

Memory Strategies in Basic Education

Blog 4 about the Erasmus+ KA2 Project "How to Learn a Language?"(H2L2) – February 2024

"My head is broken!" This phrase can be heard all too often by course instructors in adult second language and literacy (LESLLA) education. Learners often offer this sentence as explanation for why they find it difficult to memorize words in the second language. Often they blame themselves for this, and this self-devaluation and doubt initiate a mental negative spiral, which may pose an additional obstacle in the learning process (not to mention personal well-being). As part of an Erasmus+ project, we are therefore exploring how memory strategies in LESLLA courses can be strengthened with disadvantaged adults and how autonomy in the learning process can be achieved.

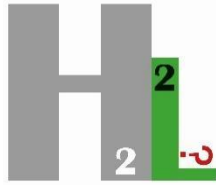
How to Learn a Language?

The project "How to Learn a Language" (H2L2) offers experienced LESLLA education institutions the opportunity to delve intensively into the question of how learner-centeredness can be implemented. All institutions in the consortium work with people affected by multiple disadvantages (e.g. educational disadvantage, origin, first language, (or lack thereof) residency permit, religion, and learning difficulties).

All institutions in the consortium work with a diverse group of learners with multiple challenges, like (lack of) residency permit and educational disadvantage. In ten-week courses, learners and course instructors together develop and evaluate language learning strategies in a co-creative process, including memory strategies, self-narration as a basis for self-efficacy, 'Bringing the outside in' (where learners bring authentic reading and listening texts from their daily lives into the classroom), portfolio strategies and digital learning strategies (such as the use of Google Lens and other helpful tools), etc.

Memory Strategies

In the first pilot course implemented by Orient Express in Vienna, we had the opportunity to extensively discuss how memory can be impaired, as long as concerns about the family's financial situation, refugee status in Austria, or the physical survival of remaining family members in war zones burden daily life. This form of psychoeducation emphasizes that it is a fundamentally sensible strategy of the body and the brain to limit oneself to the survival necessary in dangerous situations. This created a good basis for dealing with supportive learning factors in a perceived safe learning environment. As the next step, we jointly analyzed how it can be successful to create a framework outside of class in which learning and repetition can take place (at least to a small but regular extent). After some consideration, we initially worked with the conventional but proven method of vocabulary cards, which were filled out by the learners themselves. For this purpose, the learners took photographs of interesting objects in their households, etc., and sent them via a WhatsApp group specifically set up for this course. The course instructor prepared vocabulary picture cards, which were completed together in class. Over the course of the pilot, other approaches and techniques were added, such as relaxation exercises (linked to vocabulary work), the "Audiovisual Dictionary" (videos created and sent after each lesson, showing the picture cards and speaking the corresponding term in the second language, German), or the "sensory library" (objects brought in on a theme selected by the learners).



In our perception, the participants greatly benefited from actively contributing to lesson planning and becoming familiar with strategies that strengthen memory. The repetition of selected memorization techniques was particularly advantageous and as learners became more autonomous over time. The fact that the pilot course was conducted by an instructor who could speak the participants' first languages, Farsi and Arabic, added another valuable dimension.

Partnership

H2L2 is an Erasmus+ KA2-strategic partnership in which the following organizations take part: Second Chance School of Mytilene (Greece), Orient Express (Austria), C.P.I.A. Sede di Ancona and Università Degli Studi Di Macerata (Italy), TopTaal NT2 Experts, Kaatje Dalderop and ITTA UvA (The Netherlands).

