

SARD AS A BASIS FOR MAXIMIZED LEARNING

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This paper is based upon the assumption that all learning is maximized when all the elements of SARD are present and carefully balanced with one another. A definition of this assumption and of SARD will be provided. Examples taken from learning experiences I have had will be offered to support this assumption. Following this, general implications for the use of SARD in the classroom and specific techniques/activities to create SARD in my English as a Foreign Language classes will be presented along with techniques/activities to be avoided.

Learning can be maximized by providing the elements of SARD because the components comprising SARD: Security, Attention Aggression, Retention-Reflection, and Discrimination are indispensable to the learning process. As used here, "maximized learning" refers to the realization of MAXIMUM learning, in quantity and quality, for each individual learner in any given learning situation. Maximized learning is essentially the way humans learn naturally, at different rates of speed and emphasizing some items over others in the learning process. Ideally, maximized learning occurs when all the elements of SARD are balanced within the learning process.

Examining these components of the learning process in greater detail makes it clear that security is the foundation that learning is built on. Security enables a learner to enter the process of learning as a "whole person", accounting for the different aspects of his or her personality. Personality includes the intellect, the emotions, the will, the instincts, and the physical reactions at the somatic level. The learner's personality is expanded from only an intellectual level to include emotions, volitions(will), instincts, and somatic reactions. From this secure foundation, the whole-person learner is free to begin asserting himself in the learning process within a clearly defined structure. At this point, the learner's will is especially active. By exercising personal choice of what to participate in, the student realizes greater attention to the subject matter and task at hand. From attention and focus on the subject, the learner moves to reflection and feedback, enabling him or her to make new connections to the material. The combination of the above steps leads to a deep retention of the material. Finally, the learner works at discriminating what he knows from what he does not know and finds where the unknown fits into the known. Thus, what SARD can offer the foreign language teacher is a way of looking at learning that does not demand the learner's humanity to be sacrificed in order to gain new knowledge. I believe learning will be maximized in an atmosphere such as this.

My past experiences as a student learning Spanish and Greek in classroom settings, as a

teacher teaching EFL in Japan, and as a student studying Serbian and French (and various other foreign languages) at the School for International Training, has led me to see the necessity for viewing every student in a holistic, whole-person way. As a foreign language learner, it has been my experience that when I was treated as less than a whole-person by the teacher or educational approach used, my learning suffered in varying degrees of quantity and quality. Likewise, I have seen the same phenomenon occur in my students learning EFL when they were dealt with in a non-holistic fashion. When I studied Spanish in junior high school and Greek in college, the focus of the courses was content-oriented on an intellectual level. Within six months of finishing the Spanish and Greek courses, I remembered and could use only about ten percent of what I had learned. The other ninety percent disappeared permanently. This language vanishing act was especially noticeable in the case of my learning Spanish. My inability to recall Spanish was not due to a lack of opportunity to use it. Living in the Southwest United States provided many chances to hear and speak Spanish if desired. Rather, it appears that if my experiences in Spanish and Greek had included the other levels in the whole-person model for education: emotional, volitional, instinctual, and somatic reactions realized through the use of SARD in the classroom, both my competence and performance in those languages would be greater than it is currently. In both courses, most of the components of SARD were either missing or unbalanced. Security of the learner was usually non-existent since the general atmosphere in both classes was one of competition for grades among the students. Attention was demanded. Inattention was punished rather than being a possibility in the learning process. Student assertion was generally not welcomed and reflection was never allowed. Retention was realized in varying degrees by individual students but could have been much greater in my case. Discrimination activities centering around grammar exercises were used extensively. Again, these experiences left me feeling quite a bit less than a whole person.

If I contrast my previous experiences in Spanish and Greek with the CLL French and Serbian classes I participated in at SIT during the summer, it is very easy for me to see how the different approaches used in each class produced vastly different feelings. I left the French and Serbian classes at the very least as a whole person; plus, I was frequently enriched as a person. The language study did not demand that I exchange my self-image and personhood for new knowledge. Although, CLL was the central approach used in these classes, I contend that careful consideration and use of SARD in lesson design and implementation will yield similar positive results as I experienced. How to do this will be discussed in detail in the implications portion of this paper.

My experiences teaching EFL in Japan continually point out to me the validity of my assumption. Learning is maximized when the basic elements of learning, SARD, are present and balanced within the learning environment. I have seen EFL students of diverse nationalities (14) and ages (8 to 60 years old) in varied situations (multi-cultural/multi-lingual to mono-cultural/mono-lingual) respond in similar ways to their human needs not being met. When emotional, volitional, instinctual, and somatic reactions and needs were not included in their learning, the students visibly showed frustration and even anger towards **themselves** (for being so stupid), the **subject** (English! Who needs it anyway?), and the **teacher** (I can't understand

him!) Unfortunately, many times it was my teaching that contributed to these negative student reactions. I have found it easier to teach my students in the way I was taught as a primary and secondary student rather than teaching them in a holistic way. After all, I suffered through it and it will be good for them. Or so, the thinking goes. It may be that some "good", like the development of academic learning strategies, occurs when students are taught traditionally. Yet, the paramount considerations for me now are: Are the students learning all they can learn and will they be able to apply their learning later?

Some broad implications for the use of SARD in my EFL classes and in general classroom settings can be drawn from my experiences as a learner and teacher and from the pertinent literature on the subject (see references.)

1) Security, being the foundation on which all learning is built, should be provided throughout the learning process.

This process as described in Curran's Counseling Learning Theory has five stages. The learner in stage one (embryonic stage) knows nothing about the subject being learned and needs maximum security. Stage two (self-assertion stage) learners need a little less security because they now know some of the new material and can act independently of the teacher in some limited situations. Learners in stage three (separate-existence stage) are capable of functioning independently of the teacher most of the time. These learners often need to forcefully assert their new ability/independence. This assertion can take the form of student anger towards the teacher. The student's need for security in this stage is knowing that the teacher will not reject the student because of this behavior. Stage four (role-reversal stage) learners have reached a point of development where the teacher cannot offer any more material to be learned unless they, the learners, want it. At this point, the learners must indicate their willingness to proceed and provide the teacher with acceptable ways to present new material to them. The learners' and the teacher's security lies in the creation and maintenance of a mutually acceptable learning partnership. The fifth and final stage is the independent stage. The learners now have the same level of competence in the subject as the teacher does. However, their performance in the subject learned may not exactly match their competence. At these times the students' security lies in the teacher's silent presence as a possible resource while the stage five learners become teachers to stage one, two and three learners studying the same subject. Viewing the learning process in this way shows the necessity for providing students not only with security but providing the proper **type** and **amount** of security for each particular stage of learning.

2) Students must be viewed as whole persons.

The teacher must consider how a specific approach, technique, content area, or syllabus format (the order the content is presented in) will affect the students, engaging or disengaging the learners' intellects, emotions, wills, instincts and physical reactions. The careful and balanced use of SARD in determining the suitability of these factors for learning situations will

result in the complete engagement of the learners' personalities leading to maximized learning.

Specific techniques/activities for creating SARD in the foreign language class room can be drawn from most, if not all, approaches to teaching languages. Since the fundamental requirement for realizing maximized learning is security, the appropriate type and amount of security must be provided for in all stages of the learning process irregardless of the educational approach used. To begin, specific techniques/activities for generating security in each learning stage are as follow :

– Stage one learners, for example, would benefit from activities where risk-taking behavior is not asked for. Reflective activities, like CLL conversation and transcript making, provide increased security. Total Physical Response activities where the teacher models every action before asking students to do it will accomplish this also. Using the Silent Way color fidel to teach sounds and numbers in the target language by beginning with the same sounds and numbers the students know in their native languages also produces security. Suggestopedia-based techniques for relaxing the students through a pleasant physical learning environment, classical music and reflective relaxation techniques are very helpful.

– Stage two learners are able to move into low-risk activities which still provide security. Using index card games, such as those found in Index Card Games for ESL, in conjunction with CLL transcript making is effective. The language the students generate can form the vocabulary to be practiced in games like: matched pairs, categories and scrambled sentences. Teachers using TPR can hesitate a few moments after giving a command to allow the students time to perform the action on their own, then model the action to provide security. The Silent Way word charts can be introduced to the students and they can be encouraged to use what they know in the target language to create sentences on their own. Some Cuisenaire rod activities which aid risk-taking behavior are: "Back to Back Directions", "A Day In The Park", "Do As I Say", "The Five Story Building" and "Tell and Show". These activities can be found in Action Plans. Taking on new identities and occupations in Suggestopedia is another way students can experiment in a secure environment.

– Stage three and four learners need activities which reduce the teacher's knowing presence in the classroom. Careful lesson/activity planning stressing student-generated material and minimal overt error correction will help the students to feel secure in their growing independence and your acceptance of it. Activities include continued use of student-generated conversations and transcripts using the CLL approach. The teacher remaining in the background and taking notes on the students' errors. Students then can be given the task of writing the transcripts out instead of the teacher doing it. The transcripts can then be checked and revised overnight by the teacher to avoid direct error correction. TPR student-led activity sessions, where students give others in the class commands to perform, also work well. Group activities in which learners present/teach different portions of the target language to other students is another possibility. Silent Way word charts and Cuisenaire rods can be used very effectively with this type of activity. Students can also teach ESL operations they have created to each other in groups. These and other group activities allowing students to provide most of the error correction themselves work well at this learning stage. Out-of-class activities also encourage students to feel competent in their new language skills while pointing out the

need for further study. Some specifically applicable ones for teaching EFL in Japan are as follows: "The Observer", "Sign Language", "Mapping It Out", "Scavenger Hunt" and "Be The Expert". All are taken from, Experiential Language Teaching Techniques.

– Stage five learners gain security and benefit most in their learning when given opportunities to perform as "knowers" to other "learners". These occasions to be "knowers" can take the form of student teaching arranged in advance by the teacher. Initially, they would teach students at the first two stages, later to those at the third and fourth stages. The student teachers can be given responsibility for the content to be covered, as well as, the approaches/techniques to be used. The presence of the teacher as an optional resource person provides security and stimulates the student teachers to use what they know. It should be noted here that the specific techniques/activities just presented provide the other elements of SARD, as well as, security throughout the learning process. The techniques and activities only differ in the way the elements are balanced within each stage of learning. Stage one techniques/activities place a greater emphasis on security and reflection while in stage two, security is reduced and learner aggression is formally introduced. Security, in the form of a knowing teacher, is reduced further in stages three, four and five. Also, more discrimination work is used.

To assist the balanced use of SARD in a learning situation, a look at some specific techniques/activities to be avoided is necessary. Due to space limitations and to avoid repetition, each technique/activity will be examined in the context of only one element of SARD, although these techniques/activities usually affect two or more elements simultaneously. The contexts to be examined are as follows:

1) Security. Student security is adversely affected by anything in the learning experience which causes the students to feel or be less than "objects of primary value in a world of meaningful action" (Stevick, A Way and Ways.) Thus, nearly everything in a learning situation has the potential to affect student security. For example, a teacher using threatening behavior and body language, speaking in a harsh, loud voice most likely will reduce student security. On the other hand, the use of a low, gentle tone of voice and non-threatening gestures will not guarantee student security if what the teacher says to students is sarcastic or evaluative. A competitive classroom atmosphere can also reduce security.

2) Learner aggressiveness. The presence of learner aggressiveness depends to a great degree on the amount of initiative the students can express in their learning. Learning situations where students are not allowed initiative by the teacher will lower learner aggressiveness. A teacher who does not encourage students to offer opinions in class or uses instructional techniques emphasizing correct/incorrect answers, such as substitution drills from the Audio-Lingual method, will effectively restrict learner aggressiveness.

3) Attention. Attention of the students to the task at hand can be manipulated by the amount of material the students can directly contribute to the learning process. The use of a textbook or material which has little or no relevance to the students' world(s) tends to cause inattention. Concentrating on any one activity for too long a time, especially teacher-generated ones, also reduces attention.

4) Reflection. The amount of time set aside for reflection and feedback in a learning situa-

tion directly affects the ability of the students to internalize (retain) the material being learned. To hinder students from making the "material their own" a teacher need only avoid planning times for reflection and student feedback into the learning situation. Showing impatience to the students when they do not give answers immediately is another way to do this.

5) Retention. As just stated, retention is affected by the element of reflection. The other elements of SARD are also indispensable to the realization of retention. Some specific techniques a teacher can use for reducing retention are: emphasizing rote-memorization of the course content and stressing the importance of learning to pass tests versus learning to apply the knowledge in life.

6) Discrimination. The ability of the students to discriminate learned material from new material and finding a place for the new material in their learning can be greatly affected by how well the discrimination activities have been designed and the relationship the activities have to the content covered. Characteristics of poorly designed activities include the following: the need for complex instructions before the activity can take place, stressing one particular learning style (for example, experiential) over others in nearly all the discrimination activities used, and an emphasis on providing variety at the expense of continuity. The last two characteristics are especially common now that "eclecticism" has become popular. When using an eclectic approach to teaching it is very easy for the students to lose their sense of direction and purpose in their learning, eventually leading to a lessened ability to discriminate.

Finally, as educators we are constantly presented with the challenge of helping as many of our students learn as much as is possible in the shortest amount of time. To fully realize maximized learning in every student the elements of the learning process, known as SARD (Security, Attention-Aggression, Retention-Reflection and Discrimination), must be thoughtfully balanced for each stage of learning and included in all our lesson design and implementation. By doing so, we are providing a whole-person model of education which addresses itself to all aspects of the students' personalities.

(英 文 学 科)

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