

PRESENTATION NOTES:

## **WHAT AUTISM CAN TEACH US ABOUT TESOL**

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**The goal of this presentation is twofold;**

First, to show the primacy of the Input Hypothesis advocated by several theorists and to critique the Output hypothesis and its importance in terms of SLA through the observation of severely autistic people who acquired language with virtually no output.

Secondly, as a teacher educator and parent of an autistic son, to give specific advice to teachers including ELL on the autism spectrum in their classes on how to accentuate SLA through a variety of means. I will also provide links that might prove helpful for anyone engaged in tutoring or working with students who have autism.

### ***Outline:***

Intro:

Who knows someone with autism?

### ***Everyone***

Who knows what the birth rate of autistic people is now?

*One in 68 U.S. children has an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a 30% increase from 1 in 88 two years ago, according to a new report released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control*

Take a moment to discuss: How can we teach someone with light or severe autism L2?



***This is my son Forrest, the reason for this presentation***

### **Useful Websites for this presentation:**

Video of Forrest: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lMrTvMo\\_y0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lMrTvMo_y0)

His website: <http://www.forrestsargent.com/>

An excellent blog about Forrest, RPM etc:

<http://www.quirksee.org/2013/09/03/forrest-sargent-autism-letterboard-rapid-prompting-method/>

Good website re: Output vs. Input Hypotheses by Rassaei:

<http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume16/ej63/ej63a2/>

Rapid Prompting Method: [www.halo-soma.org](http://www.halo-soma.org)

*Thanks to: Soma Mukhopadhyay, founder of RPM & her son, Tito Mukhopadhyay  
Autistic Author of **The Mind Tree***

### **About Forrest:**

Born in 1991- perfectly normal development until 2.5 yrs old, growing bilingual ability in Japanese/English

Developed severe autism in 1993, soon lost all but a few words, *extreme negative behaviors*.

Virtually no language output for 12 years. Able to use PECS for some communication, some gestures.

Introduced to RPM in 2006 by Soma ([www.halo-soma.com](http://www.halo-soma.com) )

Parents studied and were certified in RPM in Austin, TX- began using RPM

Parents trained school system teachers and aids in RPM- output very slow, stilted at first.

By age 15, Forrest was finally able to use the full letter board- his output exploded!

Communication difficult BUT- Full generally grammatically correct sentences, a variety of vocabulary remarkable for him.

**Observation: If my son was incapable of any language OUTPUT, said to be crucial for SLA, where did all this language, including Form, Meaning & Use, come from if not from comprehensible INPUT?**

## **QUICK REVIEW:**

### **OUTPUT HYPOTHESIS:**

**Some reject the view that input alone is sufficient for language acquisition.**

Swain (1985, 1995, 2000, 2005), re: her output hypothesis, states that output is as essential as input in developing L2 knowledge.

Swain (1985) claims that **output “pushed” learners from the “semantic processing” required for comprehending input to the “syntactic processing” needed for encoding**

Swain (1985) argues that producing the target language may serve as **“the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her own intended meaning”**

Some studies indicate **input-based and output-based instructions are equally effective in promoting L2 knowledge** (e.g., Farley, 2001b; Erlam, Loewen, and Philp, 2009)

**OR Provide evidence for the advantage of input-based over output-based instruction** (e.g., Benati, 2005; Farley, 2001a; Lee and Benati, 2006)

**OR Suggest the superiority of output-based over input-based instruction** (e.g., Allen, 2000; Toth, 2006; Morgan-Short and Bowden, 2006)

### **INPUT HYPOTHESIS:**

*“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." Stephen Krashen*

*"Exposure language is usable when learners can make sense of it....and make an effort to process it" (van Leir 1996). Thus he calls what we refer to as comprehensible input as 'language engagement.'*

Ellis (2012) defines input-based instruction as an instruction that **"involves the manipulation of the input that learners are exposed to or are required to process"** (p. 285).

In this type of instruction learners are pushed to **process input by being asked to show that they have understood the meaning of a target feature in input by providing a non-verbal or minimally verbal response** such as choosing between two pictures (VanPatten, 2003)

Long (1991) addresses how grammar is acquired with a process that **"overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication"** (pp. 4-5).

**\* Severe autism has clearly put holes in the Output Hypothesis if not sunk the boat completely. Here is why:**

- Severely Autistic Students (SAS) have little or no verbal or written skills without long-term therapy like ABA, PRT or, in the case of our son, RPM

- Most spend much of their lives essentially non-verbal and illiterate- thus little or no OUTPUT is possible

-Once we can 'drill down' and 'open a path of communication' (Soma's Words) then output is possible, often in a limited manner.

- When this happens, SAS often exhibit an amazing variety of LEXIS, GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES AND COMPLEX FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE, AS WELL AS HUMOR!

- If output is necessary for the advancing of SLA, how is this possible?

**-Conclusion- it isn't. This, to my mind, proves the Input Hypothesis championed by Krashen, Ellis, Larson and other luminaries in our field.**

## **HOW CAN WE HELP OUR ELLs 'ON THE SPECTRUM' ACQUIRE L2?**

### **Suggestions from me re: Severely Autistic Students:**

SAS have small windows of attention and focus and many distracting behaviors and vocalizations. Through RPM training and certification, I have learned to ignore these and focus on those 'input windows' in a variety of ways.

1. Keep the focus on the SAS, his or her needs, desires, interests
2. Use REALIA, real things and images the SAS is interested in or loves Ex: Favorite food, Batman, DVDs etc)
3. Create Narratives that help students understand and gain language (i+1!) that interest them. Ex: Chats about the rules of baseball, different trees, history of his name etc.
4. Use short, statement sentences during the 'lesson.' Ask 'yes/no' questions with a simple feedback system of pecs or pointing to Y/N
5. Keep the process kinesthetic – draw pictures, draw diagrams, move things to catch and keep attention etc.
6. After each session, write out in block print the key vocabulary with a short 'chat' and a y/n reinforcement question

In this way I discovered my son's love of animation, science, chemistry, math, Harry Potter (he got through all of them) and football!

### **Suggestions from me re: Students who are 'on the autism spectrum' but have language skills. This includes people with Asperger's.**

Keep the classroom environment in mind at ALL times. Variables to consider: Lighting (florescents flickers!), sounds, ambient noise and music and other students, colors and visual 'noise' as well as scents, the way things are displayed, organized, presented and so on. ANY and all of these can impact learning for these students negatively. Autism is a 'sensory integration disorder.' OCD is not uncommon.

Such students often seem distant, withdrawn or arrogant, rude and argumentative! 'Social graces' are at times lacking. It is important to realize that they often have a very high IQ and often do NOT see their differences as a handicap. In NEUROTRIBES (recommended!) Steve Silberman says we need to think of such students as a different tribe that he calls NAs

(Neurologically Atypicals) and 'us' as NTs (Neurologically Typical) and that one is not better, only different.

Form a clear bond with the student in terms of private conversations based on clear honesty and truth. Ignore the social 'niceties' we often use to sugarcoat critiques, such students are very sensitive to being 'snowed' or talked down to.

Ignore odd ticks, behaviors, strange verbal outbursts and so on, but also do not fear to ask such a student to modify their verbalizing or behaviors in a calm but respectful tone.

Always have alternative assignments or strategies for work for these students. I once had a student flip out over doing a collage, but when calmed down and offered the chance to draw instead, was perfectly happy.

Logic may not always work because you are using NT logic not NA logic, which often varies. A student may be upset if you vary seating or shift positions of chairs or do things 'out of sequence.'

If possible, keep the lesson sequence the same and give that student a chart showing what comes next and when. When such a student gets difficult, be clear on how many more minutes are left. Do what you can to minimize all anxiety, remember they are strangers in a strange land.

Use calm clear language when counseling such students. Do so in a private quiet place. Do not fiddle or do other things. Listen carefully. Respond clearly and concisely. Keep emotions to a minimum.

All assignments must be extremely concise, steps included will help. Modeling exactly what is to be done with clear examples is crucial.

Such students often love math and structure, so make sure to show them the underlying linguistic structures and rules and patterns we are using, even in a fluency class. It may in fact hook them. Introduce irregularities and ambiguity in the language carefully and slowly, such students do not do so well with both of these.

Make sure a written form of oral language is always presented. Even introductions and jokes! Such students often want to see transcripts of oral activities.

Keep questions very pointed. Don't ask 'Is it all clear?' Ask: 'Do you understand the three steps you need to do?'

Do not react to emotional or behavioral outbursts emotionally at all, no matter how illogical they seem. Isolate the student, listen with calm interjections, explain expectations, rules, and assignments clearly and concisely with a written example of this.

Structure, not always a hallmark of an ESL class, is crucial to these students. Follow a schedule, set times for different sections, do not vary more than necessary, be clear of both academic and behavioral expectations, have an 'out' for the student if they get 'overloaded' like a quiet place of break they can take.

Be kind, compassionate but firm. Think of such students as being from another very different culture, use all those cross-cultural communication strategies! Check-in with them often if they seem agitated. It may be something as simple as the way the books are arranged.

There are so many more things to say, but this is a start: Learn to love the different and think outside the box!

*Have a question? Feel free to email me: [sargentd@spu.edu](mailto:sargentd@spu.edu)*

USEFUL ADVICE FOR ESL TEACHING TO LESS SEVERE AUTISTIC STUDENTS FROM <http://exceptionalities.wikidot.com/autism-esl-statergies>

- Incorporate the students first language in the classroom as much as possible
- Encourage opportunities where student can share language and cultural information to other students
- Learn a few words from that child's language to open opportunities for conversation
- Display to student you are interested in learning their culture
- Model appropriate language opportunities, where child can build self esteem and public speaking
- Have posters in their language in the classroom
- Have pictures of routines and schedules posted on the wall
- Teacher should focus on conceptual understanding of students work before assessing pronunciation
- Have a print rich environment that encompasses the balanced literacy concept
- Provide books in the classroom in the child's first language
- As a teacher be cautious of verbal and non verbal forms of communication, as depending on certain cultures this could be culturally insensitive
- Interact culturally sensitive and incorporate in the classroom
- Invite other cultural groups and members as resources and support building in the classroom
- Families should be able to communicate reading aloud and story telling in their language, which

will strengthen literacy skills in children

- cds of familiar stories in English and the students' first languages should be provided
- Students should have a buddy who is fluent in English speaking, in order to support the ESL student, especially during projects
- Use flashcards to assist in building common dialogue
- Provide student with simple instructions
- Use simple language, being cautious of using humour
- Modifying assignments to meet their needs, basing it on their cues
- Provide opportunities to the child straightforward tasks, as this will allow the student to be focus, by minimizing feeling of being overwhelmed when stuck
- Provide the child with opportunities to collaborate with their peers in small group activities (this will depend on individual student)
- Use positive reinforcement, acknowledge students contribution and success
- Establish rules and routines that
- Student need visual props to assist them in their transition and to tap into their prior knowledge and experience as to what the visual prop represents

### Other 'autism and ESL' websites recommended by others (not vetted):

<http://exceptionalities.wikidot.com/autism-esl-ref>

<http://www.songsforteaching.com/autisticchildren/lookatyourneighbor.htm>

<http://www.eslminiconf.net/april/oneillreply.html>

[http://simplesongs.blogs.com/head\\_shoulders\\_knees\\_and\\_/2007/08/autism-games.html](http://simplesongs.blogs.com/head_shoulders_knees_and_/2007/08/autism-games.html)

<http://teenautism.com/>

[http://www.autism.com/families/therapy/teaching\\_tips.htm](http://www.autism.com/families/therapy/teaching_tips.htm)

<http://www.internationalsped.com/documents/7Vacca%20Autistic%20Reading.doc>

<http://www.oadd.org/publications/journal/issues/vol10no1/download/bartman&Freeman.pdf>

[http://www.marksundberg.com/files/301\\_research\\_topics.pdf](http://www.marksundberg.com/files/301_research_topics.pdf)

<http://www.marksundberg.com/publications.htm>

<http://digilib.petra.ac.id/viewer.php?page=1&submit.x=0&submit.y=0&qual=high&fname=/jiunkpe/s1/sing/2002/jiunkpe-ns-s1-2002-11498033-380-cakra-chapter2.pdf>

[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/Autism204\\_blue.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/Autism204_blue.pdf)

<http://prv31woman.org/Documents/Teaching%20Tips%20for%20Children%20and%20Adults%20with%20Autism.doc>

<http://educ.ubc.ca/westcast/proceedings/Teaching%20Students%20with%20Autism.pdf>

<http://www.chalkboardproject.org/images/PDF/Educating%20Autistic%20Children.pdf>

<http://www.hilarymccoll.co.uk/autismMFL.html>



<http://www.hilarymccoll.co.uk/resources/AutChap1.pdf>

[http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/182\\_07\\_040405/wra10330\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/182_07_040405/wra10330_fm.html)



**Hello, my name is Forrest Sargent. I have autism.**

**I use a letter board to communicate. I am 24 years old. I am a photographer. I like to take pictures of nature. I sell my photos. I love taking photos because I can make something beautiful, I am an artist. I think photography is the loveliest art because it shows the truth. It show the secret beauty in things.**

**Taking pictures, I need to find the hidden light in everything. I want people to get pleasure and reach my mind from my photos.**

#### ABOUT MY LIFE:

I was born in Tokyo, Japan.

I lived there for three years.

I became autistic when we moved back to Seattle.

It was terrible and I couldn't talk or do things.

I was not happy. I lived at home and acted crazy.

Now I live at Fircrest.

I go home and see mom and dad lots.

Now I can talk with a letter board and I feel much better.

I have friends and I don't scare people anymore.

I will get better and have a relaxing life.

I know a lot and I want to share it.

This is written work by Forrest done via RPM with the use of a letterboard.

**Child's Name:** Forrest Sargent

**Child's Age:** 17 years old

**Aim:** Learning how dinosaurs became extinct and introducing the subject of dinosaur fossils

**Objectives:**

1. The student will identify what dinosaurs are and when they lived
2. The student will learn key vocabulary re: Dinosaur extinction
3. The student will know about the 'meteor impact' explanation
4. The student will define what steps happened in the extinction of dinosaurs
5. The student will define and review about dinosaur fossils
6. The student will know the connection between dinosaurs, fossils & museums

Material	Sensory Activity	Questions
<p>Review of dinosaurs, previously studied.</p> <p>Dinosaurs lived about 200 million years ago. They became extinct about 65 million years ago.</p> <p>Now they are extinct- gone forever. Why? Because of meteors hitting the earth.</p> <p>Meteors are rocks in space. At least one big meteor slammed into the earth.</p> <p>So dust went into the atmosphere- the air. This dust blocked the sun. It became very cold on the earth. Plants died. Dinosaurs starved to death.</p> <p>Dinosaurs are lizards. They need warmer climates. This killed them as well.</p> <p>So dinosaurs became extinct and that is why there are none</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take child's hand and point to pictures in the Dinosaur Book (K &amp; V)</li> <li>- Write key words in front of student (V &amp; K) Many choices</li> <li>- Say information aloud (A)</li> <li>- Shake the letter board to redirect (V, A, &amp; K)</li> <li>- Illustrate terms with drawing (both alone and hand-over-hand) METEOR, DUST, BLOCK SUN,</li> <li>- Used kinesthetic action to illustrate SLAMMED (hit table, F hit table too repeating word) V, K, A)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When did dinosaurs live? Can you spell 'million of years'?</li> <li>2. When did they become extinct?</li> <li>3. Spell EXTINCT.</li> <li>4. What are meteors?</li> <li>5. Are they on earth or in space? Can you spell?</li> <li>6. Did meteors slam into the earth or miss it? Can you spell SLAMMED INTO?</li> <li>7. Can you spell DUST</li> </ol> <p>Did the dust help the sun or block it? Can you spell DUST? Can you spell ATMOSPHERE.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Was it cold or warm after this? Can you spell COLD?</li> <li>9. Was it light or dark? Can you spell DARK?</li> <li>10. Because it was cold, what happened to</li> </ol>



