

# Developing More than Just Linguistic Competence—The Model *LdL* for Teaching Foreign Languages (with a Note on Basic Global English)

Joachim Grzega (University of Eichstätt, Germany)

*LdL* stands for the German label “Lernen durch Lehren”, which means “Learning by Teaching”. The fundamental principle is to hand over as much teaching responsibility to the learner as possible and to encourage as many students as possible to engage in the highest possible degree of activity. The team of students placed in charge of the lesson must think of appropriate teaching methods to convey their topic (i.e. chalk and talk teaching, working in pairs, group work, discussion, etc.). The role of the teacher consists in preparing, supporting, moderating and supervising.

I first heard about *LdL* as a student when I attended several courses by Jean-Pol Martin, Professor of the didactics of French language and literature at the University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany, and the father of *LdL*. At first I thought that it is “just” another didactic model. But when I actually visited a lesson in Martin’s high-school class I could witness myself how much higher Martin’s students with two years of French in comparison to those students who had not been trained according to *LdL*. From then on I’ve known that this is it and integrated *LdL* in my own teacher training courses as a student and made it my teaching model when I became a university teacher eight years ago (my experiences with *LdL* in university classes are described and classified in Grzega 2003, 2005c, 2005d).

## **The Development of *LdL***

Gartner/Conway Kohler/Riessman (1971) illustrate and describe experiences with tutoring. Among other examples, they shed light on the Youth Tutoring Youth programs of the National Commission on Resources for Youth and on Peggy and Ronald Lippitt’s concept of Learning Through Teaching (LTT). In Europe, despite some experiences with learning by having students take care of the teaching, the concept hasn’t received broader frame until Jean-Pol Martin started to give this principle also a theoretical, biological-psychological and anthropological basis. Moreover, the previous tutoring concepts were thought for additional small-group phases outside the regular classroom. In contrast, *LdL* can be used in any regular or traditional classroom setting. However, experience has shown that the ideal group-size is about 20. Martin has been developing the concept of “Learning by Teaching” since the 1980’s, continuously improving this method and extending it from pure language classes to other areas of learning and living; this is shown by a comparison of his publications over the last two decades (e.g. Martin 1985, 1994, 2002). In the mid-1980’s Martin built a network of several hundred teachers who integrated *LdL* in various subjects and various school-types. Several times a year a didactic circular with materials is sent to the members of the network (during the first years Martin sent out the circulars via snail mail, for a few years he has been using e-mail for this). Many of his works and further information are provided on Martin’s homepage <http://www.ldl.de> (you also find reports on the experience with *LdL* by other language teachers, e.g. Skinner 1994). Martin used the method “Learning by Teaching” for the first time in his French lessons at high-schools. He had found out that the dilemma that had been caused by the so-called “communicative turn” in foreign-language teaching could be solved with the help of *LdL*. With the “communicative turn” educators finally realized that students participate much more in class when they are allowed to talk about themselves and their own life; but as a result there was not enough focus on grammatical competence. Martin’s solution was to have the students teach grammar chapters themselves.

## **A Description of *LdL***

With Martin’s systems of having students adopting the role of the teacher, the students were enabled

to train grammatical as well as communicative competence and to acquire “hard skills” as well as “soft skills” (i.e. the ability to work in a team, complex thinking, the competence to seek and find information, explorative behavior, project competence, internet competence, generating knowledge as well as disciplinary virtues like punctuality, reliability, patience, presentation skills, discussion skills). Actually, learning a foreign language means both acquiring a “hard skill” and a “soft skill,” since you learn to speak *about* a language as well as *in* a language (about various topics). But *LdL* means even more: *LdL* encourages and demands creativity, independence, and self-confidence. *LdL* can be used for every subject and at any level.

With *LdL* you give up the unrealistic linearity of classroom teaching. Rather, *LdL* confronts students with the realistic uncertainties in life (which have even been increasing with the spread of the internet); students have to cope with the uncertainties of life and learn to make complex topics more and more linear and thus to develop quantitatively and qualitatively improved cognitive maps. Martin shows that human beings strive for (systematically) increasing of their competence of being in (mental) control of various walks of life and fields of study (“control competence”). The achievement of this “control”, according to Martin, leads to “flow effects”, i.e. great intrinsic satisfaction and feelings of happiness. This also means that the results should give pleasure even if the route to achieving them is arduous.

What are the tasks and skills required from the teacher? The teacher has to get used to recognizing the core aspects of each student contribution and to connect it to other contributions and the broader target. S/he is the organizer of collective reflection and leads the group to the main target of the course, intervening basically only to improve communication and the collective construction of knowledge. Most important of all, the teacher has to make sure that, despite the chaotic situation that students might feel in at the beginning of a learning unit, the main points to remember are clear at the end of a session (linearity a posteriori)

Martin runs his classes like a company and sees himself in the role of an executive manager (cf. Martin 1999). Another metaphor Martin uses is the mind metaphor, in which the members of the class are seen as neurons with their different responsibilities and competences. Readers who want to gain further insight into the anthropological basis of *LdL* should also study some of the new findings from learning psychology and management. With this concept the expectations from classroom sessions gradually increase: the students strive to improve the quality of their presentation.

*LdL* also takes into consideration the current development from an information society to a knowledge society. A momentous quality in a knowledge is to attract people’s attention; we could say that an important “currency” of knowledge societies is attention (cf. e.g. Franck 1998, Davis/Meyer 1998). Furthermore, already since Pestalozzi it has been claimed that the teacher does not have to feel responsible only for the education of mind and hand, but also for the education of the heart. Martin regards the teaching of “world improvement” competence (cf. Martin 2002) through passing on knowledge as a main duty of teachers. The anthropological basis of *LdL* is Maslow’s pyramid of needs (1954), but also Viktor E. Frankl’s model of *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946) can well serve as an anthropological framework and an explanation for the success of *LdL*. Teaching something to somebody should satisfy to a certain extent these needs. Already Garter/Conway Kohler/Riessman (1971: 10 & 135) claim that tutoring concepts are successful due to reasons at the emotional as well as at the cognitive level: tutors play the helper role, learn how to learn, get a feeling of competency and increased self-esteem, they develop responsibility, reliability and maturity, and they may even master shyness.

Also of note, many teachers remark a decline in motivation when students are in their puberty age. Martin has observed that this is not the case with his methods and deduces that dealing with interesting topics autonomously and teaching them to fellow students seems to meet the capacities and interests of students between 13 and 16.

## **Some Advice for the Organization of *LdL* Classes**

The toughest phase certainly is when students are introduced to the method. As a first step, the teacher can prepare an exercise that the students have to work on in pairs. If possible, the class should be sitting in a circle or halfcircle (this holds for every *LdL* session). This is a more communicative array than rows. One pair of students, however, is charged with leading the solution section. While the rest of the class is working on the exercise, the teacher explains the *LdL* method the “solution team,” provides them with a few didactic notes and gives them the master solutions that are already prepared; the “solution team” has to agree on the distribution of their tasks during the solution section. Students should not immediately give the correct answer but they should give the fellow student the possibility to correct him/herself. During the solution section the teacher only intervenes when there are questions that can be solved, when wrong answers are not corrected or when the solution leaders do not react to the other students’ answers. The teacher should generally not intervene too often and too fast. This would demotivate students. Students need time for reflecting and for getting used to the new teaching model. The teacher must also pay attention that all students are respected and that none of them is interrupted or overlooked. Furthermore, the teacher must take care that the relatively liberal form of social interaction doesn’t trigger less concentration and discipline, but that it leads to a more intensive and more comfortable treatment of contents.

When the method is clear, the teacher distributes the contents, which s/he has divided into small units beforehand, to student groups of not more than three members. Each group tries to make themselves experts of a strictly defined field of new material and has to find appropriate methods to familiarize the other students with the contents. The preparation for a presentation can be done in class or as a homework. If questions arise, the teacher might be contacted via a discussion forum or e-mail (for frequently asked questions the teacher may set up a catalog of standard answers for him/herself). The teacher must take care, though, that students are not loaded with too much work. After all, they have other classes, too.

On principle, students can lead any class section: grammar sections, vocabulary presentation, text interpretations, dictations, translations, and lessons on culture and civilization. When presenting something, students should speak freely without permanently looking into their notes. The textbook and materials provided by the teacher may help the students, but they should always be encouraged to develop their own ideas. Sometimes they do this very readily: Martin has observed that students who have to explain new words in a text seldom copy just the explanations in the textbook, but develop their own presentations. Moreover, they leave out a number of words, because they are self-explanatory or because the words have already been introduced in class spontaneously.

School also means that a student’s progress needs to be verified. One possibility is to have one student be tested by his fellow students. However, in this case there should be no grading. Thus students get used to relatively tough situations without having to master any angst. Grades should only be given on tests developed by the teacher.

## **Some Material for Teaching a Foreign Language According to *LdL***

The teacher should give advice on the ways a topic can be presented or elaborated: with primary/original texts, adapted texts, texts with blanks to be filled out (solutions at the bottom), riddles/quizzes, role play, or mind mapping. As media s/he might suggest handouts, transparencies, PowerPoint, a film, or the blackboard.

When learners are at the beginners’ level, they need to be given a number of useful fixed expressions in order to lead classroom sections, e.g.

“You are the narrator.”  
 “You are ....”  
 “Start to read, please.”  
 “Go on, please.”  
 “That’s fine, thank you.”  
 “That was very good, thank you.”  
 “That’s enough, thank you.”  
 “Stop, there’s a (pronunciation/vocabulary/grammar) mistake. Think again.”  
 “Be careful.”  
 “Louder, please.”  
 “Please repeat.”  
 “How do you say ... in Spanish/German/Japanese?”  
 “What does ... mean in English?”  
 “Not so fast, please.”  
 “Lead the next exercise/dictation/discussion section/grammar section, please.”  
 “Can you come to the blackboard, please.”  
 “The line before/after.”  
 “Can you help me/him/her, please?”  
 “Open you books on page ...”  
 “Let’s do exercise number ...”  
 the punctuation marks, the alphabet, the numbers

For lessons on culture and civilization important facts can be gathered and presented with the help of an original textbook from the country of the target language or with the help of the respective version of the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

### **Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Beginner’s Level**

In our world, English plays a specific role as the most important global language. More than with any other language is it necessary to bring students to a level of communicative competence in English for international contexts. Therefore, we might ask whether it is really a native variety of English that should serve as a model for Teaching English as a Foreign Language or Teaching English as an International Language. One alternative would Ogden’s BASIC English, as it, e.g., described in Templer (2005). In my concept of LdL, teaching should consist of three pillars:

- teaching a core knowledge
- teaching key qualifications (“soft skills”) and methodological competence
- encouraging students to delve more thoroughly into aspects they are interested in

For foreign language teaching this means that we need a system that provides basic linguistic means like BASIC English plus an opportunity for individual enlargement. I have therefore constructed Basic Global English (BGE) for beginning learners of English (cg. Grzega 2005a & 2005b). BGE is based on findings from successful communication between non-natives. It includes only 20 grammar rules and consists of a basic vocabulary of 750 words (that is not bound to any specific single culture). In addition, learners are asked from the very beginning to do dictionary work and collect another 250 words (e.g. word-fields on hobbies or professions of family members). Additional rules for word-formation enable the learner to form a lot more than 1,000 words. Moreover, phrases for the most basic and frequent communicative situations are offered. Unlike, BASIC English, BGE is not a closed system, but allows variation and offers the learner to fine-tune his command of an internationally useful English according to own wants and needs.

### **Frequently Raised Criticism**

In this section I want to comment on a few points of criticism frequently articulated by students and, especially by colleagues, against *LdL*.

**Criticism:** With *LdL* one can get through less material because not everything is offered in a linear way. **Comment:** This might be true (although Martin's classes show us something else). But who wants to get through as much material as possible if then the students may have presented a lot of information, but are in fact unable to understand the information or use it correctly? Less is more. Quality must be valued more than quantity! Students need knowledge but they must also know how to use it. Therefore, examples should be collected (as a corpus to be examined); then the students, as young scholars, should identify and formulate rules by way of an inductive approach. This way they learn to control new fields (key word "cognitive map").

**Criticism:** Students cannot cope with the presentation of linguistic material because they do not have the necessary overall knowledge. **Comment:** To begin with, it must be pointed out that teachers do not have the right to confront their students with unchallenging tasks. Moreover, they must not lead their students into passiveness, nonage, and intellectual impoverishment. Teachers should not suppress their students' natural curiosity and destroy it through demotivation. Therefore, research and teaching must not be seen as separate entities but must be combined. The classroom could be turned into a laboratory and should offer students a platform for self-fulfillment. Students are very often underestimated, not overtaxed. There are many studies in learning and motivation psychology that show that the cognitive effects are much greater when students are a little overtaxed than when students are underestimated. Only in this way is the acquisition of key qualifications possible. Only if the students get the chance to "play" with linguistic problems and ideas in different ways, only if they can try out in what ways linguistic contents can be presented, only if they can "grasp" a problem physically, only then will they also "grasp" it cognitively.

**Criticism:** Presentations on cultural topics held by students often do not show enough depth and have a rather unacademic character – this might sometimes have to do with the source of information (e.g. internet sources). **Comment:** Actually, there is bound to be much more in-depth treatment in *LdL* courses because students have to delve into a problem much more deeply. Moreover, they can contribute their own experiences and ideas, which a teacher can never provide. Regarding the source of information, the main criticism is directed at the increased use of the internet as a source of information. This does not mean that one has to be skeptical about the internet in general. A lot of nonsense can be found in printed form as well. The students need guidance in evaluating the information from the internet. It must rather be pointed out that the internet can serve very well for the acquisition of resources (via search engines, databases, thematic homepages, e-mail distributors, discussion platforms, chat rooms, etc.)

**Criticism:** Presentations by students can never be perfect. **Comment:** This might be true. But are presentations by teachers perfect (at least "always")? Moreover, "not being perfect" triggers discussion and reflection. The students deal more intensively with the material; they learn to "be in better control" of it and give their cognitive maps sharper contours. In general, teachers should less be afraid of mistakes than of speechlessness.

**Criticism:** Due to the open style of teaching and the high level of activity of students there is often a time problem, i.e. the problem of not getting everything done that was planned for the session. **Comment:** Indeed, this often seems to be a problem—especially when the class is not yet experienced in *LdL*. But time pressure should not be the reason to stop lively discussions or further questions. Even if there might seem to be a loss of time at first there is actually less time needed for revision; moreover, students will be constantly motivated. If not everything that was planned for the session can be completed, the remaining information can be distributed in written form (via e-mail) or be supplemented in the following session. Generally, I ask my students to plan "their" sessions in a way that the last minutes are reserved for me. I particularly point out to them that, if a group-work

task lasts  $x$  minutes, then at least  $1\frac{1}{2}x$  minutes must be reserved for the discussion of the results. I can make use of the last minutes for different purposes: summaries, revisions and completions of topics, information on specialized literature, meta-discussion, etc.

**Criticism:** *LdL* courses are disproportionately more work-intensive than “traditional” courses.

**Comment:** This observation that many students make in *LdL* courses must be taken seriously. *LdL* is not only associated with a relatively great cognitive effort but also with an expenditure of time students do not have to invest in many traditional courses. I myself try to make sure that the additional time for the organization of sessions is compensated for by less time having to be spent on homework.

**Criticism:** *LdL* courses often give the impression of being unstructured. **Comment:** This is understandable and natural due to the open character of *LdL*. Therefore, it has to be guaranteed to the students that they will be offered oral or written summaries of the most important points to remember at the end of every session or every thematic unit (keyword: linearity *a posteriori*). On the other hand, it has to be made clear to the students that an *LdL* course cannot be taken successfully without preparation and revision sections. New data, information and technical terms may already have to be dealt with for the preparation of a session. “Stabilized” knowledge may nevertheless only be achieved in going over the contents again at home.

## Summary

In conclusion, how does *LdL* humanize language teaching?

1. For the student, *LdL* means fast acquisition of communicative competence and key qualifications relevant in an information society through constant activations in the classroom—the communicative success will allow students to see the sense and meaning of language learning and teaching
2. For the teacher, *LdL* means a more intense relationship with the student: the teacher will better understand students’ problems, see interesting ideas in students’ presentations, witness the fast progress in students’ communicative competence and thus see the fruit of his/her efforts and the sense of the teaching profession.
3. As far as the teaching of English is concerned, the principles of the didactic model *LdL* can be connected with the principles of the linguistic model Basic Global English, which has been created for a rapid acquisition of communicative competence in English for international settings by highlighting just the grammar rules relevant for successful communication, by teaching only a basic vocabulary and basic phrases and by encouraging the student to develop an individual extra vocabulary according to his/her own needs and wants—things vital for the student’s success in today’s world.

(N.B.: Anybody who wants to try out *LdL* and needs help can contact me or Jean-Pol Martin; s/he may also open a discussion thread on [www.zum.de](http://www.zum.de) (> Foren > Lernen durch Lehren) and will certainly get answers from colleagues and students already experienced in *LdL*.)

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