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MELT (Mindless English Language Teaching) – an Anti-Mindfulness Crash Course in 14 Steps

Abstract: Im Folgenden werden auf ironische Weise in Form von 14 Schritten Ansätze und Prinzipien von Achtsamkeit und Achtsamkeitsübungen hinterfragt und kritisiert. Das Befolgen aller einzelner Schritte kann im Stadium des sogenannten MELT (mindless English language teaching) gipfeln.

Step 1: Ignore the great philosophers.

Forget about Aristotle, who, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, pleaded for the “golden mean,” i.e., the middle between the two extremes of excess and deficiency, and who sought for symmetry, proportion, and harmony as the attributes of beauty. In a similar vein, let’s forget Confucius who postulated the doctrine of the mean (中庸). And let’s forget the middle way (majjhimā patipadā) in Buddhism, as well as the Taoist notion of yin yang (陰陽).

Step 2: Disdain the value of balance.

Do not believe in the need for *balanced thinking*. It does not matter that Schaefer and Yoshioka (2000) pretend to have discovered that a human being needs guidance and freedom, dependency and autonomy, uniformity and variation, structure and openness. The concept of *constructivist instruction (knowledge-based constructivism)* is nothing but a fake middle-of-the-way synthesis between administrative-centered instructivism and student-centered constructivism designed by some German psychologists (Reinmann-Rothmeier & Mandl 2001). If you follow these ideas, you may also be taken in by the simplistic aphorism, “Wer A wie Autonomie sagt, muss auch B wie Betreuung sagen.”

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Step 3: Believe in extremes – and jump on bandwagons.

If you reject closed-language teaching (teacher-fronted classrooms) because self-proclaimed experts have told you that it is outdated, authoritarian, and even learner-hostile, then join the modern trend towards open learning (cf. Thaler 2011). Open teaching methods such as individualized instruction, station learning, project work, weekly plan, storyline, task-based language learning (TBLL), learning by teaching (LdL: *Lernen durch Lehren*) and others will guarantee student autonomy, activation, creativity, cooperation, and motivation. Open methods are good per se.

Do not believe critics (e.g. Thaler 2008) who claim to have empirical evidence that an overdose of openness leads to classroom management problems, lots of inactivity going nowhere, mother tongue small talk, action instead of reflection, multimedia shows for the sake of multimedia – in short „a lot of sizzle and not much steak.“ The teacher in his role as “sage on the stage” has to be dethroned, so students can indulge in the production of pulp. By the way, those critics are the same who, for some inexplicable reason, praise the many benefits of closed-language teaching such as cognitive intensity, a sense of orientation for students, teacher as role model ... and its popularity with students and parents who perceive true learning.

Step 4: Dismiss *Balanced Teaching* (in the narrow sense).

Balanced Teaching, i.e. a synthesis between closed- and open-methods, claims to uphold the value of balance, respect the teacher’s individuality, and re-assert the importance of common sense; it rejects jumping on methodological bandwagons when the academic pendulum happens to swing to another side (Thaler 2010). You should have no difficulty in dismissing this approach as pseudo-scientific middle-of-the-road rhetoric.

Step 5: Oppose *Balanced Teaching* (in the broad sense) as well.

An extended version of a wrong concept cannot be true because quantity cannot make up for quality. So, skim and immediately forget the 20 parameters of *Balanced Teaching* in the broad sense (Thaler 2010, 2012). Instead of finding a balance of oral and written working modes, or different interaction patterns, or various activities, or different speeds, or varying difficulty levels or ... simply choose one or the other and stick with it.

Step 6: You do not need an EAR.

Carl Rogers (1995) maintained that teachers (and human beings in general) need an EAR. The acronym stands for the three core characteristics a teacher is supposed to possess: empathy, authenticity, respect.

Unmask Rogers as a typical representative of humanist psychology with its bias on a holistic approach to human existence, self-awareness, self-actualization, and a positive human potential. Teachers do not need to respect all their students, they may just play the role of a teacher and hide behind professional claims, and they do not have the capacity to understand or feel what all their students are experiencing.

Step 7: You do not need with-it-ness either.

Jacob Kounin (1977) coined the term “with-it-ness” to describe a teacher’s ability to know what is going on at all times in the classroom. Teachers who are “with it” have “eyes in the back of their heads.” With-it-ness can be maintained by making eye contact to all students at all times, knowing each student on a personal basis (name, interests, strengths, weaknesses), using non-verbal techniques to show students that they are alert and care about the well-being of all learners.

You should waive with-it-ness because it is a strange term, Kounin developed his classroom management principles a very long time ago, and with-it-ness is far too demanding – who, in fact, has got “eyes in the back of his head”?

Step 8: Avoid surprise-sensitive teaching.

Whatever happens in your classroom, stick to your plan. Be inflexible. Some theorists (Mühlhausen 1994, Woodward 2001) may try to convince you that you should be sensitive to surprises (or even “hijacks”: Woodward 2001). Or they may go so far as to ask you to adapt teaching to the situation, and tolerate changes of direction in the lesson.

Ignore their suggestions and try to prevent reality from happening. Do not deviate from the plan designed the day before because plan-implementation congruency is more valuable than being responsive to transient learners’ needs.

Step 9: Be vain.

Take the young Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water, as your idol. Satisfy your narcissistic needs. If you don't love yourself, you can't love another person.

Step 10: Follow Prodrromou's advice on how to be a boring teacher (1997).

- It is your right to be right: It is you who has all the answers. Remember, the ultimate goal of all good teaching was and is to demonstrate to the learners what they do NOT know.
- Be predictable: You have a fixed routine for doing everything so students know exactly what is coming. You always begin with Presentation, always follow with Practice, always finish with Production. That is why the letters PPP appear in that order. Stick to PPP, and you will never come unstuck.
- Make your students idle: Let them see how much you know and can do. Do all the work yourself. Explain what you did the previous lesson yourself. Read the text aloud yourself. Read out the questions yourself. Answer the questions yourself. Write the answers on the board yourself, and then rub the board clean yourself.
- Become a textbook slave: Start from page one and go straight through to the last page of the textbook. Lesson after lesson. Unit after unit. Textbook writers are omniscient, they know everything. You are benighted, you know nothing (Socrates). And your students don't know nothin' neither (Bob Dylan).
- Speak in a monotone voice: Slavishly follow the I-R-F pattern (impulse – reaction – feedback). Do not vary your pitch. Do not distinguish between explanations and questions, instructions and asides, the beginning or the end of your discourse, the serious bits and the funny ones. “God gave you one voice – you should not make yourself another” (Shakespeare: *Hamlet*).
- Sit still: Do not stand up if you can avoid it. Walking through the aisles is dangerous as it can get you close to your students. You are not a guide on the side. Your place is on your chair.

Step 11: Maximize TTT.

“Imitation is the mother of learning,” as Pavlov discovered, and “parrots learn best,” as Skinner added. Therefore, raise your teacher talking time (TTT) to

at least 90%. This way student talking time (STT) is reduced to below 10%, which means that individual speaking time (IST) becomes a *quantité negligible*. Remember the German definition of teacher-centered classrooms: „Wenn viele schweigen und einer spricht, nennt man dieses Unterrichts.“

Step 12: Be the boss.

“We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are” (Unknown). Your main motives for becoming a (language) teacher are authority, control, security, and power. Neglecting democracy, impoverishing moral education, and reducing discipline to sheer outward appearance must be accepted as collateral damage.

Step 13: Use the Nuremberg funnel (*Nürnberger Trichter*).

Assume your students are a *tabula rasa*: They know nothing. If they have not understood, that is their problem, not yours – or as the former President of a Western superpower once claimed: “If they can’t stand the heat, they should get out of the kitchen” (George Bush).

New vocabulary, grammar, literary and cultural knowledge must be funneled, drummed, and pounded into the learners. Rely on your students’ passive and receptive learning, ignore their autonomy, reject self-organized learning, and neglect social competences.

Step 14: Believe in sameness.

All classes are of the same level, all students work at the same speed, and all people should be like you. Individuality, heterogeneity, and differentiation are foreign words – and should remain foreign to you. “Unless you learn to face your own shadows, you will continue to see them in others, because the world outside you is only a reflection of the world inside you” (Unknown).

Conclusion

As you are a free human being, you may follow these 14 steps to reach your MELT aim: mindless English language teaching. Or you dismiss this upside down peda-

gological perspective and appreciate the importance of mindful teaching. After all, recent studies illustrate that teachers who employ contemplative practices are flexible in their instructional methods, interpersonally connected to their students, and view the classroom as a place for all students to become their most authentic selves.

Literature

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