

FOR DYNAMIC LANGUAGE TEACHING: THE MANY APPLICATIONS OF THE  
DILM (DARTMOUTH INTENSIVE LANGUAGE MODEL)

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In the Spring of 76, the Exxon Foundation deemed the DILM "an educationnal innovation of demonstrated merit" and awarded to John Rassias, Professor of French at Dartmouth College an IMPACT grant of \$100,000. With the funds he received, J. Rassias was able to produce a documentary film entitled "Effective Language Teaching" in which he explained and demonstrated his method. The film was made available to many institutions across the nation. Interested Modern Languages departments applied for grants to implement this innovation on their campus. Ten to fifteen Exxon-choosen applicants were then invited to a four-day workshop, held twice a year during 77 and 78 on the campus of Darmouth College, to be trained by J. Rassias himself in his techniques. There is now, four years later a network of fifty plus F.L. instructors having implemented the DILM at their institutions and whose efforts are coordinated by the newly founded Rassias Foundation.

Let me describe briefly the DILM for those of you who would not be very familiar with it, although it has received extensive coverage both in the media and in the profession.

The first component of the DILM is the master class, in which the Master Teacher (M.T.) introduces new material, using various dramatic techniques to shorten explanations and facilitate comprehension and retention. The M.T. also gives initial practice to the students. He/she stresses cultural as well as linguistic training, through the use of "micrologues" for example. He/she checks formally the progress of the class, correcting the written assignments, quizzes and exams. The M.T. is responsible for stimulating the creative and individualized usage of the structures and vocabulary previously learned.

A second a more original component of the DILM is the drill session. The 25 to 30 students of the master class are divided into 3 smaller groups. Under the guidance of a specially trained undergraduate called Assistant Teacher (A.T.), this small group will spend 50 minutes daily actively practising the material presented earlier in the day.

The third element of the method, used in both the master class and the drill session, is its precise and elaborate choreography, designed to orchestrate everyone's participation.

Since such is not the object of this paper, I shall not go into more details concerning the description of the method; rather, I shall share with you the many applications of the DILM, which, not only in my own experience but also in the experience of many colleagues across the nation, have revitalized language teaching.

First of all, the DILM brings to the classroom all the excitement of drama. Not new! will you say. the classroom as a stage has been a topic of reflexion and inspiration for generations of teachers. But these instructors always viewed themselves as the main performers, the stars. In the DILM the teacher is more like the stage director and its the students who become the performers.

One of the DILM axiom is that the presentation of material to be learned can be effective only in as much as it involves directly the students. Therefore, it offers many concrete steps to achieve such an involment.

1. In order to encourage his/her actors to play, the stage director does not stay in the wings: he is on stage, among his actors, transmitting along with his directions, his own energy and enthusiasm. By always moving about, the teacher animates the class and keeps the students alert.

2. The DILM emphasizes the importance of good eye contact and touch in order to encourage the expression of individual talents. Once again the master teacher, like the stage director strives to place the performers in the best possible light; he knows the value of "positive reinforcement" in order to get out of each person his/her "best performance.

3. The DILM master teacher is attentive to provide many rehearsals for the individual and the group. Presentation drills take up an important part of class time. Verifications drills are done only when these initial exercises have been accomplished to everyone's satisfaction.

4. All material is presented with drama, using students and their belongings as extras and props.

5. An inductive approach to grammar is favored. The student's participation is directed by well thought-out questions, and

individual performances are always reinforced by group performance such as choral repetitions.

6. A wealth of teaching aids is provided for the instructor and one will find an exhaustive list in the teacher's manual accompanying J. Rassias's text Départ-Arrivée. Their common denominator is providing for the involvement of as many students as possible.

Along with so many suggestions related to the effective presentation of material, the DILM has also much to offer in the area of motivation, both self-motivation and motivating students. The reason is that the DILM is built on a second axiom: the firm and proven belief that enthusiasm is the single most important factor in encouraging communication.

Upon receiving training both the Master teacher and the AT will be shown the many gestures of enthusiasm. After trying on which ones fit best his/her unique personality, the apprentice DILM instructor is encouraged to learn and rehearse them so well that these gestures indeed become an authentic part of his/her personality.

Success has always a price: the price paid by the DILM is a certain stereotyping: the method is sometimes perceived as fitting only "outgoing" or "naturally enthusiastic born-teachers". But the DILM never claimed that one can become enthusiastic by some kind of miracle; more realistically, it provides training and guidance for one wanting to learn to behave enthusiastically in the classroom.

The results of this approach are obvious: It is very hard, if not quite impossible to resist the mechanism set by such training: drawing irresistibly the enthusiasm from the outside (on which one has gained control through the mastery of the choreography) to the inside, it becomes a powerful self motivating force.

Motivating students is no longer seen as a formidable task, that requires a special gift or grace. Rather it becomes a daily task that can be accomplished by following these guide-lines:

Planning spontaneous disruptions. When preparing the lessons, the instructor plans several "disruptions" or distractions for the following purposes:

They provide students with a welcome break in the middle of a specially difficult exercise. This interruption may take the form of a physical activity, it may be a song, an anecdote, a game, use

of disguise. The only requirement is that the "distraction" must be of short duration.

2. They give students an opportunity to re-use creatively the material previously learned, for example a drill will be abruptly interrupted to ask a personal question: Paul forgot his billfold in the cafe. What about you, do you also forget things often? where? in the cafe? at the movie? A student may also be directed to ask such questions from classmates, or to make a quick opinion poll: the possibilities are endless, but again, these interruptions have to be planned, otherwise they just create havoc.

Facilitating communication. The teachers own enthusiasm facilitates communication in the classroom. Everyone inhibitions are significantly lowered for the following reasons:

1. Many rehearsals or choral repetitions are provided, eliminating the fear, on the part of the student, of totally "blowing" his/her chance of giving the right answer. Choosing an official prompter to come to the rescue is a practice which seems to encourage the slowest students to express themselves without feeling threatened.

2. Everyone knows exactly what's going on at all times, because the instructor expresses clearly his/her reactions, both through comments and body language. The student receives an instant and precise feedback, instead of being left confused either by a total lack of reaction or a very uncommitted remark.

Breathing emotional involvement into language acquisition. With his/her animation, the teacher creates in the classroom an environment which is no longer sterile. The learning process no longer takes place in an emotionless vacuum: there is laughter, play, indignation and praise in a DILM class.

All these guidelines or suggestions have for objective to create this illusion of spontaneity, which motivates students to get involved. But again, let's not forget that under such an appearance of spontaneity, the DILM class is very tightly organized. As John Rassias stressed so many times during the workshop I attended: "One should be totally prepared to be totally spontaneous". He also repeatedly warns those considering themselves born teachers of the precarious nature of their talent. I quote "Before the unexpected the "talented" are disconcerted and powerless. A method acquired is

a second nature, closer to the soul and containing the whole as the peel contains the orange and yet remains integral to it. This second nature makes him the master of all his resources--no matter what happens. Without methods of training, the teacher is subject to various psychological contre-temps which can derail the most powerful locomotive.

If acting techniques do anything, they liberate the individual; if the training is rigorous and the actor masterful, it will help liberate the audience."<sup>1</sup>

All that has been said so far suggest strongly the importance placed by the DILM on teacher training. Although the DILM provides ideas for the training of undergraduate drill instructors, I believe, from my experience as GTA's supervisor in my department, that they applied equally successfully to GTAs' training.

The DILM training starts with a 3-day workshop consisting of the following two parts: presentation of the philosophy behind the method, and intensive practice in the choreography.

1. Asserting one's self-image, and identification of role models  
Through a personal reflexion guided by both the questions from the master teacher and by the answers to the apprentice teachers, each person is helped to clarify his/her self-image as a teacher, in view of his/her successful and unsuccessful experiences. This exercise usually allows the group to reach the following conclusion:

The value of enthusiasm as a communication facilitator. Role-playing quickly demonstrates further the truthfulness of this statement.

2. Rudimentary drama lessons. During this active phase of the training, students-teachers practice in front of the group and the camera, the gestures and facial expressions they normally use to express pleasure and displeasure (from mild to strong), hesitation, inquiry. Constructive criticism helps each person refine these gestures until they are very evident without being offensive or aggressive.

Teaching the choreography. The DILM choreography is simple enough to be learned by anyone, yet sophisticated enough to prevent the boredom that a drill-sergeant routine would, no doubt, quickly generate. In the DILM clear-cut gestures (hands up for choral repetitions, pointing rapidly at individual students) are performed while

moving quickly among the students. They also happen on three levels: instructor standing up (if there is a need to demonstrate who is in charge, or simply during more formal grammar explanations); at eye-level with the students, a non-threatening, non-aggressive position, and below eye-level, used both to beg or encourage a distressed student. Establishing and maintaining eye-contact with individuals in the group is also emphasized and practiced.

Experiments with the DIIM, whether conducted with Peace Corps volunteers for whom J. Rassias initially developed his method, with students enrolled in small colleges and large state universities, with children, or with adults, have proven many times that the DIIM is a method which each of us can learn to use in order to revitalize language teaching. Far from being another gimmick or faddish trend, it stresses the importance of rigorous training and plain hard work. These two ingredients go a long way in providing the teacher with a positive self-image.

The object of this paper was to share with colleagues some ideas about the direction in which to apply one's effort to become a truly functional teacher. In conclusion, I shall quote again the words of John Rassias, because in my opinion they put the responsibility for dynamic language teaching where it belongs "on sophisticated equipment which do it all for you, but on the shoulders of all and each one of us language teachers. "The art of teaching must be developed from within the profession itself. . . .I believe that the key to success is near at hand, available to all teachers. That key, that precious and life opening key, is the self."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>John Rassias "The classroom as a stage". An excerpt from BREAKTHROUGH (ch VIII) to be published by Harper and Row and reprinted in the Ram's Horn, a publication of the Rassias Foundation.