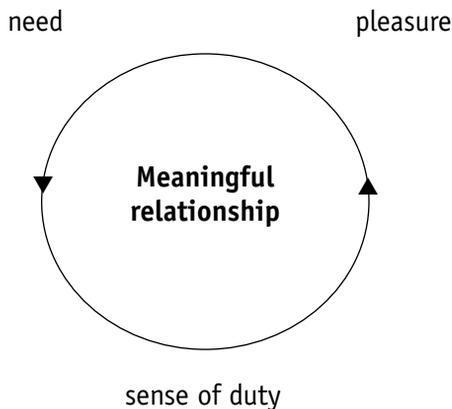
The relationship of trust can make the student also capable of accepting heavy and exacting assignments that are far from his spontaneous interests and needs (e.g. the mnemonic learning of grammar or drawing up a text in a foreign language) by virtue of recognising the teacher’s reliability and by being conscious that, within the context wherein the relationship occurs, the teacher’s action is in the interest of the pupil and directed towards the promotion of the student as a language learner and as a person.

The motivation based on the meaningful relationship is a stable integrating background in which the disciplinary proposes are inserted; it is worth noting, however, that they need to be always bi-directional and they must always have the objective of joint-responsibility so that the teacher is also called upon to review some of his methodological and content choices in order to favour the unique characteristics of his individual students and/or his student groups.

Hence, the above stated “sense of duty” is profoundly different from the “extrinsic duty” of Balboni’s tri-polar model (cf. par. 2.3), in that it can generate pleasure in the student because it is founded on profound human values like, precisely, the trust in the teacher and fellow students and because it promotes, at the price of diligence and hard work, the growth of the person in terms of his cognitive, emotive, and social components.

3.2 Motivation based on a meaningful relationship

With regard to the above, we believe that the dimension of the “duty” can be recuperated by modifying it in light of Balboni’s meaning and by interpreting it as a positive motivational factor; we think that a “sense of duty” meant in this manner can remain in relation with the other two factors, need and pleasure, as previously proposed by this scholar. Such a relation is not about the three poles (represented by the vertices of the triangle) being in opposition to each other, but rather, is a possible circularity wherein these three aspects cohabit in a meaningful relationship.



In fact, motivation based on a meaningful relationship,

- a. presupposes an action by the teacher aimed at locating the needs and the interests of the students and their favourite learning modalities;
- b. is based on the integration between these needs and interests and the directives of the study program;
- c. is explicated by diversified didactic LTM's that permit the different cognitive and learning styles to be valorised;
- d. encourages constant critique by the students through social mediation methodologies, activities aimed at making the students conscious of communicative strategies and inductive techniques;
- e. has the purpose to create new needs and new interests. These can be proposed by the teacher but, very often, they originate from the students themselves and result from their progression towards achieving their autonomy, and by acquiring a responsibility about their study and their relationship with the teacher, fellow students, adults, and their peers.

In this model, the natural *need* is therefore integrated with the *pleasure* of being gratified owing to the facilitating action of the teacher and fellow students. The *pleasure* of eventually feeling rewarded, valorised and responsible in a transparent, challenging and serene atmosphere, encourages the development of a *sense of duty* and of a responsibility toward the teacher and fellow students. This *sense of duty* generates a profound intellectual and affective investment and the openness to put oneself into play, so to speak. This opening toward other people originates new learning situations which then generate, themselves, *new needs* and new interests and, finally, again owing to the facilitating action of the teacher and the group, generates a *new pleasure* in being satisfied and in passing the exams.

3.3 *The teacher/facilitator as promoter of a meaningful relationship*

In light of the idea that motivation underpins the entire work of the Venetian LTM, it is evident that the pupil must therefore play a central role in determining the quality of his learning.

What, then, is the task of the language *teacher*?

In order to engage this question, we note Wilhelm Von Humboldt's famous statement: "one can not teach a language but can only create the conditions in which the language will spontaneously develop in the mind in the appropriate way."

3.3.1 The creation of conditions favourable for learning

In a humanistic-affective teaching perspective that, like other psychopedagogical trends of the 20th century, puts the student in the centre of the teaching/learning process. Conversely, the role of the teacher is:

a. to negotiate between curriculum directives and the interests/needs of the students

The teacher can try to integrate the abstract necessities of the curriculum directives that have to be respected (grammar, literary authors, etc.) with the interests and needs of the students in order to have a field of *negotiation* and develop a process toward *joint-responsibility*. The teacher, for instance, can acquire information about the needs or the desires that his pupils have for studying a language and can diligently dedicate his time and energies to make their requests compatible with the objectives and the obligations of the course; he can induce them to co-operate with their fellow students, and induce them to assist those among them that have learning difficulties. Furthermore, he can induce them to avoid studying in a superficial manner, and encourage them to experiment with dialogical or confrontational group activities and with different working procedures;

b. to create a learning context that is highly stimulating and methodologically varied

This operation has two purposes: first, to respond more effectively to the different learning styles of the students (cf. Caon, 2006), second, to create a didactic redundancy, which means to propose again the same linguistic contents but through different codes and modalities. In doing this, the teacher can make learning easier for all those students whose cognitive styles and learning rhythms are obviously different;

c. to make evident the connection between abstract knowledge and real-life

The teacher can diligently make the students aware of the link – by guiding them and possibly proposing some evident connections, easily perceptible – between the abstract knowledge of the language (mother tongue, second, foreign, ethnic, classic) and the real-life of those he teaches (that is, the scope of their knowledge, competences, needs, memories, projects, values, ideals, and so on). This way, the teacher can make clear, explicit and understandable to his students the fact that their active participation in the teaching/learning process produces advantages that are important for their life, such as scholastic success, the possibility to travel with greater serenity, to work in better conditions in a global economic system and in multicultural contexts, to know more profoundly other people and their cultures, to become more emancipated by abandoning ethnocentric perspectives that are based solely on their personal view of the world, and to abandon stereotyped perspectives that are often built on simplifications and disseminated widely by the mass media. Foregoing such ethnocentric and stereotyped cultural schemes, that offer an impoverished idea of the world, is fundamental in creating in the student a heightened consciousness and linguistic/social competence that are basic for a successful integration in an increasingly borderless Europe, indeed, in a world that is increasingly directed by a global economy and vision;

d. to constantly issue cognitive challenges

The teacher can constantly issue, within the precincts of his discipline and the limits of the school, complex cognitive challenges (with, for instance, problem solving or cooperative learning activities) that simultaneously contain linguistic, cognitive and social competences (the capacity to present one's own ideas, negotiation, respect and attentiveness toward others, and so on). Obviously, such challenges might have different complexities with respect to the cognitive maturity of the class and the typology of the language being taught. Through the experimentations carried out by the Venetian research groups (cf. Caon, 2006) it emerged that playful and cooperative activities (cf. ch. 4), produced a more stable and durable memorisation of lexicon and structures, simultaneously developed linguistic, cognitive and social

competences, and permitted the development of meaningful relationships inside multicultural classes;

e. to accept the students' challenges

The teacher, as noted, in assisting the students to meet the challenge can also take upon himself the students' challenges. He can accept creative proposals and answers different from the ones he initially conceived by encouraging the development of divergent thought and creativity in solving problematic situations, or by studying grammatical aspects through, for instance, techniques of an inductive nature, (cf. Balboni, 1998; Caon, 2006). Through open problem solving techniques (with many possible answers), role-play or the theory of sets games (cf. Caon, Rutka, 2004), for instance, students develop the need to discuss their personal positions and to refute the teacher's solicitations, and/or the divergent and unforeseeable solutions of their class mates, and thereby seek recourse in their own linguistic resources. This way, creative communication solutions (circumlocutions, use of extra-linguistic codes) are developed and in them are spontaneously created new linguistic needs for which the teacher can furnish new lexicon and new structures and thus favour meaningful learning (cf. par. 4.6). Therefore, the creation of a dialogical learning context in which new linguistic needs can arise with natural spontaneity (as the students should feel them even if in reality they are partially induced by the teacher) enables the teacher – his authority being more *de facto* than *statute* – to provide linguistic assistance with equal “naturalness”;

f. to make the students interested in studying the language through clear and transparent actions

From the results of an informative questionnaire – part of a research program made with migrating students in a second language context (to be published in the near future) – we discovered that one of the main problems, from the motivational point of view, is that teachers do not clearly explain the objectives of their course nor do they explicate the reasons behind certain content and methodological choices. The students whose requests we pay attention to, and to whom we clearly explain the course we are going to undertake along with the motivations behind certain choices (why we have oral examinations, why we practice

simulations of communicative situations or role play) are on the average more motivated to study and more open to use various techniques and different methodologies.

3.3.2 The passage of the didactic role from teacher to pupil

The teacher in maintaining his essential function in the economy of the class (moderator, assistant, animator), also permits the students to become protagonists so that they can express their ideas, their knowledge, their convictions, by perfecting their first language or through the use of a foreign or second language; expressions wholly supported by the teacher. It is undoubtedly of interest and pleasure for everyone to express in an appropriate and effective manner what it is they desire or feel in need of communicating. Given that, the important thing is to generate in students the need or the desire to express themselves, to encourage them to recognise the pleasure of verbally expression.

It is of a further necessity to encourage students to glimpse, beyond the horizon of their present linguistic competence, new spaces of the "I" that they can attain by, first, becoming masters of a language in terms of communicative competence, second, by grasping decentralisation and cultural relativism, and finally, by achieving a meta-cognitive consciousness about the mechanisms of linguistic acquisition and favourite learning modalities. If, as Samuel Johnson wrote three centuries ago, life does not offer a greater pleasure than overcoming difficulties and going from one success to another, than forming new desires and seeing them realized, well, it is necessary to make the students "pre-feel," so to speak, the possible pleasure that is given by the sense of an auto-effectiveness and competence in the mother tongue language or in the foreign language.

Thus, the pedagogical action of the teacher/facilitator simultaneously develops in three directions:

- a. retroactive:* recognising and valorising students' pre-existing knowledge and competences, interests, needs, and objectives;

- b. active:* answering their needs and valorising their interests, by giving them space in the class room, and by using LTM's and techniques that develop complex cognitive processes, a collaborative spirit, and a sense of responsibility;
- c. pro-active:* making into a project their desire for contingent (scholastic success) and immanent (personal achievement) realization, by trying to continue the personal desire for learning once the course or the "collaboration" between teacher and student has ended.

3.3.3 The relationship with the teacher as a base for the development of a "sense of duty"

To establish a meaningful relationship, the personal example of the teacher is a fundamental motivating factor. In this regard, Jean Jaurès asserted that, "one does not teach what one wants, knows, or thinks one knows, one teaches and can only teach what one is."

The example that the teacher gives with his behaviour, his passion for the language as a conceptualisation and expression of the world and for the wealth implicit in the variety of its cultures; the values he implicitly and explicitly promotes with his actions in the class, his commitment to the pedagogical investment, the attention he pays to conciliate the didactic of the discipline with the scholastic and extra-scholastic objectives, and with the life projects of his students, are all fundamental in generating in his pupils a more stable and durable motivation to study in order for said motivation to unite with aspirations and existential projects and not only with scholastic contingencies.

Moreover; the fundamental objective of the teacher is also to make his students feel that his personal as well as professional commitment is primarily directed to their personal promotion, to their cooperation in building a project that is about them as individuals and citizens.

Attributing a professional and personal authoritativeness (one that is not dictatorial in nature) to the teacher, facilitates in the students the activation of a motivation connected to a "sense of duty" founded upon the sense of trust and mutual respect, and maintained by their

joint-responsibility. Such a “sense of duty” is profoundly different from the “extrinsic duty” of Balboni’s tri-polar model, (cf. par. 2.3), in that it can generate pleasure in the student because it is founded on profound human values like, precisely, the trust in the teacher and fellow students and because it promotes, at the price of diligence and hard work, the growth of the person in terms of his cognitive, emotional, and social components.

3.3.4 The teacher as facilitator

We will conclude this first part of our reflection by returning again to the initial question posed by Allwright: “why don’t learners learn what teachers teach?” Clearly, there is no absolute or correct answer to this query. The teacher, however, who is up to the task of interrogating himself in an (auto-)critical way about the relation between teaching and learning, stands a good chance of avoiding the embarrassment inherent in this paradoxical question by,

- a. recognizing that it is the student who carries out the fundamental role in the teaching/learning process and that every student learns and remembers in a unique way;
- b. having the objective of promoting an intrinsic motivation in the student by drawing together the extremes of their relationship, by connecting the contents he teaches with the ongoing and meaningful histories of the students in terms of their possessed competences, interests, and formative needs (real and present or possible and future);
- c. creating a working environment, that is serene, challenging and pleasant in the broad sense described above, through the search for a meaningful relationship;
- d. facilitating - through didactic methodology - the process of acquiring an autonomy in critical thought and in the learning strategies by resorting to a meta-cognitive didactic.

These attentions are fundamental in the conception of a general education as well as the daily didactic activity according to which the purpose

of the education is to help the students to become responsible and to let them carry the burden of their own constructions of meanings and other, existential meanings.

With the objective of forming, as Montaigne stated, “well made heads instead of well filled heads,” we can bring to the surface in the students a “sense of duty” that is both extrinsic and intrinsic in nature and that can generate a full and profound pleasure; a pleasure that can also be derived from the labour of studying. It is important to emphasize that a meaningful relationship must not be characterized by a permissiveness, because, being so characterized, in the name of adapting to the spontaneous needs and interests of the students, the teacher is forced to give up his role and his statutory duties that impose also discipline, respect for rules and scholastic or ministerial directives. It is instead in the ability to mediate between these two realities (the students’ interests and the school’s “interests”) and to draw them together, owing to the capacity of negotiation and growing joint-responsibility, that the teacher, in the perspective of the progressive autonomy of his students, can investigate the profound meaning of the educative relationship: *non scholae sed vitae*.

3.4 Summary

Summarizing the main concepts of this first part of our task, we saw that:

- a. the intrinsic motivation, based on need and even more on pleasure, is fundamental to the student being profoundly activated (cf. 2.3);
- b. such a motivation has not only a conscious dimension but also an unconscious one: it is primed on a biochemical level and it generates pre-conscious emotive reactions that can favour or make more difficult the mnemonic fixation of information (cf. 2.4);
- c. the task of the teacher (cf. 3.1), coherent with the nature of meaningful learning (cf. 1.1), is to avoid anxiety or fear

- and to create certain favourable conditions for the active, interested, and self-motivated participation of the student in the life of the class;
- d. such a task is made easier by aiming for a meaningful relationship between teacher and student and between student and student (cf. 3.2). Attributing to the teacher a professional and personal authoritativeness, (that, in a humanistic-affective context, can not be achieved by being dictatorial), facilitates in the students the activation of a motivation connected to a "sense of duty" based on the sense of trust and mutual respect and maintained by joint-responsibility. The relation that becomes established between teacher and students, as well as between student and student, is fundamental to the concept of meaningfulness.

4. Playful LTM: a methodology to promote the pleasure of studying (having a good time)

In the preceding chapters we discussed the fundamental importance of intrinsic motivation and meaningful relationship, and we proposed pleasure as the best state of mind for a stable and durable way to learn a language. In this chapter, we will present a methodological proposal – the playful LTM – (Caon, Rutka, 2004) that translates into practice both the presuppositions and the purposes of the humanistic (affective and functional) and communicative approach, and the presuppositions and purposes of socio-cultural constructivism.

4.1 Play and meaningful learning

To introduce the playful LTM it is worth noting again the key words, *total*, *constructive*, *holistic*, that are characteristics of the concept of meaningful learning (cf. par. 1.1). Accordingly, the playful LTM clearly calls to mind – by its very name – the game, and it is specifically in this dimension that we would like to initially and briefly concentrate our attention. All of this because, in full coherence and similarity with the above mentioned key words, we can also infer that the game is defined as a *total* and *holistic* experience in which are integrated, at different levels of prevalence depending on the game's typologies, the components listed below:

- a. *affective* (amusement, pleasure)
- b. *social* (team, group)
- c. *motor and psychomotor* (movement, coordination, balance)
- d. *cognitive* (elaboration of a game strategy, learning of rules)
- e. *emotive* (fear, tension, sense of liberation)
- f. *cultural* (specific rules and modalities of relationships)
- g. *trans-cultural* (the necessity of rules and the necessity, in order for the game to take place, of respecting them)

The game, like meaningful learning, emerges as a complex and involving

experience because, as we noted, it totally activates the student and allows through its practice, constantly and naturally, him to learn, increasing his knowledge and competence. Hence, there is a double form of the student's involvement in the playful activity: on the synchronic plane (during the course of the game) he is multi-sensory motivated and involved; on the diachronic plane (in the repeating recommencement of the game) his competences constantly evolve and his motivations are renewed because they tend to constantly pass the achieved aim. Then there is a third factor especially relevant for our perspective: the game, if perceived and experienced as such, both occupies the attention and amuses. This way, the harmonic match of diligence with amusement refers to the intrinsic pleasure of the activity without denying the cognitive and psycho-physical effort.

4.2 The game for learning a language: which game at school?

Once pointed out, even summarily, that the nature of the game is a total experience for the student, we can intuit that the playful experience presents some evident potentialities for learning in general and especially for linguistic learning because almost all games demand the use of words during their course, and for the communication or the negotiation of the rules. With the objective of translating the above said potentialities into a didactic methodology and to avoid falling into dangerous prejudicial visions wherein the game at school is a moment of relaxation to be put before the "serious" learning moment, it is fundamental first of all to introduce a clarifying distinction between free game (practiced by the students in a extra scholastic or non-controlled environment) and didactic game (proposed by the teacher in the context of learning).

Hence, we now need to note two terms introduced by the educationalist, Aldo Visalberghi (1980): playful activity (corresponding to free game) and playful-like activity (corresponding to didactic game). According to Visalberghi, the playful activity has four characteristics:

- a. it is exacting*: it demands a psycho-physical, cognitive and affective involvement;

- b. it is continuous:* it is a constant presence in childhood and continues to have a role in adulthood;
- c. it is progressive:* it is not static, it renews itself, it is a cognitive, relational and affective growth factor, it enlarges knowledge and competences;
- d. it is not functional,* it is auto-framing, which means it has purpose-in-itself.

Conversely, in the playful-like activity, although having exacting, continuous and progressive characteristics, the “purpose” of the game does not correspond with the end of the activity: in the didactic game it consciously achieves a purpose that is beyond the game itself. Thus, playful-like activities are didactic games because the achieved purpose is not internal, is not auto-framing, does not end with the end of the game. Rather, the purpose remains external to the game and is determined by the adult. Therefore, playful-like activities are “intentionally built to give an amusing and pleasant shape to certain forms of learning” (Staccioli, 1998: 16). Coherent with what the Venetian scholars cited in the first chapter asserted about intrinsic motivation, Aldo Visalberghi (1980: 476) declares that “only the auto-motivated activities, because they are *exacting, continuous* and also in a certain way *progressive*, that are playful or at least playful-like ones, are capable of developing human behaviour in both an innovative and flexible way. The activities that are compulsory, routine, hetero-directed or in any way such to sacrifice too much of a present gratification at the expense of future advantages, have no spiritual fecundity. Man explores his world for the enjoyment in so doing, not for some calculated advantage, immediate or otherwise. This is the divine spark that is present within him.”

Mario Polito (2000: 333) is, substantially, of the same opinion, in that, “the game has enormous educative potentialities that facilitate learning and socialization. The playful capacity, being involved and creative with experience and with life, has to be developed in every person. The game, in fact, ignites the enthusiasm, fires the interest, primes the involvement, favours social activities, increases expression, stimulates learning, and reactivates affections, emotions and thoughts. By valorising the playful dimension of learning we avoid orientating the

school solely towards the cognitive plane to the detriment of other formative dimensions, such as the affective, interpersonal, corporeal and manual ones”.

Hence, the didactic game, the playful-like experience, (projected and run by the teacher for didactic, educative and not shallow recreational purposes) can emerge as an efficient “mediator” in the transmission of concepts, as a consequence of which the student can appropriate structures, lexicon and new cognitive strategies through a total and intrinsically motivated experience (the pleasure of the game, of the challenge) that involves him from the cognitive and also affective, social, and creative point of view. Therefore, such spontaneous integration of the intra and inter-personal spheres, peculiar to the playful activity (confirmed as we saw by many scholars), can simultaneously favour, from the didactic point of view, the development of linguistic-cognitive competences along with social and educative ones.

4.3 The game for children, adolescents and adults: affinities and differences

Considering the frequent and almost spontaneous association of the game with childhood, it seems important to us to deconstruct this prejudice (that is, that the playful activity belongs only to infancy and/or that the didactic game can be practiced solely in the primary school) and expand the horizon of the playful LTM in order for it to be proposed to adolescents and adults alike, with the obvious differentiations in the modalities and in the activities themselves in accordance with the age of the player.

In our own didactic practice and experimentations with adolescents and adults (cf. Caon, Rutka, 2004) we noted an efficacy of the playful methodological proposal, provided that it is:

- a. explained and negotiated by the teacher;
- b. valorised as regards the psycho-pedagogical and didactical motivations of LTM that support it and the complex cognitive

- processes it can activate (for example, group problem-solving games);
- c. proposed through activities with a cognitive and linguistic complexity adequate to the cognitive development and linguistic competences of the students.

Apart from this, there are other elements that assume relevance for the older adolescents and therefore can obviously represent valid motivational stimulations with which to initiate a process of linguistic acquisition and the development of transversal abilities. Next to pleasure and amusement, the adolescents gain a heightened capacity for recognising and respecting the rules coupled to the capacity - experienced as a stimulating challenge to elaborate strategies and new rule systems - to search for logical and creative solutions to different problems (real or hypothetical), to plan actions, and, to discover new combinations among their pre-existing knowledges.

“The adolescent student often does not accept activities perceived as too infantile, or of little significance, that frustrate his intellectual capacities because they are cognitively too simple. In his new identity - fragile and confused - as a ‘boy,’ he often identifies the game as a typical ‘children’ activity of an age group he is want to demonstrate he has definitely passed. Added to this difference, there is also one deriving from inheriting cultural conventions that distinctly separate the school, (synonymous with hard work and diligence), from the game (perceived as relaxation and recreation, or wrongly, as solely an infantile activity). Inherited conventions, promoted by the family and the school alike, that never fail to emphasize how the game belongs to the ‘recreational’ sphere” (Caon, Rutka, 2004: 39).

Thus, the objective is to encourage students to experience this pleasure through challenging activities (for instance, problem solving or certain creative activities where their talents are valorised) and to encourage intellectual and emotive understanding through feedback, through post-experiential discussion and the valorisation of their intellectual conquests, personal and/or collective.

Attending to the pleasure in its various possible declinations has always been at the centre of the concerns of the Venetian school: Titone, in his studies, often refers to the pleasure of the systematisation of new information in the cognitive structure of the learner; Freddi, for his part, speaks of the pleasure that is awoken by satisfying curiosity and by recognizing cultural variance; Balboni, equally interestingly, dwells upon the pleasure of intellectual challenge (cf. ch. 1). The teacher has to create the conditions so that:

- a. on the one hand, difficulties are understood as proportionate to the competence and the cognitive maturity of his students;
- b. on the other hand, the class is organised (by group cooperation and by the valorisation of the different personal abilities and talents) so that it can, with him functioning as an expert helper, overcome the “challenges” he initiated or those that spontaneously arise from within the group.

Therefore, the activities being proposed must be playful, defined thus far as pleasurable and also challenging in a cognitive sense, so as to initiate a desire to surpass oneself, to embark upon challenging oneself prior to any challenge directed at others. The activities must act on what Vygotskij (1978) calls the “proximal development zone,” namely, the distance between the present level of development, (as it is determined by autonomous problem-solving), and the level of potential development, (as it is determined through problem-solving under the guide of an adult or in collaboration with more capable equals). Exposing the student to stimulating activities, furnishing him with direct help through a meaningful relationship as well as an indirect one through cooperative working modalities, is fundamental in achieving meaningful learning, in developing a sense of self-effectiveness, in improving self-esteem, and in strengthening social abilities. The playful-like activity, if challenging because it is exacting, presents the advantage of being naturally complex and of generating pleasure in its operation as well as in its completion. If the teacher succeeds in encouraging his students to understand (through the expressive potency of the concrete experience) that the game is not recreational but is a way to acquire new

knowledge and competences, and personal and social abilities, he can then make it didactically proposable, and thus more acceptable to the typology of more “diffident” students.

In validating the playful experience, leaving aside the age factor, we found that, within the work of numerous internationally recognized authors (Huizinga, Caillois, Vygotskij, Bruner, Winnicot) a seeming convergence, (mindful of the specificity of their investigations), in attributing to the game a value that both structures and liberates the personality. For his part, Vygotskij (in Bruner et al, 1981: 657) says “the numerous indications given by the observation and the research provisionally allow us to assert that the game, even being a pre-eminent and specific function of infancy, continues throughout the whole of life.” Concerning the motivational value of the game, Huizinga asserts that the game enjoins and liberates. Attracts the interests. Fascinates, that is, enchants. It is rich in the most noble qualities that man can recognize in things and express within himself: rhythm and harmony. As regards the holistic value of the playful experience, the psychologist, Winnicot (1974), asserts that, “it is by playing, only by playing, that the individual, child or adult, is capable of being creative and making use of all of his personality.”

The didactic game, that is sustainable in terms of linguistic complexity, that is adequate to the cognitive maturity of the student, and that is precisely explained in its manifold formative functions, can also encourage adolescents and adults to recover the auto-framing pleasure, the pleasure of the activity that in itself is amusing, absorbing, and gratifying.

4.4 What is the playful LTM?

The playful LTM is a methodology that coherently realizes, in operative models and in LTM techniques, the founding principals of humanistic, affective and communicative approaches, and those of socio-cultural constructivism. These principles may be summarized as:

- a. the attention to the communicative needs of the student (with particular regard for the psycho-affective and motivational components that influence the learning process);
- b. the importance of the language as an instrument of personal expression and social interaction (with particular attention to the socio-cultural, intercultural, para and extra-linguistic aspects);
- c. the conception of learning as a constructive process wherein the pupil has to be actively committed in the creation of his knowledge. Such creation occurs by the connection between what he has learned on one hand, and his pre-existing knowledge on the other;
- d. the consciousness and valorisation of those differences among students that derive from their personal histories, their social ambience, their specific interests, their existential and scholastic objectives, and their cognitive and learning styles;
- e. the conception of the role of the teacher as a facilitator with respect to learning (cf. par. 3).

Hence, the teacher/facilitator (cf. 3.3) who applies the playful LTM has as principal objectives:

- a. the creation of a learning/teaching environment characterized with calm, serenity (play) and in which is expected a frequent and purposeful use of didactic games; an environment wherein the student is indeed the centre of the teaching/learning process, in which special attention is paid to the students' interests and formative needs, and to the teaching/learning modalities that are most effective with regard to the specific characteristics of the individual and/or the group;
- b. the promotion of a playful approach to the didactic activity, in which the cooperation in achieving clear objectives for learning is valorised, in which competitiveness is controlled so as not to generate anxiety and stress in the students, and in which taking pleasure in the challenge is promoted.

To reach these objectives, the teacher proposes every activity in a playful form, thus attenuating, hopefully, all resistances and difficulties of a psychological nature, which in turn permits the student to serenely face studying the language and involve all his cognitive, affective, social and sensory-motor capacities in the learning process. Furthermore, the teacher uses the game as a strategic modality for the achievement of educative aims and linguistic abilities peculiar to linguistic education (regarding linguistic abilities, cf. Balboni, 2002; regarding linguistic education, cf. Titone, 1993). Though the game the facts of reality become internalised and re-elaborated, and knowledge inside increasingly complex conceptual nets is expanded and organized. All of which occurs in a dynamic *continuum* that witnesses the student becoming intrinsically motivated as well as becoming the protagonist of his own formative path.

4.5 The potentialities of the playful LTM for intercultural education

In an educational context, increasingly multi-cultural - which in this series the *Documento* no. 2 is dedicated to - it is fundamental to propose certain pedagogical models that educate the students not only to accept and respect diversity, but also to recognise and valorise various cultural identities within the perspective of a mutual enrichment. In order for this proposal to become meaningful for the students, that is to say, to arise from a real and deep desire in them to know and put themselves in a relation with the "other," it is necessary to actuate it though a search for personal and mutual comprehension, (me of myself, me of the other, the other of himself, the other of me), and for an active collaboration among the students.

The objective is ambitious and certainly must transverse all disciplines and be promoted by all teachers. However, of course, the language teacher can have a privileged role in this common research for an inter-cultural dialogue that is attentive to, respectful of, and interested in, difference. The motives behind this privileged role are easily understandable; for his part, Titone, in his "humanistic recovery of language" (1993. 54) locates two general motives to which we now add a more specifically inter-cultural one:

- a. "language is the person... The consciousness of being able to translate yourself into a word gives substance and security to the individual as a human being, both in his essential identity and in his social expansion." Language is communication and expression, it is the primary means through which we enter into a profound contact with the other and through which we manifest our feelings and individuality. Therefore, the teacher has the task and the responsibility to facilitate communication among people and to facilitate the expression of the individual (though different linguistic codes and through perfecting those of one's mother-tongue);
- b. "every education operates by means of a language, and every teaching is language teaching (...) Any formative intervention regarding the person is translated into verbal stimulations, (...) in school, every didactic act is centred on the informative and illuminating word, even if it subordinately makes use of the help of other signs" (Titone, 1993: 54). Therefore, the language teacher has the task of:
- c. facilitating the learning of a foreign language, or a classic language, or a second language, and also has the task of proposing cultural models in part similar and in part different to the referring one: the capacity of the teacher to make these affinities and differences recognised and appreciated permits the student to create a "critical estrangement" from his own point of view, with the ultimate objective of making his personal view relative. In an intercultural perspective, the teaching also of the first language or the ethnic language demands an explicitness and a criticalness of the cultural models that have linguistic correspondences (the use of the formal register, or real, communicative purposes that involve forms of courtesy, or idiomatic expressions).

The game that, as we noted, demands a frequent use of language during its course (cf. 4.2), presents two characteristics that can favour intercultural didactic proposals. It is, simultaneously:

- a. *trans-cultural*; all children, independently from their geo-

graphical and cultural origin, play and share some aspects belonging to a “universal playful grammar,” as, for instance, the respect for rules or the ritual of the initial “count”. Thus, the game is an experience that creates fraternization, creates contact and establishes an equal relationship among different knowledges and among different competences;

b. culturally determined; as G. Staccioli (1998: 151) notes, “a game is a mirror/image of the society wherein it gets developed and every player ‘plays’ (consciously or not) within rules, symbols, aspirations, and fantasies peculiar to his culture.”

The teacher can use this peculiarity of the game as a vehicle for intercultural educational values (besides, obviously, making it an exercise for learning the language) in a playful and communicative context, where dialogue and collaboration appear spontaneously and linguistic-cultural understanding is necessary in order that the motivation for success or pleasure in the challenge, (characteristics of the game), are satisfied. Pursuing the objective of intercultural education, the teacher can discover, in the dimension of the game, a meaningful context because it implies the recognition of some implicit trans-cultural values and regulations (like, for instance, the respect for rules and for whose turn it is, so to speak) and promotes in an absolutely natural way the interaction among students by totally involving them in the assigned task. The game, as we noted, permits an activation of the cognitive and emotive spheres in the learning process by stimulating capacities and abilities that, in a merely verbal communication, would stay unexpressed. P. D’Andretta (1999: 24), notes:

interactive techniques and games are very useful...in favouring the interaction with people and cultural contents that are “other,” in inducing an empathy towards “diversity”, in suggesting unusual languages that help us travel along unknown paths, and also in recognising that our languages and habits are partial and relative.

Therefore, games supply the teacher with occasions to modify the possible ethnocentric visions of the students,

...they allow, in fact, to live in the first person...the experience of “decentralisation”, the dizziness of loss that bursts forth from perceiving as relative what we used to consider as absolute, or from perceiving as cultural what we used to consider as natural.

In concluding the playful experience, the teacher can then, in the phase of cognitive reconstruction of what has occurred in the game, encourage the students to ponder the characteristics of games and the value of contribution, though a reflection born from their experiences and confrontations. The objective of such common reflection and confrontation is:

- a. to critically examine the ethnocentric approach to culture and the deviating simplifications implicit in stereotypes;
- b. to recognise the value of cultural pluralism;
- c. to stimulate an interest in otherness and trans-cultural identity though pleasant and motivating interactions.

This last phase represents the ideal terminus of a didactic path that unites the linguistic-communicative objectives of the playful LTM with the transversal ones of intercultural education: namely, cultural decentralisation, deconstruction of prejudices, and overcoming xenophobic and racist attitudes. The teacher who wants to be “playful and intercultural” will have the task of creating playful-educative contexts that are rich in exchanges, wherein the talents of the students are valorised and wherein the group enriches itself from the pre-existing experiences of each student. The teacher would likewise have to make the students aware of these values though direct experience by encouraging them to understand that, as Claude Lévi-Strauss said, “the discovery of otherness is the discovery of a relation, not of a barrier”.

4.6 Further to didactic games: the concept of playfulness

To avoid understanding in a reductive way the playful LTM as a methodology actuated only through didactic games, let us broaden the operational horizon by presenting the concept of playfulness. By this term we mean *the vital charge in which strong intrinsic motivational inducements become integrated with affective-emotive, cognitive and social aspects of the learner*. Such a vital charge can obviously be emitted also in activities that, even though games, can completely absorb the attention and the interest of the students because they are supported by an intrinsic motivation, they are challenging and exacting. To take an example: the boy keen on motorbikes, working hard in collaboration with other mates to strip down the motor of a scooter, to understand its function with the objective of repairing and reassembling it under the tutelage of the teacher, is not playing in the strict sense of that word. In his actions, his involvement is, however, total; he is fully immersed in a task that while exacting is non-stressful because his actions are aimed at an objective that is meaningful to him, thus his task is both challenging and pleasant for him. Consequently, language is also meaningful because it allows the exchange of information between the pupil and his mates or by comprehending the teacher's requests and suggestions. Furthermore, the motivation for memorising is profound; learning a lexicon becomes important, for instance, for requesting specific material (e.g. working tools), and useful for reaching certain personal objectives (being able to restart the scooter, improving its performance, and so on). In a pedagogical sense, linguistic competence becomes important for the self-realisation of the student.

Therefore, by adopting a playful LTM we locate in playfulness the founding principle that promotes the total development of the student and, in consequence, creates learning situations that are complex and rich in stimulations (experiential and creative activities, problem solving activities, and ones that demand multi-sensory involvement) that are followed by moments of linguistic formalisation, reflection, and the systemisation of grammar.

4.7 Objectives of the playful LTM

The specific purpose of the playful LTM is to supply the teacher with operational principles and suggestions with which to plan, organize and manage certain activities so that they are perceived by the students as playful and therefore intrinsically motivating, challenging, amusing, absorbing, and naturally socialising. We would like to conclude with a quotation from the educationalist, Lucio Lombardo Radice, who calls to order the broad value of the term “to play” (read as both playful dimension and playful activity) as one that finds linguistic correspondence, for example in the English, French and German language (*play, jouer, spielen*). The quotation cited below adequately summarizes the playful LTM in the context of linguistic teaching/learning:

We live in a society that does not ask us to invent. We live in a society where there is very little space to “play”. We recover the joy of playing music, of painting, of acting, of making movies...not simply by playing music (badly), painting (ineffectively), acting (dreadfully), making movies (very poorly)... rather... to play well means to relish precision, a love of language, a capacity to express oneself with non-verbal languages; it means to acquire, simultaneously, intuition and rationality, loyalty and collaboration.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter we saw that the game:

- a. has potentialities for the development of affective, social, motor, psychomotor, cognitive, emotive, and cultural components in the student;
- b. has a trans-cultural nature and value useful for promoting intercultural education at school;
- c. has an affinity with meaningful learning because it integrally involves the subject in a solo experience.

We then located the fundamental difference between the free game and the didactic game, that is to say, that, the didactic game is planned or used by the teacher to propose linguistic contents in a way that is amusing and pleasant but at the same time exacting and cognitively challenging. For the game to be amusing and challenging it has to be adequate, in terms of complexity, to the cognitive maturity of the students and to their level of linguistic competence. To be accepted and lived as an experience useful for linguistic learning (given the considerable negative prejudgments among adult students whenever games are proposed in the class room) it is necessary for the teacher to describe with exactitude the game's multiple formative functions. When these conditions occur, adolescents and adults alike experience an auto-framing pleasure, one that is, in-and-of itself, amusing, absorbing, and gratifying; Co-extensive to this pleasure, language can be presented though complex and involving experiences, that by implication incur linguistic-cognitive, emotive, social, and affective participation on the part of the student.

Linguistic games are not the only way to propose the playful LTM in the class room: in this methodology are also included non-joyful activities that equally require the total participation of the student, equally require a profound motivation and personal involvement. In fact, both the challenging didactic game and the experimenting activity are complex experiences that are integrated with – in a multi-sensory dimension regulated by linguistic communication – interest, designing and planning, solving problems though reasoning and intuition, cooperation, and the use of creativity and divergent thought. The task of the teacher/facilitator therefore, is:

- a. to create a context wherein the pupil can learn the language in a diffused playfulness;
- b. to adopt a varying and negotiable didactic that adapts itself to the characteristics of the learning group, which then in turn adapts itself to different learning modalities that favour diverse cognitive styles and that encourage an interaction among the members of the group;
- c. to program activities that permit the conciliation of disci-

plinary contents with the students' interests and that favour their learning modalities, and second, that supply the scaffolding, the support, and the incentive for the development of linguistic-communicative, expressive, cognitive, social, and intercultural competence.

Consequently, the learning of a language is inserted in a general frame of personal development and growth, whereby the psychological, psychomotor and neuro-linguistic aspects of the student assume the mantle of great importance.

Reference bibliography

As this *Document* is addressed to specialists who are already familiar with the fundamental bibliography, we will confine ourselves on this occasion to simply noting those publications,

- from which the above quotations are cited,
- and those of Venetian scholars that are a testament to their interest in the theme highlighted in this *Documento*.

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Tel. +39 075 5289090 - Fax +39 075 5288244
e-mai:info@guerraedizioni.com