

ON THE NET

Foreign Language Study and the Brain

Jean W. LeLoup

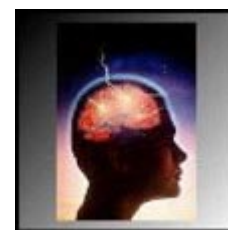
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Robert Ponterio

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Many foreign language teachers wishing to keep up with current ideas for improving their teaching based on research findings may not be able to attend professional conferences as often as they might wish. Web-based presentations may be a possible alternative to attending a live presentation on a particular topic. While such Web presentations certainly do not replace conferences, they can represent an additional and worthwhile avenue of access to current information and ideas, especially for those teachers who live far from the typical conference venue and who receive little financial support for professional development.

[Foreign Language Study and the Brain](#), a site created and maintained by Dr. Teresa Kennedy of the [University of Idaho](#), is a good place to start for those foreign language (FL) educators who wish to find out more about how the brain works and how those workings relate to second language acquisition. The goal of this Web site is stated clearly on the home page:



Historical brain research, combined with a review of effective foreign language methodology and research, provides a framework that teachers can utilize to incorporate brain-sensitive activities that foster memory storage and language retrieval. Recent research about the brain, general recommendations for classroom teaching and assorted activities are provided on this Web site.

The site, in English and Spanish, is part of the University of Idaho Virtual Campus. The material presented is organized by a clickable line at the bottom of the home page:



A brief synopsis of the material contained each section will provide the reader with an idea of what resources can be found at this site.

Brain Research in the Foreign Language Classroom

Several general resources about the brain and learning appear in this section. These give the reader access to background on the topic from the viewpoints of neuroscience, general pedagogy, and foreign language pedagogy. Links include two to books that deal with brain studies and teaching: [Brain Topics: A Handbook for Teachers and Parents](#) and [How People Learn](#). Both works address issues of interest to classroom teachers such as brain functioning, how to design an optimal learning environment, and strategies for teacher learning to name a few. They also provide ample bibliographies for those wishing to delve further into this subject. The article [Summarizing Concepts about Teacher Education, Learning and Neuroscience](#) calls for teacher education researchers to begin to associate with their neuroscience colleagues. The link to [Brain Research and Education](#) offers many articles for and by educators that appear both in scholarly journals and in the public press.

In terms of research specific to second language learning, we find essays on [early language learning](#) and [language learning after puberty](#). Another [essay](#) discusses the limitations on foreign language study in the U.S. One can also access Fred Genesee's ERIC Digest on [Brain Research: Implications for Second Language Learning](#) from this page.

Methods

Dr. Kennedy offers an annotated list of 16 [FL teaching methods](#) that will be a good refresher for those long out of their FL methods courses. She includes some comments on the correlation between these methods and learning in the FL classroom, emphasizing that "there is no single 'BEST WAY' to teach."

Activities

The page devoted to [Activities](#) gives a large nod to Gardner and his theory of Multiple Intelligences. This is indeed one area of brain research that has attracted the attention of many foreign language teachers. The intelligences are listed with links to suggested concomitant activities of a general nature. Another link leads to some specific [activity suggestions](#), complete with clip art. The passage from the research principles to classroom implementation through sample activities helps teachers better grasp the potential applications of the research in their daily lives.

Presentation

Finally, Dr. Kennedy has provided, in PowerPoint format, a presentation on [Creating a Brain Compatible Classroom: An Overview of Brain Research and Language Learning](#), given with Terry Armstrong at the annual conference of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in November, 2002.

In addition to the results of a study of the brains of monolingual and bilingual teachers, the presentation includes a discussion of memory and information storage. The presentation also offers numerous fascinating graphics of the brain and its component parts. One caveat: This presentation has been optimized for more recent versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer and may not function on Netscape.

The [Foreign Language Study and the Brain](#) site is an excellent example of an effort to bring professional development to foreign language teachers using the Internet for access to instruction that has traditionally been found in the classroom, in conferences, and in the published literature. By using the Web to offer easy access to a condensed overview of the topic as well as broader background information, appropriate sample lessons, and an electronic presentation simulating the conference experience, Dr. Kennedy has shown us a direction that many conference presenters could take to disseminate their professional development offerings much more widely, bringing the word to teachers who would not otherwise have been able to participate.

Creating a Brain Compatible Classroom: An overview of Brain Research and Language Learning

Teresa J. Kennedy, Ph.D.
Terry A. Armstrong, Ed.D.
College of Education
University of Idaho

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