

Stress Less for Better Success in International SL Education

Dr Stanley W Theron.

Academic Dean, PolyEthnic Institute of Studies, P O Box 65467, Mairangi Bay NZ swtheron@xtra.co.nz

A basic premise of this paper is that stress experienced is in an inverse ratio to learning outcomes. Practically applied it means that in any learning situation – especially SL situations – there should be subjective and objective awareness of the stress factor, continuing attention, assessment, alleviation and addressing of stress-producing factors to optimise outcomes. These aspects should be both preventative as well as therapeutic when stress situation arise.

To facilitate the structure of this presentation, a few basic axioms are to be noted before the main sections are discussed.

Axioms based on the previous research and taken as basis for practical application

- All learning, but especially language learning and SL learning, is optimised by stress-debriefing approaches on every level.
Many accelerated language-learning methodologies have made use of one or more aspects of the teaching methods of Lozanov (1979), cf. Botha (1989). One vital aspect that is largely neglected is that his method was developed for stress debriefing of psychiatric patients.
- Stress in SL learning is in inverse ration to positive outcomes. Danger, fear and stress create brainwaves that optimise “fight/flee” reactions but do not place one in a state of mind to peacefully peruse, manipulate and assimilate information. Brainwave research and technology have opened a vast knowledge of states which should be utilised optimally.
- Stress may be caused by internal or external sources with respect to both the learner and the tutor. Many educational situations are planned, built and suited to the needs of management, business, budget, hopefully of tutors and students too. This does not optimise learning.
- Respect for basic andragogic principles debriefs stress and optimises learning. More than one adult SL school have not taken sufficient account of the many findings even of “father of andragogy”, Malcolm Knowles (1970) who emphasised the great differences between child and adult learning. More cooperative planning and tuition in the light of student needs, interests and objectives in imperative.
- Language in normal humans is an all-embracing, multifaceted ability whereby the individual “objectifies”, understands and manipulates her/his whole internal and external world. To optimise language acquisition a student should at an early stage “take personal possession” of his/her new language and be given freedom to utilise that language though imperfectly.

- Language and languages are addressed to and placed in different sections of the brain – optimised learning and SL learning makes use of as many portals, addresses and levels in the brain as are practical for a given situation. In a later section these aspects are to be detailed.
- Learning and tutoring methods should be relaxing or stress debriefing. Overly authoritative and disciplinary methods inspire fear, the worst enemy of fluency (see Theron, 2006 on emotional laryngitis). Perfectionism and “imperialistic attitudes” by native speakers expecting perfection are further enemies of optimising fluency and language acquisition.
- International students run greater risks that could aggravate stress levels.
- Consequently education establishments and tutors should know
 - How to be aware of potential and actual stressful situations and experiences,
 - How to assess and address these levels in general, and
 - How to assess and address these levels therapeutically.
- Intrinsic motivation especially in adults optimises learning to a greater extent than in the case of younger learners.
- Sense, Joy, Hope and Serenity Closely Correlated to Optimum Human Functioning in general, in learning and language and ESOL learning in particular.

Some of these axioms will now be applied more specifically and practically to the SL learner situation, namely

- Stress debriefing and optimising SL language learning,
- Positive Motivation and optimising SL language learning,
- Toward a Comprehensive Methodology in optimising SL language learning.

Stress debriefing and optimising SL language learning

If stress-debriefing or relaxed learning and optimised learning are two sides of the same coin, it is self-evident that tutor and student should be aware of the negative effect of higher stress levels on optimised learning, as well as methods of both ongoing and crisis-time debriefing of stress, stated positively - of keeping an optimum level of relaxed learning circumstances and attitudes.

- **A variety of circumstances calling for stress debriefing**
 - At registration and placement – this has been discussed in the previous paper (Theron, 2006).
 - In casual and consultative exchanges staff and especially tutors should be vigilant (cf. “Awareness” *infra*) to pick up any signs of stress like absence, illness, change in patterns of behaviour, rowdiness, attention seeking, emotional upsets, signs of withdrawal and isolation, nervousness, etc.

A truism of pedagogy is also applicable here.

- In class and learning situations – an acknowledged principle in stress debriefing is that stress, trauma, anxiety are not confined to the individual but immediately influence the immediate societal environment. At the personal level confrontation creates confrontation, and these stress patterns eddy out in concentric circles to the supporting parties in the environment.

It is to be recommended that both teaching and administrative staff be versed in a degree of stress-awareness, stress-assessment and of addressing, defusing or debriefing stress.

- Assessing, alleviating and addressing stress *in situ and referring students and staff for therapy*

Referral for therapy is often non-existent in some quarters, in others referral is only considered in extreme crises and cases. Prohibitive factors could be finance or the “shame” factor dependent on the cultural or sub-cultural taboo attributed to counseling and therapy.

Some educational establishments have awoken to the need of having a trained counselor on the staff but often waiting for students or staff members to go for consultation. This is step in the right direction but “clients” are often too shy or ashamed to seek aid until crisis level approach.

A second step would be to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust within which tutor- or student-initiated referral for counseling is part of an optimising learning atmosphere and situation. This could be facilitated by educational establishments being less “professionally stilted” and “regulation regulated” and developing something akin to an extended family situation where stress levels can be absorbed or ameliorated in a more natural manner and where referrals would just be an extension of the preliminary stress alleviating conversation with the knowledgeable tutor or staff member.

The PolyEthnic Institute of Studies is situated in the heart of Pasifika and especially Samoan communities in Manukau City. Confronted with a grave difficulty of lack in student retention, completion and qualification, they were studying how to wed or integrate Pasifika traditionalism to Western ways of learning. One of their solutions was the development of an *aiga* or “family” approach where personal and other difficulties are not “regulated” but addressed as soon as practicable..

Although staff and students come from a dozen or more denominations their similar religious and value-forming backgrounds have made the acceptance of counseling from knowledgeable pastors and counselors an overall accepted *modus vivendi*.

A further step would be to train all staff members in the basics of stress awareness and amelioration, as well how to assess and address stress levels. Staff is constantly reminded of a the basic educational fun song: “We want everybody to be happy ... “

An example of a simplified method to assess and address stress

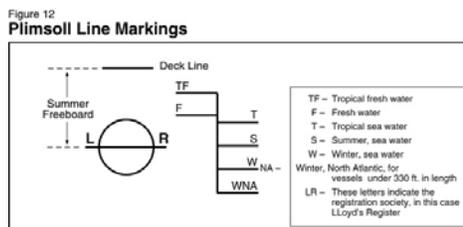
As outlined in Theron, 2006 the following practical advice as to reducing stress levels and optimising learning outcomes is eclectically based on findings and practice of counselors such as Frankl (1972, 1973) in his search to find and give meaning to life, Heimler and his emphasis on balancing workload with life exuberance and satisfaction, Rogers (1951, cf. Parrish, 1970) and his client-centred therapy, Albert Ellis and Paul Hauck with his rational approach to therapy (cf. Hauck, 1990), Lozanov (1979, cf Botha, 1989) and others with their stress-less learning approaches.

I have reduced their emphases to two simple lectures based especially on Frankl (1972, 1973) and Heimler with the popular title “Stan’s Storm Ship” and “Stan’s Seesaw” (from unpublished seminars, 1991 originally presented to community and church counselors in Africa.

➤ “Stan’s Storm Ship” SSS “PACIFICA”



1. Each ship has a safety marker, the International Load Line or Plimsoll mark (National Defense University, 1998):



Since 1875 British and later all international shipping had to adhere to the load markings as depicted on this scale which takes variations in ocean circumstances and weather into account. Non-adherence could have fatal results.

Acute stress levels may have dire physical, mental, emotional and spiritual consequences. All illnesses have a stress component either as one of the contributing causes of the illness or as an aggravating factor. These factors have a dampening effect on learning, but stress *per se* has a direct influence on brain function with respect to learning. High stress levels are a very negative factor regarding optimised learning.

Stress or load needs to be measured and alleviated before the critical level has been reached. Stress levels fluctuate according to internal and external factors, the most important being “stress loads” and “personal buoyancy”.

2. These factors are illustrated in the SSS “Pacifica” where each load symbol and each buoyancy symbol represents feelings that one has with respect to various factors that have been identified by the above quoted scholars.
3. On the “Pacifica” the main factors that have been included are: health, employment, finance, family, friends, sex, drug dependency (cf. Heimler’s measurement of actual and present feelings) and sense, goals, planning, aspirations, serenity (cf. Frankl and others).
4. A simple application is to measure oneself as to personal buoyancy versus stress levels on a double happy/unhappy scale of 1 to 5 but a further ? in 2nd column for every 3 registered as Heimler has found that ambivalence is itself a great source of stress and anxiety:

I feel the following degree of satisfaction when I THINK about my	?	I feel the following degree of dissatisfaction when I THINK about my	?
Health, safety, nutrition		Health, safety, nutrition	
Family (and extended family)		Family (and extended family)	
Marriage, partnership and sex		Marriage, partnership and sex	
Finance		Finance	
Employment		Employment	
Use of drugs		Use of drugs	
Total feelings of buoyancy [A]		Total feelings of overload	
I feel the following degree of satisfaction when I THINK about	?	I feel the following degree of dissatisfaction when I THINK about my	?
my Religious life		my Religious life	
my Scale of values		my Scale of values	

my Hope for future success		my Hope for future success		
my Goals and successes attained		my Goals and successes attained		
my life as having and giving sense to life		my life as having and giving sense to life		
my Conscience, mistakes and failures in life		my Conscience, mistakes and failures in life		
Total feelings of buoyancy [B]		Total feelings of overload [B]		
Grand total A + B		Grand total A + B		

Clients should be respected, recognised and treated in a personalistic, individualistic, holistic and totalistic manner and leeway made for each person's unique environment for which leeway should be made.

5. Non-professional but very useful self or tutor-assessment (professional assessment may utilise more detailed and intricate scales like the full Heimler scale.

6. How to use this scale:
 - a. "A" could score an impossible maximum of 30 positives and 30 negatives and 6 "?"s" on each account.
 "B" could score an impossible maximum of 30 positives and 30 negatives and 6 "?"s" on each account, giving a Grand total maximum of 60 positives and 60 negatives and 12 "?"s" on each account.
 - b. The most important criteria however are the following:
 - The relation between "A" and "B" totals. To go about one's daily tasks (even if "B" is "loaded") is to have sufficient surplus on the "A" side. The nearer they tend toward a balance the more important that professional aid should be sought.
 - The "?"s" point toward ambivalence and uncertainty, which are stressful, factors in themselves, and add to the "B" factors.

7. Non-professional but very useful self or tutor-alleviation of stress.
 An additional, aggravating aspect of "B" is stressing about one's stress and all the related "sense-questions" of "why". Any good, understandable assessment should identify the most important areas of dissatisfaction and stress. This in itself lifts the "fogs of uncertainty" that surround an embattled "ship of life".

8. More refined analysis and utilisation of the stress meter in stress alleviation or debriefing.

- a. The client can decide what areas of greatest stress should be addressed immediately and rationally find alleviation if not full solutions. By prioritising analysed factors one can alleviate, neutralize or erase the stress-component .
- b. Prioritising should alleviate stress because attention can be given to one aspect at a time and change can be monitored immediately.
- c. The client can see where the greatest joy-producing factors are and cultivate them carefully to add “buoyancy”.
- d. The client should analyse and try to understand and eliminate the “?’s”.

These factors can however also be applied to the following section regarding motivation and methodology in optimising learning

Positive Motivation and “Recreation” in and Optimising of SL language learning as a basis toward a more comprehensive methodology to optimise adult SL learning

1. Overall emphasis on enjoying relaxed learning.

In the Heimler approach satisfaction and joy are emphasised, Lozanov (1979) and others have emphasised “play” in their methodology of learning. In this respect and in many modern applications games, puzzles, role-play, etc. have become a normal part of teaching repertoire.

In its meaning “recreation” could include relaxation, change of menu and even recuperating to take up the daily tasks again with renewed strength and fervour.

In recent times however, it has been positively applied to study preferences. Lozanov (1979) and others have applied this concept by way of relaxed learning to optimise or accelerate learning of all learners, and with an eye to better retention.

2. Hitting the “Bull’s eye”.

Many years ago in his “Psychology applied” George Crane (Crane, 1952) his recurrent theme was “hitting the bull’s eye”, meaning that the basic human drives should be most concretely be exploited to optimise attention, interest and motivation. In this paper it is agreed that the more animal-like instincts absolutised by early behaviourists should be included in the list of motivators, but in keeping with the previously discussed stress debriefing the higher purely human drives be more fully utilised in especially adult learning and tutoring. In the previous table the [A] factors are more basic than the [B] factors but just as important.

- Seeing and giving meaning to life is related to immediate, intermediate and longterm goals. At registration and welcome adult students need to have a set of clear but concrete and obtainable goals.
- Making and giving sense to life is basic in logotherapeutic thinking and counseling (Frankl 1972, 1973). Adult learners need to understand the detail and the large picture (cf. “Gestalt psychology”) of both the immediate learning matter and how it fits their immediate and ultimate needs and goals.

- Humans have higher than basic needs and drives. The basic needs have to be addressed and taken care of, but each individual has a set up values based on internalised culture and religion. Optimal learning requires that the adult learner find development and maybe acceptable moderation of the personal set of values.
- Adults need concrete goals but also have the ability over against younger learners to delay present fulfillment with an eye to reaching greater and more final goals. This could be related to a neglected “art” first identified and described in a negative way by later Freudian psychoanalytic thinking and counseling, namely “sublimation”. Negatively in the sense that suppression or sublimation of basic especially sexual drives are harmful and cause negative complexes. The other side of the coin is the adult ability to consciously delay or even suppress basic needs with an eye to more important possibilities. Of these many illustrations may be given.
- The category of hope. After the hopelessness and absurdity of the great XXth century wars, philosophers like the atheistic communistic E. Bloch derided Christians that they had lost the category of hope. On the other hand theologians like Moltmann (1964 cf. Buhri, 1972) and Pannenburg (1981 cf. Buhri, 1972) became influential in the religious thinking of the undeveloped nations with the theologies of hope. All humans – especially adults – must to be able to sacrifice and persevere by seeing the light of hope at the end of the tunnel. In adult tuition this perspective and active encouragement is an oft-forgotten perspective in the pursuit of academic excellence. Adult and International learning situations should facilitate ways to help the student keep perspective, find ways of solving personal and academic problems and persevere to success.
- The categories of time and space. It is taken for granted that humans are limited by time and space, yet these aspects as individual needs are often neglected in adult education.
 - Attention is usually given to an optimal physical learning environment but individuals have varying needs that should be taken into account by interaction with the students themselves.
 - Often attention is only given to the time factor as far as the length of course, hours of attendance, etc. are concerned. Important aspects like learning curves, utilisation of time *per se* and of time aspects are often ignored. These aspects need further research and application.
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- The Human Need of Serenity especially in Learning Situations. The older universities of Europe show the sense of this need in the many notices “SILENTIUM”. In recent research on liminal and subliminal learning is has become evident that silence or absence of distracting factors is not the only criterion. In a holistic sense optimised learning needs the student to find “study serenity” which includes both the internal and external world but which may be optimised by certain levels of music or peripheral visual colour, charts, etc.

For popular presentation to staff and students at the PolyEthnic Institute of Studies these factors have been portrayed as *Stan’s seven star students* (Theron, 2004). Many aspects of the previous

discussion have been incorporated in this fun song set to the tune of “Men of Harlech”. This is also an illustrated example of using better memorising techniques.

Stan’s Seven Stars and W.A.L.L.M.A.P.S.

STAN'S SEVEN STAR STUDENTS

Star's the man that lives from learning,
to new knowledge always turning,
fire of sense and hope keeps burning –
he expects success.
Study stars are SEVEN,
place them in your heaven:
and when you know to goals you go,
you'll find your learning fun and great
adventure – venture!
Upward onward – study will lead us
for our land and people who now need
us.
God of knowledge surely leads us:
We must have success.

(Follow his W.A.L.L.M.A.P.S)

- ★ WHY & WHAT I WANT AND WILL = MOTIVATION
- ★ ADULTS AGREE & ACT AUTONOMOUSLY
- ★ LEARNING TO L ME – LIVING TO LEARN
- ★ MULTI- MAXI L EARNING
- ★ ADDICTED TO L EARNING NOT TO DRUGS
- ★ PLAN, PROGRAMME, PERSEVERE
- ★ STRESS LESS, LEARN & LIVE WITH JOY

The ancient ingenious ancient and less ancient Pasifika and Maoris depicted by Captain Cook as the best mariners in the world, followed STAR PATHS. PolyEthnic Institute students are urged to find and follow the best path for their successful studies.

A further introductory week is then dedicated to the central star of “Multi-Maxi Learning” about which a brief discussion follows.

Toward a Comprehensive Methodology regarding Optimising SL language learning

Based on the foregoing reasoning in this and Theron, 2006 general and more specific aspects of methodology and applications have been developed.

- A more general overview may be spelled out in the acronym THORP – “Totalisticising”, Holisticising”, “Optimising”, “Revitalising”, “Personally Individualising” the learning environment, subject matter and specific learning/tutoring methods, which will be spelled out in a later report.
- In brief this means:

- “Totalistic”. Taking the total world and worldview of the student into account as the knowledge pool that is the base and basis of further learning that should enhance further learning even when it is modified to integrate new insights and activate creativity.
 - “Holistic”. Taking the whole person seriously as a human being with all its faculties, personal traits of thinking, feeling, experiencing as well as cluster of ideas, values, spirituality, etc.
 - “Optimising”. Making optimal use and optimising the use of the individual’s physical, social and individual capabilities. This is over against the perfectionist ideal of maximizing, of attaining 100%. For example, if an individual utilises 10% of brain function and learns how to use a further 5%, there could be 50% improvement!
 - “Revitalising” is used to replace “repetition” which general means rote learning or repetition of unrelated sentences, whereas “revitalization: refers to experiencing the subject matter in more ways than one which is related to fun and to addressing more sectors of the brain, again optimising learning, or making SWOT mean “study with-out threats and trauma!”
 - “Personalising” is recognising, addressing and optimising the human individual and unique person of each specific learner.
- “Multi-techniques”. More specifically this methodology uses the terms “multiportal”, “multi-level”, “multi-method” learning that may be briefly defined as follows:
- “Multi-portal” means using as many entrances to the individual’s mind as possible and/or specifically practical and optimising.
 - “Multi-level” has to do with utilising and addressing as many aspects of brain-function and specifically practical and optimising.
 - “Multi-method” should speak for itself but is briefly discussed in the final section that is limited to a check-list of methods quoted from an in-house staff seminar, July 2007 (Theron, 2007)

“In the table below these aspects have been spelled out in various ways with relevant spaces to check which have been utilised by the tutor in the specific lecture or lesson. The spaces relevant to passive and active learning refer to the degree of autonomous adult learning in the specific presentation. In andragogy the principle of autonomous learning is of utmost importance. A lack of check marks in the last three columns could point to impoverished adult guidance.

	Aspects of MULTI- learning 50+ aspects listed, when related to each other and to passive/active applications = 100+	Passive tutor centred	ACTIVE –student centred		
			1	2	3
		Perceive	Rework	Act	Create

				or utilise	
1	Taking learner’s immediate and ultimate goals and choices into consideration				
2	Taking concrete adult expectations and choices seriously				
3	Taking present needs, wants, wishes into consideration				
4	Taking basic human drives into consideration – hunger, thirst, sex, safety, fears, etc				
5.	Taking higher human drives into consideration – consciousness of self: image, respect, confidence, aspirations, etc.				
6.	Taking seriously the adult’s truth orientation				
7	Taking seriously the adult’s cultural orientation and situation				
8	Taking seriously adult learner’s religious, ethical and aesthetical values				
9	Taking learning needs of a safe, tranquil, stress-free and optimising environment into consideration				
10	Taking teaching need of an adult friendly educative environment into consideration				
11	General explanations				
12	Ask questions and “leading questions” – Socratic method – logic				
13	Students ask questions				
14	Students work together in pairs or groups				
15	Asking for explanation of difficulties				
16	Grammar explanation – logic				
17	Word structure explanation – logic				

18	Rote learning				
19	Explaining idiomatic phrases and phrasing				
20	Explaining things in Samoan – logic				
21	See, discuss, make diagrams – logic				
22	See, discuss, make pictures				
23	Use and variation of colour and black and white				
24	Use and variation of size and intensity				
25	Use and variation of sound volume and intensity				
26	See, discuss, make acronyms, “ass bridges”				
27	See, resolve, discuss, make puzzles – logic				
25	See, discuss, make handouts				
26	Students discuss or practice verbally				
27	Reading				
28	Writing				
29	Hear, read, write, act, make rhymes, alliteration, assonance, word-play, poetry				
30	Hear, read, write, act, make, sing songs				
31	Hear, read, write, act, make stories				
32	Hear, read, write, act, make smaller and larger metaphors, symbols, allegories, etc				
33	Skim, scan, summarise written article/ story				
34	Hear, summarise spoken article/ story				
35	Class discussions – for/against –new ideas				
36	Using past experience and existing knowledge – evaluating, classifying, modifying, integrating, associating, creating				
37	Post or publish student work				

38	Correct each other's mistakes				
39	Read work, correct and help student to understand <u>mistakes</u>				
40	Receive handouts: pictures, diagrams, exercises and explanations				
41	Write on the white board				
42	Hear, find, play, make jokes				
43	Having and creating an atmosphere of fun and joy				
44	Create own acting/ play				
45	Positive reaction to efforts				
46	Peers react positively to efforts				
47	Work posted (publicly)				
48	Working from whole to detail and visa versa				
49	Work discussed critically – positive/negative				
50	Using multilevel brain functions				
51	Sub-liminal & liminal backgrounding				
52	Individualising and personalising				
53	Simultaneously multi-porting information to address various brain sectors				
54	Being aware of stress factors				
55	Assessing and addressing stress factors at various levels				
56	Optimising the timing and speed of stimuli				
57	Optimising revisiting/reviewing by taking the learning curve seriously				

Further Perspectives

“Science is an ever opening field of endeavour to open further vista's of verified knowledge”. “To the making of books there is no end”. The humble foregoing endeavour must be pursued in the light of ongoing research and has already outlined fields for further elaboration. Additionally the staff of the Institute is co-operating in the following projects where other participants would be more than welcome

- Pasifika Sino research regarding traditional and modern learning techniques and methods. Utilising the best out of each realm and ways of integrating both into more optimising learning methods.
- How to optimally introduce these findings and those of this paper to neophytes – being either new International Student arrivals or learners with very little language or other background.
- Using these and modern insights to assist non-Western learners to prepare themselves for study at Western tertiary institutions and universities.

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