*“It’s time we all understood that… first and second language are the same field. That English as a foreign language, English as a second language, foreign language instruction is the same field and the same principals hold for both. And I’ve come to the conclusion that communication in general is our field.” - Stephen Krashen*

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# To gain some insight and perspective on Krashen’s idea of communication unifying all language approaches, I turned to the voices of my colleagues in our Curriculum and Instruction for Teaching English Language Learners class. Each student wrote a descriptive paragraph after they had watched the video “Prof. Stephen Krashen talks about comprehensible input, explicit teaching methods ... and much more!” (<http://www.joanwink.com/latest/week-6-2-16-krashen-pulls-it-all-together-in-25-minutes/>). I have selected the following summary statements from my colleague’s summaries of this video, focusing specifically on what they had to say about communication.

**Katelynn:**

“We model for students what appropriate conversations looks and sounds like with peers, we encourage them to read, write, and think deeply, we teach them the ‘dialogue’ of math. All these communication skills will help them be successful and independent adults.”

**Keeley**

“Loving communication is so important in the classroom, but I think Krashen’s explanation of the politics that go into our education policies has lot to do with communication as well.”

**Sarah:**

“It shows that if you communicate long enough with anyone they will understand you and communicate back.”

**Katie:**

“…literacy and language acquisition are essentially the same field and that the concepts found within those two fields can be applied to language acquisition bilingual education, foreign language education, language arts, etc.”

“Once in this type of environment [safe and loving] students will be receptive to communication and language acquisition /literacy can occur.”

**Amanda:**

“I think the story of Cosmo is amazing and supports the idea that conversation/communication, love on many different levels, and affection are key to being successful at anything including language acquisition.”

**Kim:**

“…it should be our goal as teachers to provide our students with as many tools and skills as possible to help them communicate successfully.”

**Monique:**

“Since reading is a form of communication-with the author and with the broader social context-it makes a lot of sense that free reading is so impactful in language acquisition among other things.”

**Angel:**

In order for comprehensible output to occur our students need ample opportunities to read. This does not include grammar or explicit teaching of skills but ‘actual independent reading’.”

**Jill:**

“Although the focus of this class has been teaching the English language to students as a second language, there is no difference between ELL, slower learners, poverty students and even the ‘average’ or accelerated learners, because no two students are alike. Teacher content with meaning and comprehensible input will benefit all students.”

**Lucy:**

“Communication is the key and comprehensible input with a low affective filter pull all the learning together in the fields of bilingual education, language arts, literacy, foreign language, and language acquisition.”

Most of my classmates are experienced educators who know what it takes to successfully break through to their students. Many of their comments are directed toward communicating in a loving fashion while others focused more on communicating through literacy and academics but their above comments leave no question: meaningful, comprehensible communication in many forms are keys to successfully reaching and education our students. The broader question would be what does successful communication look like?

Webster’s dictionary defines communication as “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else”. This one definition contains a multitude of information for teachers to break apart and inspect, piece by piece in order to analyze and reflect upon the communication that takes place in their classroom.

**Re-thinking Krashen**

 After watching the Krashen video, and then reading and summarizing my colleagues’ comments, I then went back to re-watch and re-think the Krashen video. This time, I was struck with these 3 concepts, which I will take forward in my own teaching and learning:

 **1. Communication is a two-way street.** Proper communication requires two or more participants. An invested teacher will allow communication to go both ways- with students reacting and responding to information from the teacher and more importantly, the teacher reacting and responding to information from the students. As determined in the definition from Webster’s, communication can take place through “…words, sounds, signs, or behaviors…”. We must allow our students many opportunities to speak because, as Wayne E. Wright points out “ …speaking can be an indirect aid to language acquisition. Speaking results in conversation, and what the other person says is an excellent source of comprehensible input” (Write, pp. 52-53). We must also pay attention to how our students are responding to our teaching, both verbally and non-verbally, and allow that communication to drive our instruction. When we communicate with our students, we will find out what is meaningful to them. When we find out what is meaningful to them, we can connect that with their learning.

 **2. Communication is what humanizes education.** Without proper communication, education easily becomes little more than transmission of facts and information for students to memorize and regurgitate and ultimately forget when the information is no longer useful to them. Unfortunately, this is the experience of many of today’s students. This approach to teaching hardly differs from plugging information into a computer. This approach does not take into account that every student is human and has a unique set of needs to be met in the classroom to effectively teach. Each student will have a particular learning style, a particular set of strengths and challenges, and a particular pace at which they learn, develop and mature. The only way to effectively educate is to embrace the humanity of our students.

 **3. Communication isn’t only for the classroom.** In today’s world of government mandates in education, many teachers feel their hand is being forced in their classrooms. How can we effectively teach our students and communicate with our students when we are told what to and how to teach and told we are failing when students don’t reach benchmarks determined by people who have never worked with these students? The people who have brought forth mandates don’t know our students like we do and they don’t understand the strengths, challenges and needs each student brings to the classroom on a daily basis. There is no easy answer to the many issues brought about by this controversial topic, but I feel the answer lies in the act of communication. As my classmate, Keeley, states, “Loving communication is so important in the classroom, but I think Krashen’s explanation of the politics that go into our education policies has lot to do with communication as well.”

**The Five Hypotheses and *Mamas, Meaning, and Motivation***

 Next, I rethought Krashen’s famed five hypotheses:

* the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis,
* the Monitor hypothesis,
* the Input hypothesis,
* the Natural Order hypothesis,
* and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

and I re-read and re-watched the story of “Mamas, Meaning, and Motivation” (<http://www.joanwink.com/store/teaching-passionately/teaching-passionately-mamas-meaning-and-motivation/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dcN2T5j_dM&feature=youtu.be>) in which Joan Wink tells her own story of the five hypotheses.

 This made me realize that as I go forward in my own teaching and learning, I need to see my students for the humans that they are. As Dr. Joan Wink so eloquently explains in her book *Teaching Passionately: What’s Love Got to Do with It?*, language acquisition, and learning in general, is a process (Wink, pp.102-104). When we use this frame of mind and communicate following Krashen’s five hypotheses, we will give our students the freedom to learn. We will create an environment where are students feel comfortable to lower their affective filter, make mistakes, and allow themselves to acquire language and new information naturally. I think Krashen sums this up best when he states “The best methods are therefore those that “supply ‘comprehensible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production”.

As educators, much, if not all, of our job is about communication. Through the effective communication as outlined by Krashen in the video **Prof. Stephen Krashen talks about comprehensible input, explicit teaching methods ... and much more!” (**[**http://www.joanwink.com/latest/week-6-2-16-krashen-pulls-it-all-together-in-25-minutes/**](http://www.joanwink.com/latest/week-6-2-16-krashen-pulls-it-all-together-in-25-minutes/)**)** and in his five hypotheses, we can make learning meaningful for our students. As Krashen, Dr. Wink, and my colleagues have helped understand and summarize, communication is our field. Through loving and patient communication, we give our students the freedom to learn.

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