Transcript

00:00:00 NS

A very warm welcome to Doctor Stephen Krashen. Thank you for giving this interview. You are the most frequently cited scholar in foreign language education.

00:00:11 NS

Due to your work, many hypotheses regarding language acquisition are now more widely known, which serve as a new base for language learning.

00:00:20 NS

I would like to begin with the first question. Your background is in linguistics. What motivated you to specialise in the teaching and learning of foreign languages?

00:00:29 SK

Excellent question. Excellent questions are defined as those I can answer.

00:00:36 SK

I know what to say.

00:00:38 SK

I always wanted to be first of all, a language teacher. I thought that would be a good way of travelling, going around the world.

00:00:46 SK

My wife is from the United States, but we met in Ethiopia where we were both teaching and we liked it and we thought we'd travel some more and be international people.

00:00:55 SK

So I wanted to get a certificate in English as a second language. What I liked about language teaching though, was the grammar. This is a confession. I studied linguistics. My degrees are in linguist.

00:01:09 SK

I loved Noam Chomsky’s work. I still do. I love the elaborate grammatical descriptions. I thought my job as a language teacher was to take the work of the grammarians and make drills and exercises out of them.

00:01:26 SK

I was all wrong. Completely wrong and it took me years of meditation and medicine to overcome this. OK, so I began from language teaching.

00:01:38 SK

And the fact that this didn't work got gradually moved back into the study of how language is acquired. Great question, thanks.

00:01:49 NS

Thank you very, very interesting.

00:01:52 NS

Continue with the second question. So here Bavaria in Germany, English is only taught from Grade 3 onwards. And learners only received two lessons per week.

00:02:03 NS

As we cannot change our syllabus, would you argue that the available time we have is sufficient to develop basic competences in a well planned classroom or should we start using English outside of the strict timetable in normal daily routines?

00:02:19 SK

Another really good question. People think we cannot change the syllabus, but we can change the child, change the child's brain.

00:02:30 SK

It's actually the other way around. You can't change the child's brain. The only way is to change the syllabus.

00:02:36 SK

So I'll keep doing what I'm doing and I hope when you rise to power we can change the syllabus. Now the reason people don't know about the research.

00:02:50 SK

The reason the superintendents and the committees don't know about it, it's not their fault.

00:02:56 SK

How are they going to find out?

00:02:59 SK

The work is written in large journals and in books. Number one: The journals and books are impossible to read.

00:03:08 SK

Their written by crazy people by maniacs. I find it hard to read this stuff. Complicated language. Someone had the hypothesis they write in difficult language so no one will understand them and they won't be criticised. Okay, I find most articles in journals really bored.

00:03:27 SK

Someone once said 300 years ago when you ask someone the time, you don't want a history of the wrist watch, just tell me the time. They don't do that. They go on and on and on and on and I can't get through it. And I have nothing else to do all day and I can't read all this stuff so the research is buried in journals and books. It's hard to read, it's expensive.

00:03:53 SK

I just mentioned that about books. Ohh my gosh. Books cost technical books in American dollars, 50 or hundred, $150. I cannot afford them. I can no longer afford subscribing to the professional journals because it's, you know, hundred, $200 and I like to read 15-20 journals because I have all these interests, can't do it, can't do it.

00:04:16 SK

So what can we do about it? There is a solution. OK, we can change the world. I'm doing it myself.

00:04:25 SK

People like Jeff Mcquillan and Shone Ashtari, people I've told you about; Danika Mason, they're doing it to. Number one: We write short papers.

00:04:36 SK

I review papers for journals. Sometimes I refuse to review any paper that's longer than 5 pages.

00:04:44 SK

I haven't reviewed anything in five years. They're all gone forever and ever and ever. So we start with ourselves.

00:04:48 SK

So we make them simple and easy to understand. You can do this. I downloaded a paper from the journal Nature.

00:04:59 SK

It was about the double Helix DNA RNA, written by Crick and Watson the discovers. If you remember half of secondary school biology, you can pretty much understand it and it was a good paper.

00:05:12 SK

That's what we're trying to do. Write respectable papers that are comprehensible and short. Number three: make them free.

00:05:25 SK

This is called Open Access. This is your vocabulary word for today. I only publish in journals that are Open Access.

00:05:35 SK

Free to the author. Free to the reader, I also put them on my website, s.krashen.com, it’s on the handout, I've started to put them on Researchgate.net. This is a good thing to do. Don't ask my permission.

00:05:56 SK

Just do it. Can I share it? Yes, you can share my work with anybody except Donald Trump. This doesn’t matter. He won’t read it anyway.

00:06:05 SK

This is a small beginning. I have to do this or I can't do any work coz I can't afford the journals.

00:06:12 SK

The only people who could read the research are university professors in first class universities who have privileges from their library. Libraries will make a copy for you, but that's a tiny percentage. That means real people, teachers of people at teachers’ colleges.

00:06:29 SK

What if we did this with biology with medicine, real practitioners, doctors can't look at the research. No, a lot of it is Open Access; open to anybody.

00:06:41 SK

That's what we need to do. Okay, do we have enough time? Yes, we do. I don't. I'm not worried about that.

00:06:48 SK

The goal is not to make you perfect in class. The goal of language teaching is to make you an intermediate.

00:06:56 SK

So you can start reading on your own. Let's focus on...libraries. Let's focus on libraries with lots of good books in all languages of interest. Bonico Mason, as I told you, teaches, or did teach she just retired, at a local university in Japan.

00:07:17 SK

Her students have access to 5000 graded readers in English. Isn't that delicious? That's wonderful. Let's not worry about the time in class so much. Yeah, let's try for a little more ectera, but let's make sure they have something to read. Let's get them so good and get them so excited they'll want to read on their own. That's our job.

00:07:42 SK

Okay, next question.

00:07:45 NS

Yes, that's a lot to take into account.

00:07:50 NS

My next question actually touches on what you already mentioned that we can't change the children and we as teachers at primary schools, we are confronted with a very diverse group of learners and from your point of view, which specific activities would you recommend to cater for the different needs of learners?

00:08:14 SK

Stories automatically does that, especially when they are self-selected.

00:08:21 SK

Automatic individual variation. Good stories that are of interest to everyone. The beginning level, that's where you know, you group them by how much English they know, not by how old they are, how tall they are. Then you do that. You can get stories that are comprehensible.

00:08:36 SK

And they don't, you don't have to worry about every word, just more or less and teachers know. Teachers have told stories, have been with kids don't need a formula, they just need to look at the story and they can tell.

00:08:51 SK

This is okay for my kids and the students can tolerate noise. They can tolerate a little bit of incomprehensible input and the teacher does some explanation. As you know, drawing a picture, making it more comprehensible. So that doesn't reduce, doesn't eliminate the problem, but it certainly reduces it in my opinion.

00:09:12 SK

Self-selection in the beginning. Wonderful stories. You don't need to know every word. Just get lost in the story.

00:09:22 NS

Thank you very much. I would pass on to Annika so she can ask the next questions.

00:09:28 AT

Alright, thank you.

00:09:30 AT

Okay, let's start with the next question. Even though reading comprehension is known as an important competence, not all children can find pleasure in the activity. By putting books in the centre of the lesson, they could feel pressured into something they do not feel comfortable with.

00:09:46 AT

Is it possible to gain the same success of language acquisition through the usage of audio- and audio-visual media with which the more reluctant readers might be more willing to indulge with? Or might there be our hidden pitfalls?

00:10:00 SK

Quite possible.

00:10:03 SK

Listening, not both at the same time.

00:10:06 SK

That's very unnatural, okay, and you won't be paying attention to the story. You'll be comparing all this stuff, but some audio books. Why not?

00:10:15 SK

I don't know, there are like one or two studies that suggest that is useful. Do them, get professors to do that in the research. Published them.

00:10:25 SK

Make sure I get a copy. I think it's a wonderful area of research. Let's do it, especially people who drive all the time.

00:10:34 SK

That's what you do in your. If I could get easy stories in the languages I'm interested in, I would love to drive all over Los Angeles, okay?

00:10:46 AT

Okay alright, thanks.

00:10:47 SK

Great, great question.

00:10:50 AT

Thank you very much for your answer. You're an advocate for free, voluntary reading which involves encouraging learners to read for fun in their spare time.

00:10:59 AT

How can we promote free voluntary reading in English in our classroom, especially if the children can choose between English and German books?

00:11:10 SK

I would make some time set aside for English reading.

00:11:15 SK

That's the easy way and let the German literature people handle the reading in German if they want to do.

00:11:21 SK

I hope they'll want to do self-selection in German literature etcetera, which is I think the way to do it, but that's of course their business. I would have some time set aside for free voluntary reading time in English and browsing in the library.

00:11:39 SK

Is the absolute best. How do you let me take your next question? Coz I know what it is. Some students don't like to read.

00:11:45 SK

How could we get them interested? Let me tell you about one study is called Spiderman in the library. This is first language, but it applies to everything.

00:11:56 SK

In a secondary school they put comic books in the library but did not allow them to circulate.

00:12:05 SK

You had to go to the library to read the comic books and graphic novels.

00:12:10 SK

After they put it in, library traffic went way up. The amount of non-comic book material taken out doubled.

00:12:20 SK

That brings them into the library, gets them excited about reading. Everybody likes a good comic book, a good graphic novel.

00:12:29 SK

OK, next.

00:12:31 AT

Thank you.

00:12:32 AT

In many classes they are classroom libraries or the children can withdraw into a corner of the classroom to read books for themselves.

00:12:41 AT

Should we have read these books together with the pupils in advance? They can choose them for pre voluntary reading and with what reasoning?

00:12:50 SK

I think that's okay where you have story time and you want to get kids excited about books you do a little read aloud.

00:12:58 SK

Or tell a little bit of the story. Some of the authors really know how to get you excited.

00:13:05 SK

That they understand that all stories must start out with a bang. Something is happening. I woke up in the morning and there was a creature from outer space in my bed, at the foot of the bed.

00:13:18 SK

So they are like; what, what's going on here? This is good writing, no delay, no long description of the moon, the sun, all these things. So yes, I think a little bit of story reading like that where people like RL Stine goosebumps, they really know how to get people interested and you want to know the rest: you gotta read it yourself.

00:13:40 SK

Excellent suggestion.

00:13:42 AT

Okay, that's a great idea.

00:13:45 AT

The main emphasis in English teaching in primary school is on communication skills, especially speaking. But foreign language learners shouldn't be pressured into speaking when they do not feel ready.

00:13:56 AT

How can we encourage children to speak English or would it be better to give these children more opportunities to read? How important would you assess speaking in contrast to reading?

00:14:09 SK

I'll tell you a story.

00:14:11 SK

When my daughter was like 6 years old, that was 46 years ago. I got 45 years ago anyway.

00:14:20 SK

She had a good friend who lived a few houses away and she wanted to go play with her. So, I brought her over and then I left her there.

00:14:29 SK

The mum said leave her here for an hour. Come back in an hour and take my child with you. Okay cause I have something else to do. Wonderful so I came back to get both children to bring them to our house. Now I have to explain to you, this neighbour is a very good friend of the family. We knew her very, very well. We spend lots of time together.

00:14:48 SK

So she said, well, “I've gotta leave now”. And you know, I was going to take both girls. “But I have to go take my pill.”

00:14:55 SK

She dashed into the kitchen, got water out, took this pill and since we were friends, I said, “what was that?”. Valium. That's like Prozac anti-anxiety and I said “what do you, why are you taking Valium?”.

00:15:10 SK

“Spanish class. I'm going to Spanish class. I get so nervous it freaks me out.”

00:15:18 SK

“What is it about Spanish class that gets you nervous?” “Talking.” Being called an in class. Having to give a report.

00:15:25 SK

I then looked at the research, absolutely. The number one cause of anxiety in classes is having to speak before you're ready.

00:15:34 SK

Just what you're asking about. This is so nerve wracking this person had to take medication before going to Spanish class. When we look at language acquisition, you allow - the good concept of a silent period is very, very well known.

00:15:52 SK

I read a study of people in Africa near the Amazon Valley who lived in a small area, 10,000 people who spoke 24 different languages. Now 10,000 people is not a lot. 24 languages that's a lot. You go to a football game. 24,000 people in the stadium is not a lot.

00:16:16 SK

These children grew up, ohh in this group. You'll love this. You are not allowed to marry someone who speaks your language.

00:16:27 SK

They thought outsiders like us were disgusting coz we marry people who speak our own language. So, the child has to acquire Mummy's language, Daddy's language, the language of the small group, languages of a larger group, the language of the community. So they are acquiring languages their whole lives, and they're very good at it.

00:16:49 SK

How do they do it?

00:16:51 SK

They usually don't say anything for the first year or two.

00:16:56 SK

They listen.

00:16:59 SK

They don't practise, they don't start to speak unless it feels comfortable. People don't correct them, by the way.

00:17:07 SK

Because it's considered impolite to correct anybody doing anything in that culture. I've found the same thing. Ugine Nited did a book in the 1950s. He calls it the African method. People in a country in Africa, in neighbourhoods who go to neighbouring areas to work and they work along with people who speak another language. Pick up the language. How do they do it? They listen, they listen. They said we're very confident. We assume that if we listen enough, eventually we will hear the language will be able to understand it. They don't start speaking until they're ready.

00:17:42 SK

Once again, you see this figure. It's a year or two in general. Same thing in your classes.

00:17:49 SK

No forced speak, speaking. If you get lots of comprehensible input, listening and reading, you will want to speak. You will find that it comes easily.

00:18:01 SK

And it won't go away.

00:18:02 SK

Okay, it'll stay with them. They'll have it when they're ready for it.

00:18:06 SK

Thanks for asking.

00:18:08 AT

Alright, thank you very much. What last piece of advice could you give us as future primary school teachers?

00:18:17 SK

Well, stay away from junk food, okay?

00:18:22 SK

Drink lots of coffee.

00:18:26 SK

Pump iron. Lift weights. What else can I tell you?

00:18:31 SK

My best advice is to obey your inclinations. Give in to temptation.

00:18:41 SK

Do another language. You all want to do that. I know you do.

00:18:45 SK

You do a little here. Whenever you can get comprehensible input in another language, do it. You always have, all of you have a secret language you've always wanted to acquire. Try to find easy, easy books.

00:18:58 SK

Take the beginner’s class. If the teachers good take the beginners class twice. Okay, you find a teacher who will tell good stories.

00:19:06 SK

Shop around, take lessons from a friend, but you are in charge of how it's done. Okay, do another language. Find easy. Choose a language where there's lots of input available. That's my recommendation.

00:19:20 SK

You'll love it.

00:19:23 AT

Alright, thank you very much. Thank you for your advice and many thanks for taking the time to answer our questions. It was really a great honour to have you here as our guest.

00:19:33 AT

Thank you.

00:19:34 SK

My pleasure.