

# Notes to accompany Michael Lewis's lecture: "But now we know: Ten radical changes to our teaching"

(FMF-Kongress Halle, 22 March 2002)

## Background

**Language:** Corpus linguistics - corpora, concordances

*"The language looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once."*

(John Sinclair, Corpus, Concordance, Collocation, 1991, p.100)

*"The overwhelming nature of the evidence leads us to elevate the principle of idiom from being a rather minor feature, compared with grammar, into being at least as important as grammar in the explanation of how meaning arises in text."*

(John Sinclair, Corpus, Concordance, Collocation, 1991, p.112)

**Learning:** Relationship between input and intake? What is 'noticing'?

### 1. *Are there any words you don't understand?*

**But now we know:** Phrases, not single words, are the basic components of any natural text. (Invisibility of chunks; comprehension does not guarantee intake - cf Krashen)

### 2. 'Some' in positives; 'any' in negatives and questions.

**But now we know:** Most standard EFL 'rules' are untrue or at best half-truths as likely to confuse as help. (Agentless passive; noticing; sorting but **not** describing.)

### 3. *I'm opening the door.*

**But now we know:** Authentic, often spoken lexical examples, are the best, most memorable, foundation for grammar generalisation. (Sinclair: artificial flowers)

### 4. *'My sister live in Madrid.'*

**But now we know:** Grammatical accuracy is a late acquired skill - whatever the teacher's supposed priorities. (Condemning learners to the intermediate plateau).

### 5. *Can you say that in a full sentence, please.*

**But now we know:** Sentence grammar is only part of grammar. (Prefabricated phrases; noun phrases; centrality of patterns with "of")

**6. *sh.... sh... ch.... It's a 'ch' sound.***

**But now we know:** We should be working not with the smallest possible unit -phonemes- but with the largest - lexical items. (Gillian Brown's comments)

**7. Reduce Teacher Talking Time**

**But now we know:** You don't learn to talk by talking - you learn to talk by listening.

**8. *I wish they'd talk more.*** (Increase Student Talking Time)

**But now we know:** Noticing and (often silent) reflection are as important for acquisition as productive activities. (Skehan, *Cognitive Approaches*)

**9. *'We've already done that.'***

**But now we know:** Repeating the same activity is, subject to certain conditions, the most effective way of encouraging effective learning. (Telling an anecdote)

**10. *I've presented it; now they need to practise it.***

**But now we know:** Teaching does not cause learning and no amount of practice can guarantee acquisition; there isn't even much evidence that it *facilitates* acquisition.

**Until we start by thinking about the true nature of both language and learning, we can't hope to understand what teachers should be doing.**

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*The Lexical Approach* 3-12-524306-8

*Implementing the Lexical Approach* 3-12-524308-4

*Handbuch der wichtigsten englischen Kollokationen* 3-12-519631-0

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