

How did an English language teacher from Hungary get interested in psycholinguistics and become professor of psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham?

I started out as a teacher of English, and came to a point when instinctively I knew what would work in my classes and what not, yet I could not explain why. I realised that to move forward I needed to understand the linguistic and psychological processes underlying second language acquisition (SLA). I applied to study applied linguistics at a PhD level, but at that time – the mid-1980s – this discipline was not recognised in Hungary as a proper PhD subject. So I selected what I thought was the closest field, psycholinguistics, and ended up doing my linguistics studies at a department of psychology. It was a curious combination at the time, but the dual background of linguistics and psychology turned out to be a real asset in my future professional development.

How did I end up in the UK? It's mainly due to my wife Sarah, who is English and whom I met when I was on a scholarship in England in 1987. She was a modern languages specialist, and when I returned to Hungary she came with me and started to teach English in Budapest. We spent ten years living there, but for family reasons we moved to the UK in 1998 and settled in the Nottingham area where Sarah grew up and where her parents lived.

You believe that communicative language teaching could do

Personal, practical and principled

Jack Scholes asks author Zoltán Dörnyei about his unique approach to language learning

with some revitalisation, and you offer seven maxims which you refer to as 'the principled communicative approach'. Could you briefly explain these?

Although I am perhaps best known for my research on language learning motivation, I have always had an interest in communicative language teaching. I have done extensive research on communication strategies, and when I spent some time as a Fulbright scholar at UCLA in the early 1990s Marianne Celce-Murcia, my wife and I developed a comprehensive model for describing the components of communicative competence. Some of the main ideas for the principled communicative approach started to emerge at that point, but the seven principles in their current form are the results of a later effort: ten years later I revisited the question of SLA in a major survey of the psychological literature that I conducted with the aim of summarising what cutting-edge psychological theories can contribute to our understanding of SLA. The result was a book-length summary, *The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition* (OUP, 2009), and the current form of the principled communicative approach is a summary of what I understand to be the best practices of language instruction according to the theoretical insights. This



Courtesy Helbling Languages

FIRST PRINCIPLES Zoltán Dörnyei's approach is based on 'the best practices of language instruction according to the theoretical insights'

was, therefore, genuine research-led theory construction. The seven principles are broad maxims because I wanted to focus on the most solid tried-and-tested knowledge in scholarship that is likely to stand the test of time. However, I hope that exactly because of their robust nature, the principles can usefully orientate language professionals in developing a language

teaching methodology that is fitting for the 21st century.

Your new book, co-authored with Jane Arnold and Chaz Pugliese is called *The Principled Communicative Approach*. How does the book present and explore these seven principles?

Because my theory was genuinely applied both in terms of its nature and its objectives, it lent

itself to being implemented in actual classroom contexts. Personally I have always been fond of the 'recipe book' format developed in the late 1970s by Alan Maley, Mario Rinvolucri and their colleagues and associates – a great genre, because it not only offers a very practical classroom resource for teachers but it is also one of the most effective ways of disseminating new ideas within the teaching professions.

It appeared an obvious way of implementing the principled communicative approach to design sets of classroom activities that exemplify each of the seven principles. I was fortunate that two wonderful professionals I knew from the past, Jane and Chaz, enthusiastically joined me in taking on this task. They both have a highly creative materials-writing talent backed up by a great deal of practical experience in language teaching and teacher training. Together we made a real international team – an American living in Spain, an Italian living in France and a Hungarian living in the UK. All we needed was a suitable publisher, and Helbling embraced the project right from the beginning. We were very pleased about that because we thought that with its innovative and creative edge *The Resourceful Teacher* series is the ideal context for the novel

evidence-based teaching approach we are recommending.

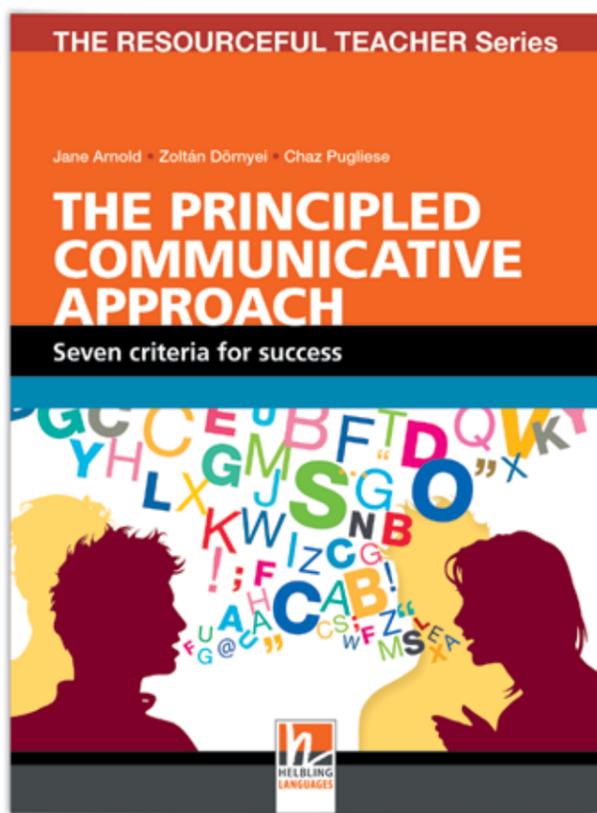
Another research interest you have concerns the interrelationship of religion and second language acquisition. Could you please elaborate on this?

My main interest in this comes from the belief that if we can bring together different aspects of our identity – such as our personal and professional selves – this fusion can generate a powerful motivational drive that we can then harness for different applied purposes, such as the study of foreign languages. I have been particularly curious about how faith – in my case, Christianity – can impact on SLA, but the integration of the personal and professional spheres of one's life can also involve other personal aspects such as penchants, hobbies, passions, basic likes and dislikes – areas that are sometimes summarised under the term 'transportable identities'. In this sense this research direction is closely related to the first principle of the principled communicative approach, the personal significance principle, which concerns the striving to make language teaching personally meaningful for the students in the spirit of student-centred learning that characterised communicative language teaching right from the beginning. ■

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