

The Sube Methodolgy

The Sube Learning Language thru Art, Music & Games program incorporates unique activities and techniques based on various language theories and methodologies that have proven successful in second language instruction. In addition, Sube was founded on the valuable lessons learned from children raised in bilingual homes, where the native language and second language are introduced simultaneously.

Sube is foremost based on the *Theory of multiple intelligences developed in 1983 by Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University, and suggests that our traditional notion of intelligence, based on IQ testing, does not reflect the broad range of human potential and diverse learning styles of children and adults. We share his belief that the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence that our traditional schools focus on, represents only one of the many forms of intelligence that individuals may possess. Each child thinks and learns in their own way according to their unique intelligence (i.e. logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial/visual, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal or naturalist). The Sube program provides a variety of multi-sensory games and activities around each thematic unit, in order to address the diverse learning styles of students. Research has shown that learning in your preferred learning style increases motivation and effectiveness (Language Learning principles, Carol J. Orwig, 1999).

Sube follows a language learning approach that is strongly influenced by the *Communicative language teaching views which began in Britain in the 1960s, replacing the structural method called Situational Language Teaching. In the Communicative view, the semantic and communicative dimensions of language are more emphasized than the grammatical elements, although these are also included. This shift was partly in response to Chomsky's critique of structural theories of language, and inspired exciting new methodologies and techniques such as *The Natural Approach by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen, which has in turn, influenced the Sube approach. For example, the Sube curriculum is built on activities in which language is required in order to participate and progress to higher levels, giving purpose to the activity, and stimulating communication with and among students.

The Natural Approach sees language as an unconscious process developed through using language meaningfully, as opposed to consciously learning about a language and its structure. The Sube method applies this fundamental principle that language is best acquired unconsciously, through meaningful interactions. With children, we have found that the best way to achieve this is through interactive skill-building games and activities, where children are consciously playing the game, and subconsciously learning the language. Even structural components of a language are taught through interactive games. In this way, the learning becomes effortless, enjoyable, and most importantly, non-threatening. This factor is especially beneficial in second language learning, where research has shown that fear and anxiety can inhibit learning. These games and activities provide opportunities for children to build confidence and a positive self-esteem around their new language.

Also in line with the Natural Approach, we believe in the importance of instructing in the target language as much as possible, in order to maximize comprehensible input. At the same time we realize that speaking 100% in the target language is not always possible in schools today. The Sube program facilitates this process by providing teachers with self contained vocabulary and phrases for specific games so that students and teacher can begin to engage in dialogue effortlessly. The Sube curriculum also includes tools and strategies for presenting learning material in the target language. Techniques such as *TPR (total physical response), mime, sign language or dramatic gestures are suggested in the activity descriptions. For example, in the flashcard games (**Show and Tell, Where is it?**, pg. ?) this strategy is used to introduce and reinforce vocabulary, phrases and sentences. These techniques are also useful to avoid the tendency to translate.

The Sube Methodology

The Sube approach is unique in that it addresses a specific challenge for second language learning observed in bilingual families in the U.S. today. Specifically, the first and second generation children of immigrant families that settled in the U.S. since the 1930s. Many of this generation can understand their native language but have great difficulty in speaking. The observation is that if their parents spoke to them in their native language but did not require or demand that they respond in the native language, those speaking skills were not being exercised. The key factor here, is that the dominant language, in this case English, replaced the native language as the language of communication for the child, in which case, they developed a high proficiency in comprehension, but a low proficiency in speaking in the native language. This is a truth that children raised in bilingual homes experience first hand, and from which we have learned many lessons.

Some language theories believe that once listening comprehension has been developed, speech develops naturally and effortlessly out of it. But research shows that communication takes the path of least resistance. It is our belief is that speaking skills do not develop automatically once the student has developed comprehension skills, as long as there is another language that can be used in its place. We have learned that in order to become a fluent speaker, oral language skills must be consciously and actively developed in the beginning stages, along with listening and comprehension skills. Otherwise, the student will experience a learning plateau, as described above. At the same time, we realize that of all the skills to be developed, speaking creates the highest stress since it requires proactive involvement and high order thinking.

To address this challenge, the Sube program incorporates gentle scaffolding techniques (a teaching strategy that starts with extensive support when introducing new concepts, and leads to the gradual removal of this support once new vocabulary is acquired) into the language learning games that coax and gradually develop speaking skills. This strategy provides students with the appropriate vocabulary and subsequent phrasing needed to communicate and participate in a specific activity. Games are broken down into different versions that isolate the different skills need to learn a second language; comprehension, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. In order to play, and progress from level to level, one must acquire and communicate with the appropriate language; moving from one-word responses to two and three-word phrases, and finally to speaking in full sentences. Each vocabulary unit provides a balanced combination of activities that develop each of these critical skills. This technique provides students with the language tools they need within a safe and creative environment so that they progress as they are ready. This process also allows for students of various proficiency levels to play together and yet progress along their own path simultaneously (see Where is it? game for details on this strategy). The Sube approach proposes that by providing opportunities to develop each of these skills around each vocabulary unit, the student acquires a deeper more meaningful understanding of the language and its patterns. In addition, we stress that speaking skills must be actively, but gently, developed in order to become a fluent speaker.

Another challenge observed in schools, is the fact that second language study is most often implemented in isolated blocks of time, and where the first language is dominant in the social environment. The second language is therefore experienced as separate and disconnected from their everyday life, limiting meaningful exposure to the language. Research shows that students need to be immersed in language within meaningful context, and in a variety of social settings. We believe that this factor needs to be addressed in order for students to experience success in language learning. The challenge is in how to maximize the learning within short blocks of class time in a way that provides opportunities for meaningful personal connections to the language.

The Sube Methodology

A technique that has proven effective for maximizing the learning in short blocks of time, is the organization of academic content around thematic units that correlate with school themes, other subject areas, or community involvement. Research has demonstrated that this practice provides opportunities for students to develop skills in order to appropriate knowledge around the chosen theme. The Enhancement Activities in the lesson plans provide activities with this purpose in mind. Sube units can be integrated into a school theme or field trip, a community project, or a parent visit, as a way to appropriate knowledge in meaningful ways. For example, in the food theme, it is suggested to take students to a local restaurant authentic to the food and culture of the target language, or to have a parent who speaks the native language to visit the school and prepare a food with the class. Making the time for these activities is stressed in order to expand and enrich the social context in which the language is used.

The Sube approach recognizes the meaningful connection between language and culture, and the power of incorporating culturally authentic music into the curriculum. This technique adds a social and cultural dimension to the vocabulary unit, that reaches students on a deep emotional level, and therefore accelerates the learning. The centerpiece for this approach is the Sube music video. Each thematic unit includes a video which portrays children engaged in activities relating to the theme (i.e. going to the zoo, playing dress up, etc.). Each musical score underlying the video is done in a style of music from a different country in Latin America and Spain. For example, salsa from Cuba, rhumba flamenco from Spain, or ranchera music from Mexico. The students feel the diverse rhythms and experience the richness of the culture while they are learning the vocabulary words and phrases. Idiomatic expressions and informal language are incorporated into the lyrics, exposing students to a real world use of the language. In addition, we believe that demonstrating the diversity of musical styles and linguistic expressions, develops tolerance and respect for different cultures at a young age. Studies on the importance of teaching a foreign language in the early years discovered that “children are open to ideas of global understanding, and the study of a foreign language and culture at a young age can serve as an important vehicle by which to expand their intercultural views”. The Sube videos provide a unique blend of language, music and culture to engage students and expand their minds. Finally, the multi-sensory approach that addresses diverse learning styles and motivates student learning, also increases vocabulary retention and maximizes the learning that occurs in these short blocks of time.

These strategies and approaches create the unique Sube methodology: A thematic curriculum based on multisensory materials and activities that incorporate successful and research-based teaching strategies to develop comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills. The Sube methodology provides a balanced curriculum that provides opportunities for each of these skills to be developed simultaneously in a safe and creative environment that nurtures the students confidence, and develops a positive self-esteem around their new language.