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## “Blanket English: Learning everything and anything” easily eclipses conventional goal-orientated learning progress.

### 1. Introduction

After effective learning has been summarised through neuro-didactic research results and further essential considerations and then extended into more specific aspects for the early learning of English, this paper illustrates how these effective learning principles can be achieved in the school practice. In conclusion, the learning progress for this approach: *Blanket English: Learning everything and anything* is summarised and shown to be considerably in excess of the current syllabi requirements and the conventional goal-orientated learning approach. In the light of these results a recommendation is made to rethink one of the major concepts of the German educational system.

### 2. Principles for Effective Learning

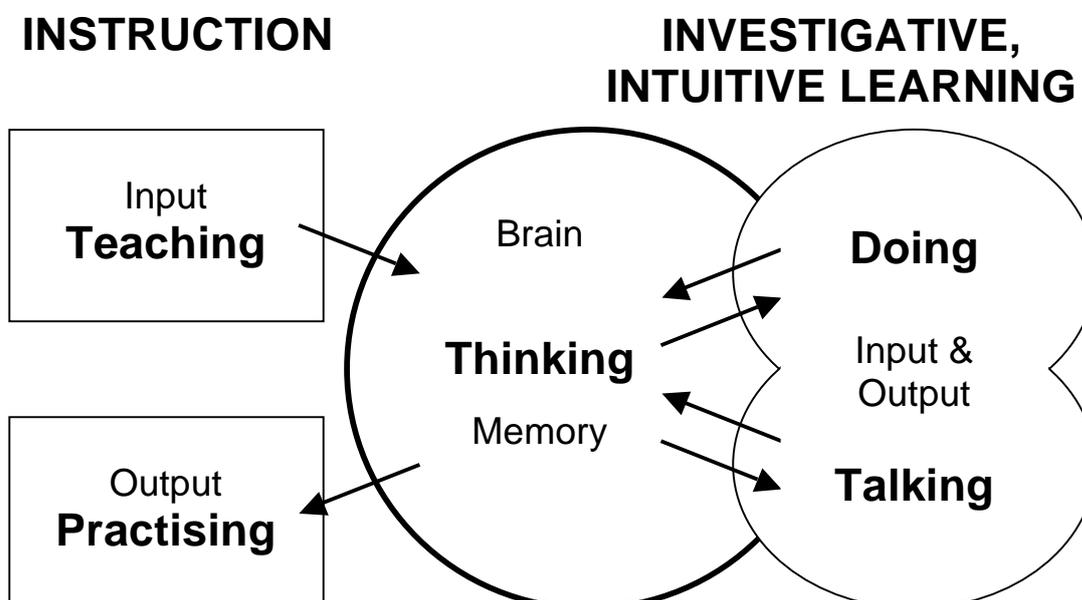
#### 2.1 Investigative, Intuitive Learning

A summary of neuro-didactic recommendations:

- Support curiosity and the hunger for knowledge
- Maximise the sense of fulfilment and enjoyment in investigation, research, experimentation and discovery
- Ensure fundamentally the exchange of views, experiences and ideas
- Guarantee learning through the children’s a) own play creativity, b) success with challenges and c) own active part in decisions relating to the learning situation
- Minimise the cramming and the swotting of facts (rote learning)

(Compiled from: Spitzer: 2006, Hüther: 2004 etc.) Not surprisingly, these results mirror the Investigative, Intuitive Learning of the pre-school child.

Many of these terms have become buzz words in syllabi and published works; however, generally the practice does not reflect the declared aims. Despite frequent claims to the contrary, the overwhelming approach to learning in our schools remains *Instruction* (in German epitomised by the verbs: vermitteln, lehren, unterrichten when taken literally) though occasionally some attempts are made to include a few aspects of Investigative, Intuitive Learning. The diagram illustrates the major differences between Instruction – an essentially one-way process – and Investigative, Intuitive Learning.



The frequently used term "learning by doing" describes a multitude of approaches and so cannot be immediately taken to mean effective learning. It is therefore essential to view the desirable requirements for: Doing, Thinking, Talking and to pursue these.

**Doing** should incorporate

- experiencing, experimenting, investigating and discovering which relate to the **Thinking** of
- choosing, imagining, reasoning, analysing, anticipating and solving.

Much learning is accompanied by **Talking** as in

- commentating, stating, questioning and discussing.

All these aspects are an integral part of effective learning and therefore of Investigative, Intuitive Learning. Only on very rare occasions should it be necessary to organise children to engage specifically with them. The perceived necessity to incorporate special sessions of Doing, Thinking, Talking probably indicates a weak level of Investigative, Intuitive Learning.

## 2.2 The Process of Abstraction

The learning environment has three available levels.

**Concrete → Illustrative → Written**

object, life picture, diagram text, symbol

Learning should be introduced at the concrete level so that all children are involved and so that children are empowered to follow their own process of abstraction. Quite apart from the fact that a textbook's format fails to pursue the recommendations for Investigative, Intuitive Learning, the inability of a textbook to start at the concrete level makes it inappropriate for effective learning. Note: In 1966 Bruner proposed similar levels however he combined certain aspects that are best regarded separately or as accompaniments throughout learning. For instance he labelled the first level as "enactive" which is misleading, as learning at any level is active. He named his third level "language-based" and included the spoken language. However Talking, as described above, is a frequent accompaniment to learning in general.

## 2.3 Further Considerations

The *Maximisation of Frequency* is another fundamental goal. The greater the number of learning process steps (per unit of time) the greater the learning progress. Emotion plays an enormous influential role, one aspect of which is the feeling of achievement. Success is the key to learning success. Errors and mistakes within Investigative, Intuitive Learning are an essential part of the learning process. However perceived failure, often generated by inappropriate learning environments and tasks, and externally imposed goals or standards (and the accompanying tests and arbitrary grading systems), contributes to a cumulative dissatisfaction and consequently an increasing disillusionment with learning. Any failure furthers this downward spiral and should be avoided. The goal must be success.

## 3. Effective Learning for Early Second Language

The particular keys for second language effective learning are:

- Living English – developing the feeling
- Maximising the spoken frequency
- Guaranteeing understanding with involvement and *Expressive Arts*, e.g. action, theatre, art
- Expanding vocabulary in context fast – active and passive

Input/output goals should be thirty spoken words per minute for each and every child, and the involvement in a minimum of 1300 words in context during a learning period of fifty hours – equivalent to sixty-eight 45 minute school periods or a typical primary year. Output goals by the end of a typical first learning year are communication, dialogue, performance and reading.

## 4. Blanket English: School Practice

### 4.1 Songs

Songs have a major role to play. The melody is of paramount importance as a catchy tune attracts all, guarantees success and in addition encourages enjoyment and repetition outside contact time. Action songs and those using props are particularly welcome. The categories with examples are:

- Body: One finger; Head, shoulders; If you're happy; My body
- Action: My hat; Shake it!; I can sing
- Event: Ten green bottles; When I come; Nick, nack; Roll over
- Story: Money, money!; In a cottage; Three little pigs
- Adaptable: Changing and developing known songs

Selecting or developing songs for narrow learning goals, e.g. greetings, food, Halloween introduces unnecessary constrictions and limitations. It is far better to welcome the wonderful songs already available, perhaps with some improvements, whatever the content.

Fantasy story songs are the most attractive of all; however, the children require a considerable amount of lesson time in order to learn them. Forty percent of this learning time can be saved by providing the children with an audio CD for use out of lesson time. The accompaniment of the recordings with step-by-step illustrations and a picture guide system in a book saves a further thirty to forty percent of lesson time, establishes understanding from the start and encourages more learning outside lesson time. (Reed: Fun 1 2003 and Fun 2 2007). Chants lack a tune and do not easily extend to stories. Nursery rhymes could be suitable for children up to about three years old though the content is often obscure and short.

### 4.2 Activities

Follow-the-lead activities are particularly ly suitable for very early English. English dances (Reed 2004) and art and craft activities guarantee understanding first through the doing and, effectively, the language is brought to this understanding, thus assuring success. Game-Play activities are free-flowing, content-free, co-operative (no winners and importantly, no losers) and dynamic and under the categories a) Responding b) Learning conversation pieces c)

Developing straightforward speech and d) Developing spontaneous conversation, they rapidly build up the vocabulary in context towards active speech. Each one of the forty Game-Play activities takes a few minutes to learn and offers hours of fun and learning. The Fun 2 (Reed 2007), as well as including songs, also provides a further model of conversation namely illustrated joke dialogues, which are offered as a resource for children to learn and perform.

### 4.3 Learning to Read

The speedy approach to the learning of reading through *total text*, which is based on the use of songs that are already known off\_by\_heart also improves pronunciation. It takes children approximately five minutes to learn the approach after which they are in a position to learn to read independently or with other children. The extra resources in Fun 2 assist children in developing their own phonetic appreciation of a language, which they can already read.

### 4.4 Support

This approach to Investigative, Intuitive Learning includes: the Expressive Arts, Storyboard, Presentations, Staging of shows, Creative Portfolio, Current file, Transit file and a time-saving straightforward assessment recording system, all of which are there to support the learning and stimulate success and natural learning outside contact time.

4.5 Teacher Handbook

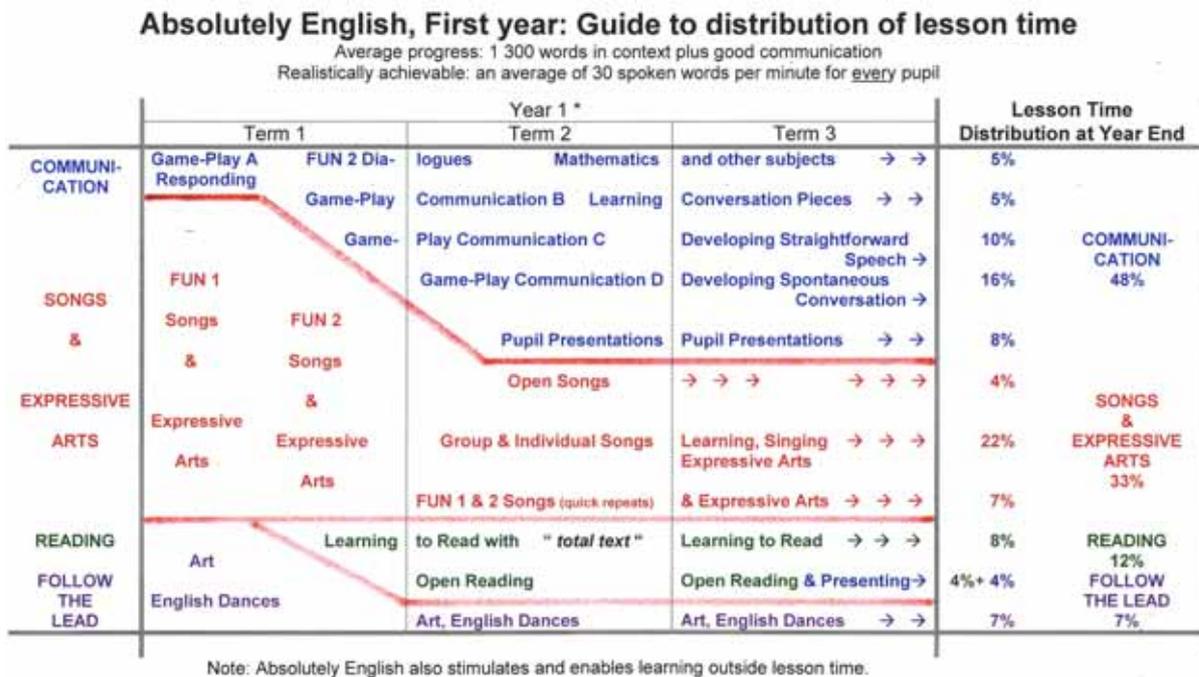
As a result of repeated requests at in-service teacher training courses, the handbook Absolutely English Comprehensive Toolkit (Reed 2007) was written to incorporate much of what is mentioned above.

4.6 Rate of Speaking

A short-term project with two groups of children aged between five and seven years with no previous English experience showed a spoken rate of well over 30 words a minute for every child.

4.7 Learning Progress

This table indicates the development of the likely allocation of lesson time during the first year, the final distribution of which forms the basis for subsequent years.



This table shows how a vocabulary of 1300 words in context can be covered during a typical first school year. (definition in section 3)

*All values are for guidance.*

	Productive Vocabulary words	Contact time USt.*
Fun 1 – songs	215	9
Picture Story Book with CD		
Fun 2 – songs, dialogue jokes	270	11
Two Books in One with CD		
Group and Individual Songs Various sources	250	12
Follow-the-lead, hands-on Art and craft	70	4
Follow-the-lead Dance	70	3
Follow-the-lead, hands-on Mathematics	20	2
Game-Play Responding	50	3
Game-Play Learning conversation pieces	220	8
Game-Play Learning straightforward speech	70	5
Game-Play Developing spontaneous speech	20	5
Open songs	50	2
Presentations planning and giving	20	4
Learning to read intuitively	individual	
Reading freely	individual	
Writing development	individual	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.300+</b>	<b>68 *</b>

Standard provision in 1 year is 38 weeks – each with 2 lessons. (1 lesson = 1 USt = 45 mins)  
 Allowing 10% loss gives 68 lessons (USt) per year. (51 hours)

## 5. The **C**onventional **A**pproach

“The large majority of lessons follow the Linearity Construction Principle. This means that the teacher plans and gives a lesson in the hope that 25 learn processes (in e.g. a class of 25) will follow it, simultaneously and in synchronisation. This is surely the biggest pedagogical illusion ever...and so for this reason alone the practice of linear, teacher-centred lessons is frequently ineffective.” (Bösch 2003)

The conventional approach for early English has been well summed up in a research project and report for the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

"Textbooks are used by almost 90% of teachers and the large majority of these teachers only use textbooks...Nearly 90% of lessons are teacher-centred...Pupils are normally listeners with rare opportunities to speak or react." (Engel, Thürman 2007)

Textbooks are designed to follow the strictures of each German state syllabus, for which approval must be sought separately in each of the states. Syllabus requirements amount to and therefore textbook series cover a vocabulary of about 500 words in two years – that is about 250 words per year – plus some standard questions and statements.

## 6. Conclusion

It is quite clear that Blanket English: Learning everything and anything exceeds the conventional low level of learning by a factor of more than three, in addition to which comes a much higher level of communication, dialogue, performance, reading and dancing.

## 7. Consequence

The German educational system's central concept is goal-orientated learning and this incorporates the setting of learning goals for certain ages, e.g. at the end of the primary stage. However a British government report came to an opposing conclusion,

"We believe it is clear...that it is not possible to make any overall statement about the ...knowledge and understanding which children in general should be expected to possess at the end of the primary years." (Cockcroft 1982:100)

As has been shown in this paper, the adoption of Blanket English: Learning everything and anything – a form of Investigative, Intuitive Learning – inevitably coupled with ignoring the current German syllabus corset, has produced an explosion in learning progress. The same can be demonstrated for Investigative, Intuitive Learning in mathematics (Reed 2010) and work in other subjects is expected to produce similar results. The deduction is that far from guaranteeing standards and furthering learning, as has been repeatedly claimed, the German educational system's central concept severely hampers the realisation of the full learning potential of the children. Both a rethink and a restructuring are urgently required.

### 7.1 School Practice

Blanket English: Learning everything and anything and all other forms of Investigative, Intuitive Learning require less expenditure than does Instruction, and large groups are easily accommodated. A Ugandan project currently in preparation should be able to demonstrate these aspects in a remarkably convincing way. (Reed 2011) Claims that the realisation of Investigative, Intuitive Learning requires more time than that available or that for Instruction indicate a complete lack of understanding of the approach. The time available should be used effectively and Investigative, Intuitive Learning achieves this.

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(Translations: Reed)

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**Note**

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