

Teaching English to Adults: Needs Analysis

Author: Ivana Kohoutová

This thesis is extremely straight-forward and that may be both its strength and its weakness. A reader has no problem understanding what Ms. Kohoutová wants to say. The thesis is well-organized and is clear and concise; the level of English is very high as well. The negative side is that the thesis is too simplistic.

Basically, the thesis is divided into two sections – a Theoretical Part and a Practical Part. The Theoretical Part is focused on teaching methods and learning styles in regard to adult students of English. It also points out differences between androgogy and pedagogy and the situation of Czech learners within the European Union (which this reader actually believes smacks of a certain trendiness – everyone wants to discuss the EU, even when it may not really fit the argument – but it seems writers always feel they have to broach the topic for some reason).

The Practical Part of the thesis is based on questionnaires handed out to adult students trying to elucidate two larger hypotheses, namely: a) the reasons why the students are learning English and, b) which language skills the students think are the most important. In this Practical Part, Kohoutová describes three of the most common English courses, In-house courses, Exam Preparation courses and In-Company courses.

This reader's criticism of the Theoretical Part is that he feels it really is just a simple list of teaching methods and learning styles that can be found anywhere. Yes, Kohoutová understands these methods/styles and presents them clearly, yet: What really is the point of doing so? And how does it relate to the Practical Part of the thesis?

Moving on to the Practical Part, once again it is clearly presented, however it is not well thought out enough. Kohoutová put a great deal of time into developing the questionnaires obviously, but she could have given more attention to their format. In general, the questionnaires are rather narrow in scope – and do not ask enough open-ended questions (too much like a multiple-choice exam) in order to make the student feel his/her input is necessary.

Because why is Needs Analysis done in the first place? Kohoutová says to gauge the needs of the students and for a teacher to be able to design a course accordingly. Yes, this is true – but she glosses over another point – that by doing Needs Analysis you can build trust between teacher and student(s). What the whole point of doing Needs Analysis is, and what can be benefited from, is not dealt with in a satisfactory manner for this reader.

In the Practical Part of the thesis the scientific method is used and a great deal of research done but the hypotheses are far too simplistic – possibly the questionnaires compound this problem. Looking at the first hypothesis, for example: why the adult students are learning English. For example, for the In-house courses Kohoutová says she presupposed the motivation of the students to be entertainment, that language learning is a hobby and that if they wanted to learn English for work-related purposes they would have taken a course financed by their company. What if one's company does not pay for such courses? And, as was pointed out by Kohoutová in the Theoretical Part, aren't adults usually more practical-

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minded than children? Her presupposition that students taking an Exam in order to pass the exam itself seems too obvious. *Of course* they want to pass the exam – but why presuppose it is an end in itself and not possibly motivation to be added to an interest in language or a work-related task, i.e., a clerk needs the Cambridge PET or FCE. And the pre-supposition that students in In-Company course would be work-oriented for their goals seems overly obvious also. The presuppositions and the answers gleaned are too easy.

A thesis should contribute to the world of knowledge with something new. But this just goes over old ground.

Recommended Grade: 2 (Velmi Dobře)

Mark Farrell – May 2006