

should decide that what it is they wish to have in their notebooks to make each and every one of them look like a family album which show and record their learning growth. Now a number of suggestions I could make:

The language students use to record what they learn, what problems they have, what they feel about their class, what problems they had in doing the exercises in their textbook, etc. need not be in the language they learn, though depending on their grade they are expected to be able to do them in that language.

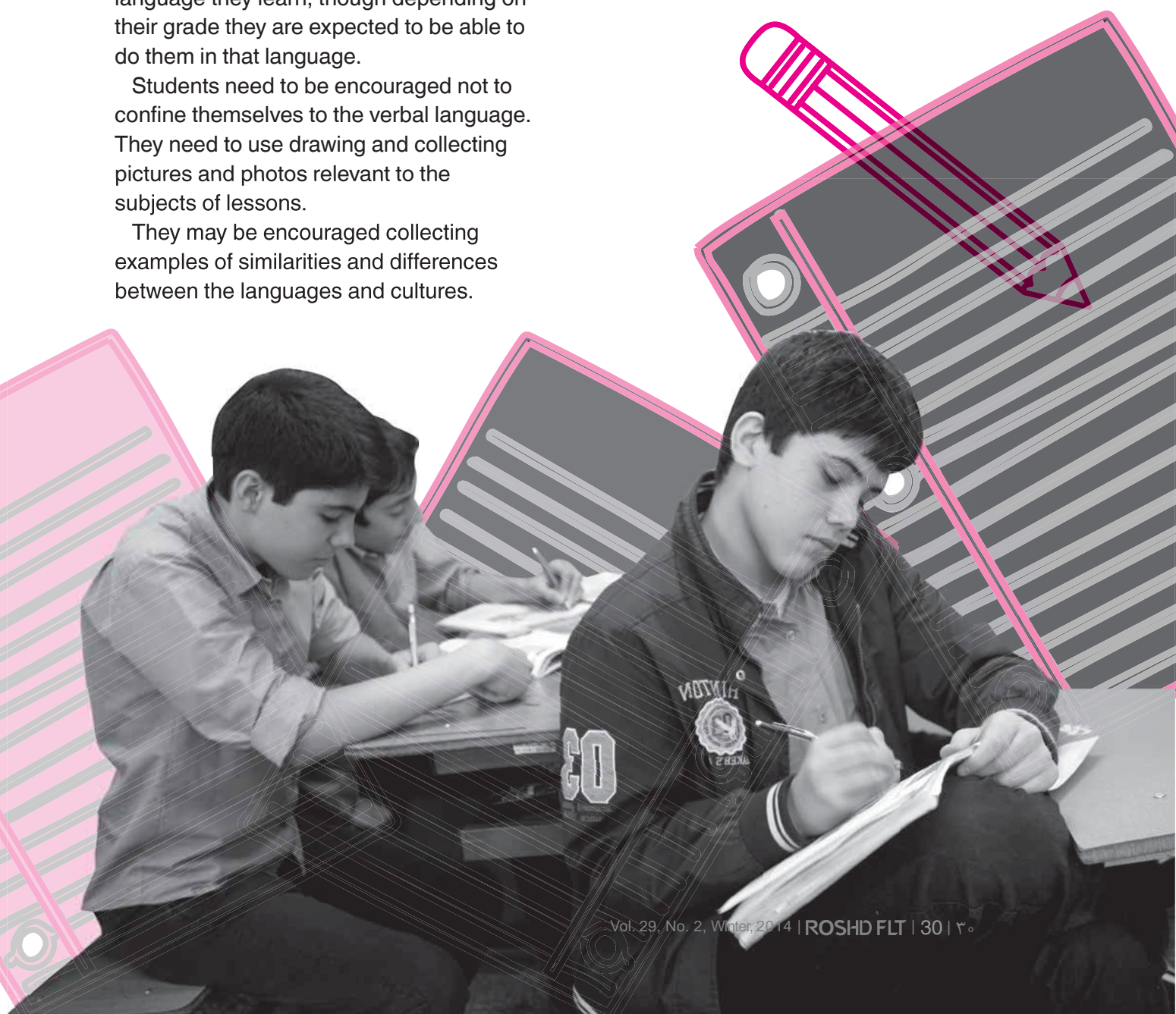
Students need to be encouraged not to confine themselves to the verbal language. They need to use drawing and collecting pictures and photos relevant to the subjects of lessons.

They may be encouraged collecting examples of similarities and differences between the languages and cultures.

Cuttings from newspapers and journals with captions and wise sayings could make homework notebooks preciously interesting.

### **One question:**

If you decide to encourage your students substitute the conventional homework notebook with the one outlined here, what serious problems you expect to have.



twenty hours stretched throughout a year with many holidays in between?" I could not argue with him much convincingly, but pointed at a bunch of homework notebooks he had under his arm and said: "These could be of some help." I could not explain much but added in haste: "Providing you do not force them to use it solely for copying reading passages or dialogues."

Decades gone, I have documents and reasons to believe: Seldom has a teacher asked himself: "What can I do to make better use of homework notebooks?"

I am NOT the person to straitjacket a teacher with long prescriptions of commandments and consider the problem solved. The target is clear to me: The time available for us to expose our highschool students to the foreign language is not sufficient at all. The demand for students' time by other school subjects is real and forceful. The main question is: With the official time allotted to language teaching in highschool schedule, how can we make optimum use of the means like blackboard, textbooks, homework notebooks, and extend our learners' learning time? With the blackboard we cannot do much. We cannot take it home. The textbook, we cannot do that much. Its form, content, how it should be exploited is often determined by its author. The homework notebook, yes we can do a lot to extend our teaching time and the learners' learning time. It goes with the learner outside the school, to the library, to the park, to the kitchen, even to the bathtub. Of course, we have a younger friend to accompany us: a good old friend, a pencil.

### **(c) Determining the quality and quantity of learning**


They are all sorts of measurement tools: yes and no answers, fill-in the blanks, comprehension questions, Cloze, dictation, translation, essay writing, interviews; validity and reliability. Yes, most of them might have won my mind, but they have not won my heart. They are like surgery tools in the operation hall. I do not take pleasure when my blood pressure is checked. My students' homework notebooks provide me pleasant way of evaluating my students' learning. Each and every student's notebook tells me how much of their learning has taken place in its pages.

### **(d) The content of a homework notebook**

What activities should there be included in these notebooks? This is the question I did not like very much to deal with it here. I did not wish to make the note look like a doctor's prescription, or a Master Cook's recipe. I should make just a few offers. It should be firmly stated here that only the teacher and his students determine the content and form of each and every notebook. They decide what it is that they wish to include in their notebooks to make each and every one of them the story of their learning. What was it they learned in the first session; what was the mistake many made; what a brilliant suggestion did someone make; what drawing or photograph reflected the meaning of a reading passage? To cut the long story short: it is the teacher and class who



my school years, in language classes they were basically used for drawing the shapes of the alphabet, copying reading passages, listing new words of each lesson with their native language equivalents, doing and completing written vocabulary and grammar exercises. These were and still are great useful applications: drawing, copying, exercising. There is, however, nothing personal about them. They are dispensable: Students would get rid of them even before they get to their final pages. In my school days they could be thrown away as wastepaper or exchanged with a few candies in the grocery shop in the neighborhood.



**homework notebooks would play three crucial roles in overall management of learners' language learning and use. These three roles are: (a) Their role in learning; (b) Extending their learning time; (c) Their role in determining the quality and quantity of their learning**

#### **What functions are they to play?**

As I see it, homework notebooks would play three crucial roles in overall management of learners' language learning and use. These three roles are: (a) Their role in learning; (b) Extending their learning time; (c) Their role in determining the quality and quantity of their learning.

#### **(a) Their role in learning**

Knowing a language is a composite concept made up of many parts and phases. Properly used homework notebooks can serve most of them effectively. When somebody makes a claim that I know such and such language what he basically means is that: "I can use it for the purposes I have and if somebody uses it for the purposes he/she has I can understand." This is what 'knowing' a language, especially a foreign one, means in a nut-shell. But what is it that the majority of learners need to go through before they make such a claim: "I know such and such language?" The answer to such a question is not as easy as the previous one. There is, however, a common consensus among many involved in the management of language learning that given sufficient time, motivation, meaningful exposure to language, exercise, practice, and use a learner is expected to grow into saying that: "I know such and such language."

A crucial question at this stage is: Can learners' homework notebook serve any of the above phases in the learning process? We provide a positive answer to this question after we briefly explain the other two roles learner homework notebook we claim it plays effectively.

#### **(b) Extending learning time**

An excited enthusiastic English teacher once reported to me that his students from the three classes he teaches are exposed to a kind of English less than twenty hours per school year. He was fishing for my sympathy that: "How on earth a teacher can teach a foreign language in



# A friend in need; a friend indeed

J.B.Sadeghian Ph.D in Applied Linguistics  
Email: jbsadeghian@gmail.com

## Prelude

A man's best friend, the English say, is his dog. The language teacher's best friend, I intend to argue here, is his **student's homework notebook**. I agree a dictionary, a textbook, and even a blackboard may raise a tough competition for this position. I have, however, enough number of reasons to stick to my gun and prove that a more private and personal use of homework notebooks can bring about a more lasting and creative learning. I hope you will be at my side at the end of the debate.

My main purpose, however, throughout these notes has always been to share with readers those ideas which will bring in practical changes in our teaching.

## History

To begin, let me put the cat out of the bag and state that, being retired, I feel

I am somehow out of a genuine touch with what goes on inside the language classrooms. Discussing the matter with a number of teachers and their students, and judging from the content of prescribed textbooks I may harmlessly generalize, however, that its place and function in the cycle of language teaching process has not undergone ground-breaking and fundamental changes. If some teachers or researchers have new brilliant ideas about changes in their forms, contents, and exploitations, why look for better places than pages of **Roshd**, the Iranian Foreign Language Teaching Journal, to air, publish, and share them with fellow-teachers? Substituting them with 'Learning Textbooks,' and/or 'Learner Diaries,' will be later discussed here.

Parents would get homework notebooks and a snack into their children's school bags before prescribed textbooks! In