

# Incorporating the Multiple Intelligences theory in language teaching: portfolios, projects and team teaching

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*This article makes a case for the possibility of incorporating the theory of Multiple Intelligences in our daily work as language teachers through the use of portfolios, project work and team teaching. After a short introduction of the MI theory, the article justifies the use of each of these techniques and shows their links with Gardner's MI theory. It also shows advantages and difficulties in their use and provides theoretical support from authors who have analyzed and experimented with these techniques and procedures.*

**Keywords:** *multiple intelligences, portfolios, project work, team teaching, autonomy, motivation, self-expression, collaboration.*

## ***La incorporación de la teoría de las inteligencias múltiples en la enseñanza de lenguas: portafolios, proyectos y enseñanza colaborativa***

*Este artículo argumenta a favor de la posibilidad de incorporar la teoría de las Inteligencias Múltiples en nuestro trabajo diario como profesores de lenguas a través del uso de portafolios, proyectos y el trabajo en equipo de los docentes. Luego de una corta introducción sobre la teoría de las inteligencias múltiples, el artículo justifica el uso de estos tres elementos y muestra sus nexos con las Inteligencias de Gardner. También muestra las ventajas y dificultades de su uso e incluye sustento teórico de autores que han analizado y experimentado estas técnicas y procedimientos.*

**Palabras clave:** *inteligencias múltiples, portafolios, proyectos, trabajo en equipo pedagógico, autonomía, motivación, expresión personal, colaboración.*

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***L'intégration de la théorie des intelligences multiples dans l'enseignement des langues: le portefeuille, les projets et l'enseignement collaboratif***

*Cet article suggère la possibilité d'intégrer la théorie des intelligences multiples dans notre travail quotidien de professeurs de langues, en faisant appel aux portefeuilles, aux projets et au travail en équipe d'enseignants. Après une brève introduction sur la théorie des intelligences multiples, nous justifions l'emploi des trois stratégies didactiques ainsi que leurs liens avec les intelligences de Gardner. Nous présentons également les avantages et les inconvénients de leur mise en pratique et les points de vue de plusieurs auteurs qui ont analysé et mis à l'épreuve ces techniques et procédures.*

**Mots clés :** *intelligences multiples, portefeuilles, projets, travail en équipe, autonomie, motivation, expression personnel, collaboration.*

## **1. Introduction**

A lot has been said about the MI theory and its use in the classroom; however, many times this use is reduced to solving MI tests or allowing students self-expression in a few tasks. The purpose of this article is to show how the application of the MI theory in language classrooms can transcend the activities mentioned above and enrich language teaching and language learning processes through the use of portfolios, project work and team teaching.

## **2. Multiple intelligences theory: What it is and what it claims**

The Multiple Intelligence theory proposed by Howard Gardner in 1983 claims that human beings possess different intelligences and that these account for differences in learning and in ways of demonstrating learning. Originally Gardner proposed seven intelligences, but in later work he added an eighth. Gardner defines intelligence as «the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings» (Gardner & Hatch 1989). If one accepts this

definition it follows that culture plays a very important role in the development and manifestation of these intelligences.

Intelligences are manifested in skills and in abilities to solve problems, to create and invent, and to overcome difficulties; these elements make them part of the personal touch that characterizes individuality. According to the current MI model (although Gardner keeps on exploring for possible additions) the eight intelligences are as follows:

- **Linguistic intelligence** includes the ability to use language effectively both orally and in writing. It is one of the traditionally recognized intelligences.
- **Logical/Mathematical intelligence** deals with the ability to use numbers effectively and reason well. It is the second of the traditionally recognized intelligences.
- **Visual/Spatial intelligence** is the ability to recognize form, space, color, line, and shape and to graphically represent visual and spatial ideas.
- **Bodily/Kinesthetic intelligence** is the ability to use the body to express ideas and feelings and to solve problems.
- **Musical intelligence** is the ability to recognize rhythm, pitch, and melody.
- **Naturalist intelligence** deals with the ability to recognize and classify plants, minerals, and animals.
- **Interpersonal intelligence**, one of the personal intelligences, includes the ability to understand another person's feelings, motivations, and intentions and to respond effectively.
- **Intrapersonal intelligence**, the second of the personal intelligences, deals with the ability to know about and understand oneself and recognize one's similarities to and differences from others.

The value of the MI theory is of paramount importance if we consider that the knowledge of oneself and others and respect for differences are crucial in everyday life. As Gardner puts it,

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It is of the utmost importance that we recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences, and all of the combinations of intelligences. We are all so different largely because we all have different combinations of intelligences. If we recognize this, I think we will have at least a better chance of dealing appropriately with the many problems we face in the world. (Gardner 1993:15)

In the context of the classroom, the MI theory offers a reasonable frame of reference to explain for variety of styles and strategies, talents, skills, different paces in learning and different ways of relating to others among our students. Also, it provides one more reason for advocating, promoting and implementing variety in our methodologies, class plans and activities for teaching and assessing. However, teachers should understand that the MI theory is not a fashion or a method on which to base our teaching. Christison (1999b, in Christison 2001:2) says that

Rather than functioning as a prescribed teaching method, curriculum, or technique, MI theory provides a way of understanding intelligence, which teachers can use as a guide for developing classroom activities that address multiple ways of learning and knowing.

When we decide to incorporate MI in our classes it is important that we present to the students a varied menu of activities and that our lessons include different styles of presentation to cater for their different intelligences; however, it is important to take into consideration the role of choice in these processes, not only in our input and methodology, but in student's productions. Students should be given the possibility of choosing different ways of expressing what they know and understand, of showing their strengths and weaknesses and doing class and homework the way they do best. This means that if we make the MI theory one of the guiding principles in our work, there is a place for using project work, tasks and portfolios. Team teaching is another tool to give our students

variety and to share our different and complementary skills, knowledge, ways of relating to students and, why not? Responsibility to do our job.

### **3. Why projects?**

Legutke and Thomas (1991:167) described projects as

a collection of a large variety of tasks, each with a specific objective, focusing on either topic information, or 'real-life' operational skills, or contact with native speakers, or practicing language in terms of structure, lexis, skill, or planning and monitoring the process.

Moss and van Duzer (1998:1) referred to project-based learning as «[...] an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop.» These two definitions of what working with projects in education mean, illustrate some of the characteristics that make project work a desirable alternative in language learning: variety of tasks, focus on information, contextualized learning and the possibility of using the language in problem – solving and product development.

There is ample discussion of projects, their characteristics, types, origins and pedagogic value (see Kilpatrick 1918, Legutke & Thomas 1991, Fried-Booth 1986, Jolibert 1995, Kagan & Kagan, 1998, Cárdenas, 2005, among others.) and, considering the purpose of this article, these aspects will not be discussed in detail herein. Instead, we would concentrate on presenting and expanding the reasons why projects are a good option in language learning and teaching, and how they contribute to the free expression and the manifestation of multiple intelligences in students.

The reason for using projects within this framework is to allow students possibilities to look at different aspects of a topic, to select activities and distribute responsibilities within members of the groups according to their interests, skills and intelligences

and, at the same time to build researching, communication, planning, negotiating, decision-making and implementation skills as a group. In this process, the development of autonomous behavior is fostered and students have an opportunity to show the product of their work the way they decide to do it.

Projects are in-depth studies of topics based on students' interests, on concepts, ideas, current issues, etc. They can also be proposed by teachers, but their implementation is an autonomous activity of individuals, of small or large groups. They usually take long, anything from a week to a year for completion, although we can carry out mini-projects, usually though guided work. Projects are developmental in nature and should allow for evolution, interaction, research, negotiation, monitoring and assessment of stages, etc. The more students get involved in project development with their own ideas, experiences, planning, distribution of tasks, ways of doing things and ways of showing creativity, diversity and strengths, the more identified they will feel with it.

The interdisciplinary nature of projects allows for the use of a wide variety of tasks, all of them including a rich selection and use of activities involving different intelligences. Problem solving, researching, predicting, sequencing, collecting and coding data, calculating and experimenting are just a few of the **logical-mathematical** activities used in projects. Likewise, activities like speaking, storytelling, retelling, discussing, debating, dramatizing, listening to others, writing journals and reports and presenting results either orally or in writing are examples of **verbal linguistic** work involved in project work. But these two traditionally recognized types of intelligence are not the only ones to have their place in projects; usually students or teachers make use of photographs, maps or graphs, paint, or illustrate aspects of the project through charts, graphic organizers or sketches. These cases involve manifestations of **visual-spatial** intelligence.

The **musical intelligence**, so common in our culture, is incorporated into project work with the use of background music in presentations, the use of songs, rhymes, playing

instruments or inviting someone for a rapping or singing show. **Bodily-Kinesthetic** intelligence, also characteristic of our culture, is manifested in Project work by using creative movement, dance, dramatizations, crafts, outings, physical activities, merging groups, creative room arrangement for presentations, etc. The **personal intelligences** (inter and intra personal) are present in almost any activity in which individual or interactive work is done. Brainstorming for ideas for the project, peer editing, cooperative and collaborative activities, sharing, group work, discussing, forming study groups, mediating in conflicts that may arise, are **interpersonal activities**, while individual study or research, personal response to what has been agreed, personal goal setting, journal writing, are all manifestations of **intrapersonal intelligence**. Finally, **naturalistic activities** such as meeting outside to design and plan the project, going on an observation walk, collecting samples of natural elements such as plants, leaves, flowers, rocks, insects, identifying species in a given habitat, sky watching, etc., may be used according to the topic of projects; these activities overcome the boundaries of the classroom and the school, which is usual practice in project work.

#### 4. Why portfolios?

Portfolios are another way of keeping record of learning processes, evaluating and exercising self-expression. A portfolio has been defined as

a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection. (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer 1991:60, in Bailey 1998:216)

Portfolios are excellent tools in language classes because they are more than files to gather samples of academic performance.

Although many of the references to portfolios stress their value as an alternative assessment tool (Bailey 1998, Common European Framework 2001, Freeman & Freeman 1991, among others), they can and should be used as a pedagogic tool, to collect and display samples of students' work, either in progress or completed, that show their typical and best work as part of or in response to class work and extra class assignments. They can contain their creativity, the product of their ability, the best ways they find to react to their learning experiences and the image they want to show, project or sell. They should also contain their reflections, justification for the selection of pieces of work they put in them and their self, peer or teacher's assessment. In the environment of freedom, choice, participation, responsibility, autonomy and right to be different of student-centered approaches, portfolios are an invaluable tool for self-expression, monitoring, communication and assessment. They also inform teachers about their own teaching processes and assist them in decision making concerning their planning, class activities and methodological procedures.

To be useful as elements for self and teacher monitoring of academic development, the language portfolios should be good record of the students' progress and performance. They need to be used for long periods of time and each piece the student selects to be a part of it should show some degree of difference, progression or a different way of manifesting understanding, application or creation. They should contain process and product, for a whole vision of the student's language learning evolution. Based on the contents of his/ her portfolio, the student should be able to construct the most accurate piece of self-assessment and, in like manner, the teacher should be able to construct a well-documented, fair and organized report on the students' learning processes. They can also be used for interactive assessment activities such as student-teacher conferences because they are the source for authentic assessment.

The fact that the students use the portfolios to collect their work –either self-selected pieces or those that respond to class criteria– make it a way of manifestation of Multiple Intelligences.



Portfolios contain not only written work; they may also hold audio and video recordings, reading records, drawings, project-linked art elements, photographs, self, peer and teacher's evaluations, among other elements. Students may be reacting to language work or expressing their learning and knowledge in several ways they choose to do it: a recorded poem or song, a piece of writing, a graphic composition, craft work, a video, etc. and all of this can be collected in the portfolio for sharing, analyzing and assessing.

Portfolios may be used to keep records of project development, combining in this way two possibilities of self-expression and manifestation of multiple intelligences. An illustration of this would be a project developed by a group of students, in which each person or sub-group has responsibilities and tasks. They have had the possibility of selecting the activities they feel more at ease with, using the intelligences that best express their learning processes and their creativity. Depending on their nature, accounts of these processes and products are kept in the portfolio. Also, sub-groups may be the product of free association of those students that share similar intelligences, or the conscious choice of the partner that has the complementary intelligence necessary to carry out and complete the tasks.

#### **4.1 The European Language Portfolio**

The European Community's goal of facilitating and regulating communications through foreign language teaching has been achieved through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF), a collective effort carried out during the decade of 1991 to 2001. The CEF is based on earlier work, such as the Threshold level (Alexander & von Ek 1975), Oskarsson's work on self-assessment and Holec's work on autonomy, both produced in the 1980s; it is now a well-known model used not only in Europe, but adapted and adopted by many countries. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is an instrument of self-development aimed at supporting the efforts of language users and learners, and documenting their processes

for report production. It shares with the CEF the levels of reference for language proficiency and has a well-defined structure.

#### **4.2 The learning portfolio**

Lenz (2004:23) states that the objectives of the ELP are to foster autonomy through the promotion of learning skills and to provide a pre-structured format to help language learners and users to keep track of the development of their proficiency, intercultural exchanges and knowledge. The portfolio has three parts: the language passport, which defines the linguistic identity of learners/users and their level of proficiency; the language biography, which documents the learners' language learning experiences, and finally the dossier, which contains what a portfolio usually holds. The ELP is used by all types of learners, younger and older, in schools and transnational enterprises. The Council of Europe has designed guidelines for its use, and accreditation is given to learners based on use following these guidelines.

In our context, learning portfolios could adopt some of these characteristics, in spite of the specific features of the ELP that tailor it to suit the European environment and situation. For example, in Europe or in Colombia, portfolios are student-centered, help in the development of autonomy on the part of the students and are a first-hand record of production and evolution of language learning. Apart from the dossier, which is the most common manifestation of portfolios, the self-assessment grids for separate skills or the individual self-assessment accounts, the intercultural experiences (although probably not as frequent as those of European learners), and the language learning biography are useful ways of record keeping, self-expression and assessment to both, Colombian and European learners. Besides, they show the owner's organization, style, preferred skills and natural inclination for some of the intelligences.

In like manner, although our conditions and context are very different from those of Europe, we, teachers could also benefit

from the use of a language portfolio similar to this. Of course, the regulations and guidelines could be different and there would not be formal accreditation based on its use; however, institutions, groups or classes could redefine criteria and contents and benefit from a well-organized instrument like this.

### **4.3 The Teaching Portfolio**

And how about trying portfolios ourselves? Several authors (Seldin 1991, Urbach 1992, Zubizarreta 1994, Bastidas 1996, among others) have proposed the use of teaching portfolios to carry out reflective teaching-learning, improve our teaching and self-evaluative skills and «practice what we preach». Seldin (1991, en Bastidas 1996:24) defines the teaching portfolio as

A factual description of a professor's major strengths and teaching achievements. It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance.

Bastidas (1996) mentions that teaching portfolios provide teachers with an opportunity for reflection and self-evaluation, he stresses the need for portfolios to be a developmental sample of teachers' career and not a simple episode in our teaching life.

In some countries teaching portfolios are used in the evaluation and promotion of teachers. They are also used as an element of decision making when awarding recognitions of excellence, to describe teachers evolution over an extended period of their career and, in general, to stimulate reflection and growth.

- A teaching portfolio, in its simplest version, should contain:
- a. a title and content page,
  - b. an introduction which describes the purpose and contents of the portfolio,
  - c. samples of the teacher's work, each with an explanation of why the pieces were included,

- d. video and audio recordings of their lessons with reflections on them,
- e. regular self-evaluations, either in the way of free written reflections or formats,
- f. students' evaluations,
- g. pictures of the teacher with her/his (memorable) groups, with a narration of the experience with that group, and
- h. an extensive evaluation if there have been any major changes in the person's teaching career or personal life that have influenced her/his work in a positive or negative way.

Other sophisticated versions of the teacher portfolio have been proposed (Hamm and Adams 1992, Murray, Bozzone and Zubizarreta in separate work in 1994, all in Bastidas 1996) and they include statements of teachers' beliefs, course program designs, evidence of professional development, evidence of personal achievements, and owners' reflections. Whether we decide to go for the simple or the complex version of a teaching portfolio, it will give us and others a first-hand, well-documented and fully reflective view of our career, both in the academic and in the more personal dimension. The best ways of self-expression we have, product of our multiple intelligences, will be visible in the document.

## **5. Why team-teaching?**

Roughly speaking, «team teaching involves a group of instructors working purposefully, regularly, and cooperatively to help a group of students learn» (Buckley 2000:4, in Stewart & Perry). This practice is not common occurrence in our context although it happens in some private institutions and some other times, a limited number of enthusiastic individuals make non-institutional efforts in this respect. Team teaching is also called collaborative teaching; the idea behind this collaboration is to work towards common goals, coordinating effort, and sharing responsibility and credit for the outcomes or products (Austin & Baldwin 1991).

Team teaching is a clear opportunity for using and strengthening the personal intelligences, both intra and

interpersonal because it allows teachers to share tasks, solve problems together and develop a trusting relationship with colleagues. To do this, they need to work not only on *relationships*, but on *themselves*. Some have established an analogy between team teaching and marriage, because in both cases two personalities, two (teaching) styles and sometimes even two philosophies (of teaching) are successfully merged; as in marriage, teachers have to work hard to overcome difficulties and work around their differences to accomplish a common goal. As Henry Ford (in Cromwell 2004) once said, «coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success.» This could be applied to both marriage and team teaching.

### **5.1 Types of team teaching**

In places where team teaching is a usual way of working (the USA, the UK, Japan, Hong Kong, among others) different models are clearly distinguished. There are different levels of coordination, shared responsibility and power, different ranks, time involvement and salaries involved.

Sandholtz (2000, in Stewart & Perry 2007) has identified three configurations for team teaching:

- a) two or more teachers loosely sharing responsibilities;
- b) team planning, but individual instruction; and
- c) joint planning, instruction, and evaluation of learning experiences.

The first two arrangements are not usually institutionally decided and the level of team work or collaboration may be low; planning may be done in group but teaching and evaluation may be separate; occasionally teachers meet to share comments on the development of activities and even more sporadically, they observe each other's classes. The third arrangement is usually promoted or even required by the institution. Courses are planned, taught and evaluated by the team; there are two teachers in the classroom at all times and the lead and support are exchanged in a balanced way. This kind of team teaching requires a lot more effort in all respects.

In Japan, Shimaoka and Yashiro (1990, in Macedo 2002) have identified four models of team teaching in English courses in which the organizational structure determines responsibilities and power.

- a) A native speaker is the leading, full time teacher (he may be a teacher with tenure or an assistant) and a non-native (Japanese) teacher assists. Complaints which are usually found in this model point at few opportunities of development for the non-native teacher.
- b) A foreign speaker (native teacher-Japanese) is the leader and the native speaker of English is the assistant. The most usual complaint in this case is that the native speaker of English feels like a tape-recorder :his skills are appreciated and used only when there is work on listening comprehension.
- c) Shared responsibility for the course between the native and the non-native teacher; they complement each other in the classroom. Usually the native teacher handles oral skills and the non-native teacher handles writing and reading. This model is mainly used in private schools. The drawback in this case is its high cost, which increases the budget.
- d) Shared responsibilities, roles and certifications; alternate or simultaneous teaching of all materials and skills. This is, in practice, more an idealized model than a reality.

Team teaching can be a very useful model for teacher development, especially in pre-service courses and in mentoring programs. Cross-disciplinary team teaching is mainly used in bilingual institutions.

There are some key issues for successful team teaching; at the macro level, the experience, knowledge, roles, expectations, attitudes and personality of team members may be put together in the right blend, to start with. After teams are set to work, planning, decision making, dialogue, trust and respect need all the attention to keep the right balance and succeed. Many times teachers will have to make adjustments to their individual teaching style to work properly with a partner.

Planning is critical in team teaching. It should not be distributed but shared; it helps in coordinating actions, in practicing reflective dialogue, in finding reasons to respect the capabilities of the other, in fostering cognitive and social growth. In the process of team teaching a clearer understanding of teaching should emerge and this should produce more coherent lesson plans. Interpersonal intelligence is put into practice here and it contributes to respect for and trust in each other. Linguistic-verbal intelligence and mathematical intelligence are put to work in dialogue, negotiation, reflection, critical and rational decision making.

### **5.2 Advantages of team-teaching**

Practitioners of team teaching in different parts of the world have mentioned what in their experience have been gains from the process. The following section summarizes some of the obvious advantages of team teaching and some of the opinions of those who have practiced it.

### **5.3 For the students**

They benefit from the attention of two teachers; team teaching enriches their perspectives and language experience; it models cooperative behaviors, something we expect more and more to find in our classrooms. In elementary and high school, team teaching may help in the relationships of children and teachers because the former will have two listening ears for their worries and problems .

### **5.4 For teachers**

Team teachers are resources for one another, models to observe, colleagues to consult. Sometimes they complement each other, some others times one supports the other. This contributes to their understanding of themselves as teachers, and to an increased ability to expose, express and examine ideas. They combine strengths for better results. Teachers can further develop and enhance their teaching techniques by learning from each other.

Team teaching gives teachers an opportunity for heightened reflection; in this process each of them recognizes and understands his/her own tacit knowledge. Each of the partners wants to do her/his best and this stimulates each one's creativity and level of demand on their own work.

At the elementary and high school levels, team teaching may help teachers in their relations with parents.

### **5.5 Difficulties of team teaching**

Perhaps the two aspects that are the greatest sources of difficulties in team teaching are time management, and unresolved professional differences between colleagues. Teachers have to find time to brainstorm, analyze, discuss, decide, plan, prepare and evaluate together. These activities will surely take more than the time regularly scheduled for them at school and their willingness to continue working outside school is not always enough for them to be completed. As for unresolved differences, they accumulate and, at some point can jeopardize partnerships.

Some other difficulties that may contribute to the generation of tension, disappointment and desire to quit are different working rhythms, the realization that the partnership is ineffective, and the impossibility to dissolve it without disturbing the normal teaching processes.

Making team teaching work: Cromwell (2004) offers the following teaming tips collected from members of teaching teams she and her research partners talked with:

- Make the development of the team a top priority. Don't just assume the team will work well together; work on making the group function at the top of its game.
- Set clear goals for the team, and then ensure its activities lead to those goals.
- Communicate clearly and honestly to survive and grow stronger from conflict.
- Honor individual and team success.
- Assume responsibility for assigned roles.



- Be prepared for team discussions and work.

Other aspects to take into account include the following:

- Open, honest discussion, within the institutions, of the possibilities offered by team teaching.
- An initial orientation to team teachers.

As individuals trying to make team teaching a real option:

- Work out to solve frictions and differences as soon as they appear.
- Learn to compromise and negotiate.
- Exercise respect and recognition of the contributions of partners.
- Strengthen a good friendship, to have more chances of achieving a good partnership.
- Use an open, but non-aggressive style of communication.
- Maintain a good sense of humor.
- Try to develop a thick skin (accept criticism).

## **6. By way of conclusion**

Projects, portfolios and team-teaching have been proposed as ways to vary and enrich our students' learning processes, to enhance our teaching and to include and manifest multiple intelligences in language learning and teaching processes. Because of their student-centered, integrative and self-expressive nature, projects and portfolios allow the discovery, unfolding and exposure of personal ways to learn, interact and show learning. These facts make them first-rate elements in allowing the use of multiple intelligences. As for team-teaching, it brings together the best of two or more teachers that decide to work in close collaboration. Their strong skills, strategies and intelligences will complement each other's work, producing the best results for their students' benefit and for their own personal and professional growth and fulfillment.

There is much more to be said about the three aspects of teaching and learning presented in this paper, and I would be very pleased if teachers found it stimulating enough to learn more about these approaches and tools and decided to try them or make a more regular use of them in your courses. We need practices that help us change schools and teaching in the way that best caters to the needs of our students. We also need practices that help us fulfill the requirements of the present times, while they contribute to our personal satisfaction and growth. We need pedagogy which is flexible, interesting, revitalizing and all inclusive. We need practices to reduce the isolation of teachers and the lack of interest of the students. Practices that allow us to share, be in touch with others and show what we know and what we have in ways that are appropriate for us will lead to more satisfying and, hopefully, more effective processes in language teaching.

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