



Class Notes

By Vicki McLeod



Lifelong Learning: Getting off the blocks

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Once upon a time I was quite good at French, for a thirteen year old anyway. Miss Parr was my teacher. Even now, several years on, I seem to remember a phrase about a monkey being under a table, but that is it. We had fun in our lessons, and there wasn't too much pressure to learn, it was before exams and before the expectations of O Levels. But then I went from Lower Fourth to Upper Fourth (I was in a grammar school where they numbered the years using a random system I still don't understand) and overnight lost my ability to learn French. One day I was good, the next I was not. Looking back I realise that the teaching system had changed and that I just didn't respond very well to it.

Now learning a language, and not just any language, but Spanish, and properly, fluently being able to speak it, is not just a matter of academia, but of necessity. My daughter speaks three languages, but we are still working hard on making sure that all three of her languages are equally as good as the others. But hey, it's easier for kids, right? The million dollar question is how do you progress your language learning as an adult if you feel that you are stuck and can't move forward? How does that happen? You have to put the time in really don't you? Don't get me wrong, I can get by, I can understand what is being said to me, mostly, but I hate not being able to confidently converse with a person about anything and everything. I loathe it. I've spent years trying to learn Spanish whilst working as a writer exclusively using English, taking lessons as and when I could. I have discovered that this doesn't work. You have to reset your mind, and dedicate some time in order to start to



Jane and Blanca playing a game. PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD.

remember the vocabulary and language rules that you need to know in order to speak. And for many people this is not the easiest of things to do, myself included. We can joke about not understanding the way the Spanish words are "masculine" or "feminine" and how on earth do you work out the gender of a table or a chair, but in the end we have to accept that these things do exist and start to allow our minds to be receptive to new ideas. But I don't have that time, I'm a busy person. So I have to work out how I can make the time I have available work the hardest for me. This is where Glos-solalia and their teaching methods which incorporate the techniques of Suggestopedia and Super Learning come

in. They claim that their students learn at least a thousand words in a week of their intensive courses.

I went in to their school this week for a morning to see a little of how they worked in preparation for attending an intensive language course in Spanish there later this summer. The school is situated in a very nice building in the hills above Porto Pi with airy classrooms, a very swish audio visual room, and even a swimming pool.

The teachers are relaxed and friendly and seem to be incredibly patient. I spoke to Jane, one of their English teachers, about the intensive methods they use. "Isn't it exhausting to be in an intensive course? Teaching or learn-

ing?". "No", she replied with a smile, "not at all, because it's fun, nobody gets bored or tired. We play games, we talk, we move. I had two students recently, both in their seventies, who learnt an enormous amount in a week and they were stimulated and interested all the way through. Because the methods include being active, using all of the senses, and being in and out of the classroom the students are learning whilst they are enjoying themselves".

So it seems that my French lessons at school, where we literally sat down for an hour and wrote down the same sentences over and over again (*Le singe est sous la table*) until we learnt them but didn't know what they meant,

probably didn't use the best methods. Miss Parr will be very disappointed, but hopefully she would be pleased that after all of these years I am ready to try again to master a foreign language.

I found this online at their website on www.glossolalia.com

It's a pretty good list of ideas for how you can stimulate your language learning. They have other learning resources there and on their Facebook page.

- Be realistic. Make a plan for your learning and have achievable goals along the way. Congratulate yourself on your first fifty words, then your next fifty, and your next. Start using your new vocabulary on people, and don't forget the grammar!

- Be consistent. Keep going, practice every single day.

- Be prolific. Label every single object in your house in the language you are learning, watch movies, read kids' books, talk, talk, TALK!

- Be creative. You can reset your computer and your phone in the language you want to learn, and you will be exposing yourself to more vocabulary. Check out Duolingo or Anki for online opportunities to pick up new words.

- Be brave. Take your new language as a door opener for other experiences. Get involved with local activities or things you wanted to explore anyway.

- Be social. You have to interact in your new language so go and make some new friends. You can do a language exchange or find some foreign pen pals.

- Be persistent. Don't be frightened of making mistakes. Native speakers love to help and want to encourage you to speak more comfortably in their language so don't be shy.

