

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 1

Now, here are some more concrete suggestions, especially for college foreign language programs (although they are also adaptable for primary and secondary schools), as they relate to benefiting from the availability of manageable verbal communities, and you should also research these more fully.

Most of these suggestions concern taking advantage of the wonderful opportunity afforded by a unique and extensive characteristic of institutions with large numbers of language learners (of any and of all languages that they teach, including French, German, Italian, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and all others as well as English). That characteristic is the availability of reasonably sized *verbal communities!* These are some suggestions about how to make better use of these verbal communities to rapidly improve fluent foreign language learning! *Why bother?...*

We should bother because...

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 2

We should bother because members of verbal communities learn most of their language fluency through *corrective interactions* with other community members. In foreign language education, though, this reality usually receives too little attention. Perhaps this is because foreign language learners are older than native language learners and so we tend not to grant the same kinds of *non-coercive*, corrective attention to foreign language learners that we grant to native language learners... *That* is what we must change. We must teach students that to learn, they must help teach. And *they can learn from those who know less than they know* as well as from those who know more. *And they can teach those who know more* as well as those who know less. They do this by using the foreign language that they are learning to provide verbal stimuli for, and to mediate consequences for the verbal responses of, other community members, including when those consequences involve corrective comment...

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 3

And we must teach them to provide corrective comment in the same non-coercive manner that is provided to native language learners..., and that they would prefer to receive themselves when in need of it. For that is how language is learned most effectively and most efficiently...

But be aware that if they have *not* been taught, from early in primary school, to learn language partly using—by being part of, and contributing to—a verbal community, then they will experience some initial discomfort when this is first introduced to them. And so will language teachers...! But when you accept the reality that *it is all right to be wrong*—especially when both you and the “provider of corrective feedback” both benefit—then the rewards can be very great in terms of speedy and fluent learning. So, how can you organize the use of the verbal communities available to you? Here are some ways:

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 4

Here are some ways you can organize the use of the verbal communities available to you:

✿ Perhaps in cooperation with native speakers, schedule a “*Verbal Community Game Room*” once or twice each week, in a large room with many tables that seat 4 to 6 people. Arrange for a variety of different games, such as Clue, Mahjong, or Monopoly, to be available. And encourage your students to come and have fun—even assign them to do so—week after week after week. *The only requirements are that in the game room, (a) they may only speak the foreign language that they are learning, and (b) they must help each other, non-coercively, engage in verbal interactions correctly.* You can even schedule a different language into the room each day (e.g., Monday—French, Tuesday—Japanese, Wednesday—English, Thursday—Russian, Friday—German, Saturday—Korean). Set up two such rooms and you can double the number of languages benefiting from the room...

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 5

✦ Also, you can designate some tables in the dining halls as “*Verbal Community Tables.*” Add signs* indicating the foreign language that will be *solely* spoken at each table. (As students experience the benefits of such verbal community opportunities, you will not have to assign them to take part as they will do so on their own.) *The only requirements are that those at these tables, (a) may only speak the foreign language that they are learning, and (b) must help each other, non-coercively, engage in verbal interactions correctly.* Perhaps you can persuade native speakers to take part by taking one meal each day or each week at one of the tables. As more and more students become interested (And they *will* if the interactions are kept non-coercive!) you can convert more and more tables into “*Verbal Community Tables.*”

*In fact, the signs can specify not only the language—in the language—but can also encourage “verbal community” (e.g., “*This is an English Verbal Community Table*”).

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 6

✦ You can also arrange for a couple of rooms in a dormitory to be “*Verbal Community Rooms*,” if not all the time, than perhaps at certain hours. Or start with only two hours each day and gradually *shape* to longer periods when the students in the room desire it. Indeed, all the students in such rooms should be there *only* because they volunteer to do so for a month, or a semester, at a time. They volunteer to live under verbal community rules where *the only requirements are that (a) they may only speak the foreign language that they are learning (during the designated times or in the designated places) and (b) they must help each other, non-coercively, engage in verbal interactions correctly.* As more and more students become interested, you can add rooms, or convert a whole floor, or a whole wing of a dorm, or a whole dorm, into a “*Verbal Community Floor/Wing/Dorm.*” You can do these things for each language you teach (e.g., “*French/Japanese/Russian Verbal Community Floor/Wing/Dorm*”).

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 7

My sister-in-law experienced something similar to that “*Verbal Community Floor/Wing/Dorm*” example when she went to college. She had studied French in high school, but did not envision going on in French. But then, when she went to college, she volunteered to stay in the college’s “French House” where only French was spoken in the common areas (e.g., kitchen, dining room, lounge). In the other parts of the house (e.g., bedrooms) French was encouraged but not required. As part of the experience, of course, the students would politely (i.e., non-coercively) correct each other to *help* each other improve in fluency, etc. However, *the fluency building experience of daily speaking only French in a supportive verbal community* led her to major in French, and in fact go on and get a Ph.D. in French, and become a university French Professor. She has taught French in a university for over 30 years (and is still enjoying doing so). Is that the kind of fluency you desire for your students?

Figure 26—Verbal Community Apps Part 8

✦ So, in every way imaginable, help your students partake of this fundamental reality of foreign language learning: that foreign language learners should *speak their foreign language whenever they are in the presence of others who are also learning that foreign language*—that is, whenever they are in the presence of other members of *their* verbal community—and provide non-coercive corrective feedback, regardless of the level of fluency, *high or low*, that those others have attained. You will be pleased that you did so...

And as part of teaching them to speak their foreign language whenever they are in the presence of others who are also learning that foreign language, you should not only teach them about the reasons for doing so (i.e., teach them verbal behavior analysis) but you should also teach them about the benefits of do so (e.g., faster and better fluency building).

In conclusion...