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Editors

Barbara Majcenovič Kline and Katja Težak



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A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

Dear readers and authors,

“TEACHING Only for the Brave” was the motto of the 2023 IATEFL Slovenia conference. We were in the midst of creative teaching ideas, inspiring plenary talks, and heartfelt meetings of old friends for four days when we realised that all of these teachers truly are brave.

The conference took place surrounded by wonderful greenery in the small town of Moravske Toplice in Slovenia and spanned over four days. The IATEFL Slovenia conference has grown into an annual event where teachers from around the world come together and share their ideas. These ideas were written up and collected in the conference proceedings below. The contributions are organised as per the conference programme. Grzegorz Śpiewak’s plenary contribution *Drill With a Thrill* is followed by the categories VYL (Very Young Learners), YL (Young Learners), Primary, Secondary and All, with the authors listed in alphabetical order.

As the table of contents will tell you, the authors tackled topics ranging from student and teacher mental health, practicing mindfulness, drilling exercises, using movies, drama, and even dance in the classroom, teaching self-compassion and how to adapt activities to not only make them more effective but also fun.

A common thread was still the presence and aftermath of the COVID pandemic and how teachers bravely tackle the consequences brought about by it, and their resilience and creativity in tackling just these shines through in the writing before you.

Another common thread seems to be incorporating technology into teaching, which has, of course, been quite the trend in the last decades, but also seems to have gained even more momentum among teachers when a lot of their classes were transferred online. They found nifty ways to share the necessary knowledge through the screen via apps, self-cre-

ated activities, or simply by adapting activities they managed to find online. What is more, the brave teachers have taken the best from the horrible pandemic situation and are still incorporating whatever positives the digital world has to offer in their daily teaching processes.

Fast digitalization has resulted in the rapid development of AI, which was, alongside the use of ChatGPT, discussed at the conference to a great extent. Yet, this editorial was by no means generated by artificial intelligence since we, the editorial team, were brave enough to write it ourselves.

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning that the author teachers in these proceedings seem to be attuned to their students' and their own needs, which is also an act of bravery in itself. Some of the papers shed light on the emotional and cognitive struggles students and teachers face every day and give helpful insights and suggestions on how to tackle learning anxiety and teacher frustration to make the world a better learning environment.

Although this is a scholarly publication, we have decided to keep the writing style semi-formal, meaning that we have not interfered too much with the authors' attitudes to retain their individual writing styles and unique approaches to sharing their ideas with others.

Be brave, share your ideas; be brave, present your ideas; be brave, write about your ideas; be brave and be a teacher. All of that and more were the mountains the teachers published in these proceedings had to climb, and they did it with hard work and perseverance, and for that, dear teachers, the editorial team thanks you.

Stay brave!

Your 2023 editorial team,

Barbara Majcenovič Kline and **Katja Težak**

Special acknowledgement: We would especially like to thank our diligent and hardworking reviewers who helped improve the papers with their valuable input. Thank you!

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1

DRILL WITH A THRILL

Grzegorz Śpiewak

Abstract

Revision exercises, in spite of their obvious benefits for long-term retention, can easily become mechanical and monotonous. Hence the bad press for the concept of *drilling*. And yet – in view of everything we know from the science of learning – drill we must, to ensure our students' long-term success. This said, we also know that not all types of language drills are equally effective. In this brief article, I offer an approach to revision and consolidation activities that goes well beyond rote, shallow repetition and involves a considerable amount of deep(er) processing of target language. The selection of activities presented below, all tried-and-tested with teenagers in diverse classroom conditions, include a strong element of *thrill* – surprise, amusement, as well as genuine learner engagement.

Keywords: memory, revision, deep processing, learner engagement

1 Introduction: On Drills Without Much Thrill

As a teacher, I am a big believer in revision. After all, *repetitio est mater studiorum*. However, I also remember all too well my old school days, including how many of my teachers used to go about orchestrating revision and consolidation work for me and my fellow students. The governing principle could be, somewhat sarcastically, summed up with the help of ‘Three golden R’s of remembering’: R1: *Repeat*, R2: *Repeat*, and R3 (yes, you have guessed it): *Repeat*. “Ancient history” – I hear you saying. Well, yes and no. On the one hand, I did graduate last century (last *millennium*, in fact ...). And yet, in my capacity as an ELT consultant, I have observed many classrooms in several different countries, including my own, where this ancient principle is very much alive and kicking. This is a real pity in view of just about everything that we have learnt over the last few decades about what really helps people remember things much better and much longer. Simplifying massively for reasons of space limitations, the key is not just *quantity* but also – and above all – *quality* of revision. Where can such quality come from?

2 Drilling Deeper

One major hint is the by-now classic “deep processing hypothesis” of Craik and Lockhart (1972). According to this hypothesis, when information is processed *deeply*, i.e., in a meaningful way, such as by making connections with prior knowledge, relating it to personal experiences, or actively engaging in elaboration or organization of the information, it is more likely to be retained and retrieved later. In contrast, shallow processing, such as simply repeating or rehearsing information without engaging with its meaning, is less likely to result in durable memory traces. Craik and Lockhart argued that the depth of processing, rather than the amount of rehearsal or repetition, is the critical factor in determining the durability of memory. Fascinating, is it not? And, importantly, their basic claim has stood the test of time. Nearly half a century later, Jay McTighe and Harvey F. Silver (2020) define “deeper learning” as a process that involves students in making meaning of the content they are learning, rather than just memorizing and regurgitating information. The authors argue that deeper, longer-lasting learning occurs when students are able to apply, analyse, synthesise, and evaluate information in meaningful and authentic ways.

If you are now thinking: it all sounds good at a theoretical level, but how can I make sense of it behind my classroom doors, bear with me for just a little longer. In the next short section, I will briefly revisit the “three R’s of remembering,” taking advantage of the current science of learning.

3 The Three R’s Revisited

Having the privilege of observing other great teachers in action, I have been passionately collecting examples of revision activities that illustrate the value of “deep processing” and, as such, lead to “deeper learning” in the sense above (without the teachers themselves necessarily being aware of their theoretical underpinnings). However, it is only relatively recently that I came across the work of Joern Hauptmann. In his 2004 doctoral dissertation,

he claimed that learning success relies heavily on **recycling** as well as on **re-presenting** of language items – and therefore on **re-noticing** of them by the learner. These three terms have proved the most useful way for me to categorize all those great activities that I had either collected from others or developed myself. Below is a small sample – I do hope you will choose to try them out with your learners, and thus make them associate revision with a little bit of *thrill*, by which I mean surprise, amusement, and genuine learner engagement.

3.1 Recycling Language With a Thrill

The common characteristic of this group of activities is that selected items in the input material are presented to the learner without any modifications whatsoever. Thus, the extra deep processing – and the resultant ‘thrill’ – comes from the surprising manner in which the teacher organizes the activity.

Activity 1: Which ones you DO NOT want?

The image shows a page from a textbook titled 'Irregular verbs'. It contains a list of verbs in two columns, each with its infinitive form, past tense, and past participle. A blue box with white text is overlaid on the page, asking 'Which 7 do you NOT want on our test ...?!'. Below the image, there is a source attribution: '[source: Impulse A2/B1 Student's Book, Macmillan]'. The list of verbs includes:

Infinitive	Past Tense	Past Participle
be	was/were	been
bring	brought	brought
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
climb	climbed	climbed
come	came	come
cut	cut	cut
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found
fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgot
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung	hung
have	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hit	hit	hit
hold	held	held
hurt	hurt	hurt
keep	kept	kept
know	knew	known
leave	left	left
lend	lent	lent
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
mean	meant	meant
meet	met	met
pay	paid	paid
put	put	put
read	read	read
run	ran	run
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
send	sent	sent
sit	sat	sat
sleep	slept	slept
stand	stood	stood
stop	stopped	stopped
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tell	told	told
throw	threw	thrown
turn	turned	turned
wake	woke	woken
wear	wore	worn
win	won	won
write	wrote	written

1. Present your students with a list of language items that you want them to revise. It could be a list of irregular verbs, a wordlist at the end of the current coursebook unit, etc.
2. Their task is to work in pairs first and choose 7 items they do not want to come up on a test next week (the number is, of course, adjustable, though fewer than 5 would most likely not be worth their while).
3. Once the pairs are happy with their (un)selection, get them to work in groups of four – and renegotiate, to come up with a new, *joint* list of 7 items.
4. And, if you feel particularly naughty, you may then get them to repeat the process one more time, in groups of eight (they will most likely need ‘spokespersons’ at this stage).

Rationale:

This activity (which I have learnt from my great Polish colleague, Karolina Kotorowicz-Jasinska) will certainly be surprising to your learners: it seemingly (but see below!) goes

against a teachers' dogma: *all* items that are taught are normally considered to be potentially testable, right? Therefore, how can we actively encourage our learners to study less? That is exactly where deep processing comes to the fore. To see this, first think about the sort of items that your students are most likely to unselect (answer: those that they consider *difficult*). But how can they *decide* exactly which of the items on their list are more/ less difficult (answer: they need to study the list rather carefully). Therefore, by performing the un-selection task, your students will actually be revising at least once. And, given that the reason they are doing this is to reduce their workload later on, the task is going to be truly meaningful to them, and so they will most likely really apply themselves to it – after all, it is in their best interest (short-term – or so they think, but we know better, do we not?). To make the happy scene complete, consider steps [3] and [4] in the procedure above: are they not, in essence, revision rounds no. 2 and 3? Therefore, in order to study less for that irregular verbs test, your students will do so much meaningful, motivated revision here and now that the test itself will, in essence, be redundant – yet I would not recommend that you drop it, lest they think it was all a joke. In fact, the test should be administered in the usual way, with the unselected items not included, of course. By doing it exactly as described, you will, in fact, be laying the foundations for repeating this task on some other occasion, with a different set of items.

Activity 2: Make Your Own Categories!

2 Personality

affectionate • arrogant • artistic • bossy • cheerful • clever • confident • determined • easy-going • energetic • generous • hard-working • impatient • likeable • lively • loyal • optimistic • outgoing • patient • reliable • sensible • sensitive • serious • shy • talkative • tidy • well-organised

3 Synonyms and partial synonyms

attractive • beautiful • bright • calm • cheerful • childish • clever • cute • difficult • easy-going • elderly • energetic • friendly • generous • glad • good-looking • gorgeous • handsome • happy • hard • immature • intelligent • kind • lively • old • outgoing • pretty • relaxed • slim • sociable • thin



1. Get your students to look at a list of familiar vocabulary, such as a unit word list.
2. Their task, individually first, is to come up with as many (sub) categories with the items from that list as they can. The categories can be ordinary (e.g., 'qualities I (dis)like in a friend') or a little crazy (teenagers never fail with these).
3. Next, they work in groups of 3 or 4, compare ideas, and vote on top three categories; they share their winning ones with the rest of their classmates.

How many (sub)categories can YOU think of ...?

[source, Gateway to the World B1 Student's Book, Macmillan]

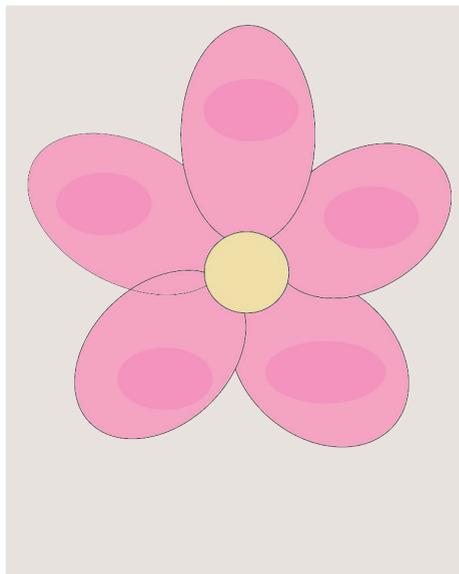
Rationale:
 If you have never done this sort of activity, you are in for a lot of surprises: your students (particularly teenagers) will come up with ideas that you would never think of yourself! And, as before, the task is certainly going to be meaningful to them – after all, they are inventing their *own, personal* (sub)categories, and thus making the words (that they are, in essence, recycling) a lot more relevant: *qualities that I hate / that really scare me / that I wish*

I had / that I think no celebrity has got / that would make me really rich, and so on. In the process, they will be considering the meaning of individual words a lot deeper than they would if they only tried to memorize the list for a test. On top of that, the micro-skill that they are exercising along the way (i.e. categorization) ranks very high among those that – as independent research suggests – will help them come up with metalinguistic generalizations, or solve cloze tests more easily.

3.2 Re-Presenting Language with a Thrill

The two activities that I would like to present in this section require that your students revise the material they have covered recently and reorganize it in a way that I hope they will find surprising and engaging, thus making the effort worthwhile – and the resulting memory traces considerably more powerful and long-lasting.

Activity 3: A Collocation Flower



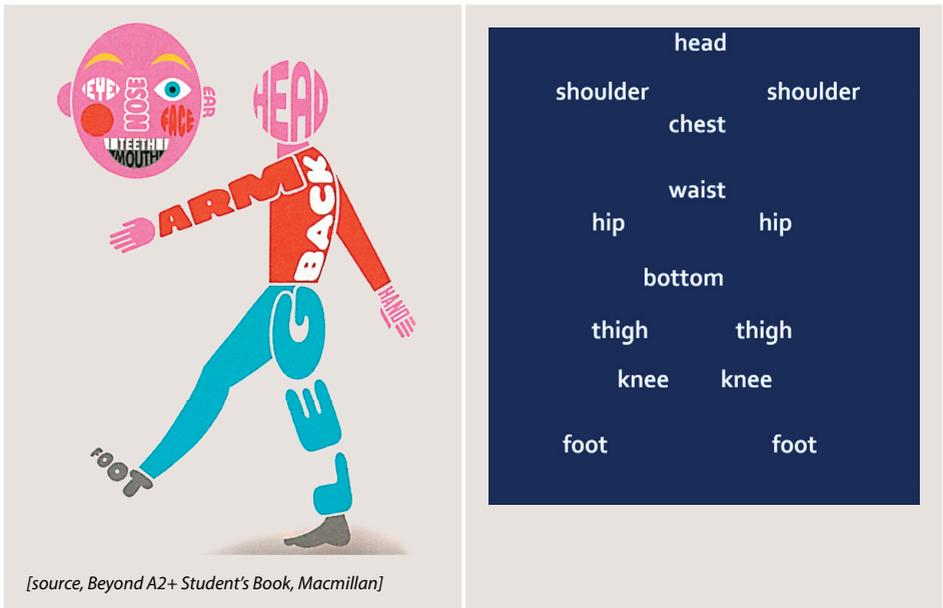
1. Show a blank collocation flower on a screen (or distribute handouts to your students).
2. Next, uncover words on the petals, one by one – all collocates of a single item.
3. Their task is to guess the connecting word and (if they are working with a handout) write it in the centre of the flower.
4. When you have done a few examples, get them to try and design their own collocation flowers (in class or as homework); if needed, set some extra rules, e.g., the type(s) of collocations that they are to look for.
5. Finally, they can exchange their flowers and test one another.

Rationale:

This activity (originally developed by Gosia Kobierzycka) makes the otherwise fairly abstract concept of collocation beautifully tangible and visual, allowing for dual coding of the material to be remembered, as argued persuasively by A. Paivio (1986). I hope it goes without saying that – while surprising and engaging thanks to its form – the activity will, in fact, induce a very labour-intensive round of revision: your students will need to spend a lot of time going over their notes and/or relevant coursebook pages in order to select appropriate collocations.

Activity 4: Word Art

1. Show your students some examples of how the meaning of a word can be represented visually, either by transforming the shape of the letters (see example on the left below) or by rearranging words on a page (see example on the right – produced by a former teenage student of mine).
2. Get them to try their hand at it, starting with really easy examples, e.g., adjective pairs like *tall – short / thick – thin*.
3. Make a habit of it – encourage your students to produce several such word art pieces after each unit of work; display the most creative ones on your classroom wall – for other students to be further inspired.



Rationale:

This one really ticks all the possible 'deep learning' and 'deep processing' boxes, does it not? The thing to emphasize here is that the true potential of this idea transpires when it is not just a one-off (it would still make a memorable lesson, but we want more, right?): if repeated regularly, it potentially becomes a powerful revision / note-taking strategy.

3.3 Re-Noticing Language With a Thrill

In conclusion, let us look at one example of a re-noticing activity. As the name of this category suggests, the idea here is for students to look at familiar language with a fresh eye and notice its value at least once more than usual.

Activity 4: Dialogue Unjumbling

a surprise
birthday
can , can
come , come
great
Hello
here
Hi
I
it's , it's , it's
Mrs Mortimer
mum
Nick's , Nick's
on
Ricky
Saturday
to the cinema
Yes
you



1. Select a dialogue (or its fragment) that you did in class recently.
2. Make a list of *all* words in this dialogue in alphabetical order; copy each word as many times as it appears in the dialogue; display the original dialogue covered with rectangles so that Ss can see the *size* of the original speaking turns but not the words!
3. Get them – as a class – to try and reproduce the original dialogue as closely as they possibly can.

Rationale:

It is actually more difficult than it might seem (see for yourself – it is way below your proficiency level, but then you never saw the original dialogue). When you try it with your learners, I guarantee that the otherwise fairly mainstream transactional dialogue such as this one (a Mum arranging a birthday surprise for a child with a friend of hers) will suddenly become a genuine riddle, as its wording will be subject to umpteen partial attempts at reconstruction. Hugely meaningful, genuinely engaging.

4 Conclusion: A License to ... Drill

I do hope that the five activity samples presented above will start you on a journey of seeking out further opportunities for deep(er) processing of language to be revised and, as a result, for your students to experience truly deep(er) learning. As teachers, we do have a license to drill – so let us use it smartly, shall we? Good luck!

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2

LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH ELEMENTS OF SPORT

Adela Krois

Abstract

In the first educational period, foreign language teaching is carried out via a content approach - it connects foreign language learning with environmental education, mathematics, music, art, and sports. Physical activity and the game method make it easier for children to come into contact with foreign languages and make it easier for them to accept them. Games can awaken positive feelings in children, so the learning can become faster and the knowledge more lasting. Integrating a foreign language with sports offers learners experience and knowledge, which is an important factor in acquiring motor and communication skills. The article presents physical activities that can be integrated into foreign language teaching.

Keywords: integrated learning, young learners, sport, physical activity, games

1 Introduction

At a time of rapid development and the pace of life, children are moving away from nature and physical activity. Therefore, it is important to provide children with as much movement as possible. Games play an important role in the development of a child into a holistic, harmonious and creative personality (Pistotnik, 1995).

Children usually like to move and exercise. Therefore, it makes sense to use motivation and the desire to move to learn a foreign language. For successful foreign language learning, the most successful are movement games that require a total physical response. When an activity attracts a child, it entertains and teaches them; therefore, they might learn faster, with more joy and might acquire more knowledge. Therefore, movement and playing games are among the most suitable methods for introducing children to their first words in a foreign language (Videmšek, Drašler and Pišot, 2003).

2 English and Sports

Learning in the early years follows the principle of holistic learning. Holistic learning seeks to include all aspects of the learner - mind, body and spirit. Children learn through their sense organs and based on their experiences. They learn in all areas while receiving stimuli from the environment and while shaping responses to them. Their movement is a response to sound, music, image, etc. When they learn motor structures, their brains go through the same processes as when listening to music or a foreign language, understanding space, etc. (Nakičević, 2008).

Learning a foreign language through physical activities promotes cognitive, psychomotor and affective learning, especially if the lessons occur outside the classroom, in the gym, or in the schoolyard. Exercise is natural for young learners and physical activity greatly stimulates pupils. They have to expend excess energy, and the more they can, in their opinion, "go wild," the more excited and willing they are to cooperate.

In English classes in the first educational period, all activities (games, instructions, storytelling, etc.) are held in the target language and with the teacher's demonstration and assistance, the learners understand what is happening. Physical activity supports the understanding of the foreign language, as children not only hear and see words and phrases but become even more aware of them when they show the meaning of an individual word or phrase through movement.

When lessons are planned, the teacher should choose content that can be integrated into movement tasks and intertwine it with sports goals. Great emphasis is placed on movement because children get to know their bodies through movement and establish a relationship with their surroundings, which is a precondition for learning (Vehovar, Bejat Krajnc, 2004). During lessons, a pleasant and stimulating atmosphere is created, in which pupils perform movement activities, play and learn English. New words and phrases are presented with the

help of demonstrations, realia and flashcards. The children should follow the lessons very closely, imitate, identify and conclude what certain phrases mean, and then perform the movement tasks by imitation. At the same time, they are encouraged to repeat certain phrases during physical activity, stimulated to perform motor tasks, and are praised for their effort. Through games and movement, pupils can show their understanding of individual words or phrases, thus becoming more confident and motivated.

Movement games provide a rich and stimulating learning environment. Vocabulary and phrases are directly used during an activity, for example, when children want to challenge the hunter to catch them while playing a tag game. Thus, they do not have to wait for the question to be able to use the acquired knowledge. Pupils can express their understanding verbally or nonverbally, i.e., they can show their understanding simply by moving. Verbal comprehension is, therefore, easier when it is expressed in combination with movement.

Whenever suitable and possible, teaching and learning English can be performed in the park, schoolyard, or gym. When the lessons occur in the classroom, the sport's content is somewhat limited due to the limited space. Nevertheless, including as much physical activity as possible is vital because it can help increase memory, perception, attention, and emotion. It is essential to take care of the safety of the pupils by removing the chairs and desks. However, there are a number of physical activities that can be done in one spot.

3 Physical Activities

a) Physical activities that can be integrated into English lessons:

- *natural movement* - e.g., walking backwards, walking on all fours, jumping, running to a certain flashcard, running dictation, imitating animals, vehicles, etc.
- *swapping seats* – in a circle, the children say what they are wearing, and all those to whom this applies stand up and swap places. The child in the middle also finds his seat. Possible topics are clothes, description of appearance, saying what they like, etc.
- *movement in place* - Brain Gym exercises can be performed (e.g., cross-lateral movements) or when a word is heard children respond to it by moving, e.g., when learning seasons, the pupils spin (spring), squat (autumn), sit down (winter), jump (summer) - each movement illustrates one season
- *dancing* - while singing songs, movement is used to illustrate the meaning of the lyrics or simple dance steps are performed
- *“rotten egg” game* - according to the principle of the Slovenian traditional movement game, different versions of this game can be performed. Children do not carry a paper tissue or pronounce the typical counting-out rhyme. Instead, they list colours, animals, food, etc. that they like or introduce children in the circle by name. When the pupil outside the circle says a wrong name on purpose or something he

or she does not like, the chosen pupil has to catch him or her.

- *breathing exercises* - at the end of the lesson or even during it, when it is necessary to calm down, children can relax with breathing or mindfulness exercises and practice counting at the same time
- *warm-up exercises* - when telling a short story, children perform exercises to warm up the muscles, or they repeat body parts, directions, and counting after the teacher.

b) Physical activities that can be performed outdoors or in the gym:

- *relays* - children move in various ways to the finish point, where they have to identify and select the right flashcard or object and bring it to the queue or take it back, while their teammates use encouragement phrases (e.g., Let's go, let's go, etc.).
- *elementary games* - different running and tag games (e.g., Sun and Ice, What's the Time, Mr. Wolf, Black Man, Crayons, etc.) are adapted so that pupils can learn and practice target vocabulary and phrases throughout the game.
- *Obstacle course* - in the gym, a simple obstacle course is set up and during the exercises, the children simultaneously practice the target vocabulary (e.g., movement around the obstacle course, where they imitate animals or act out the content of a story, e.g., rescuing a princess from a tower where they have to overcome various obstacles).

Here is an example of an English lesson performed outdoors on the topic of animals:

- *warm-up activity*: Wolf and Sheep (adapted from the elementary game Black Man). One pupil is the wolf and the other pupil is a sheep, and they are asked who is afraid of the big bad wolf. After answering "nobody," they run to the other side.
- *Stretching exercises*: pupils perform exercises, listen to and repeat names of body parts after the teacher, directions (left, right, up, down) and count to 20.
- *jumps – jumping animals*: the emphasis is on jumps that require a push-off with both feet. A game with coloured hoops and animal movement is included to make pupils more motivated. For pupils to learn new vocabulary, pictures are used and they have to imitate the movements of animals (rabbit, frog, kangaroo). There is one flashcard in each hoop and on my signal, the pupils jump in a certain way to a specific hoop/animal.
- *relay*: according to the relay rules, pupils run to the hoop, where they select the appropriate flashcard and return to the queue. If a pupil chooses the wrong picture, they must return and get the right one. Teammates are encouraged during the activity with the phrase "Let's go, let's go."
- *relaxation*: pupils perform breathing and relaxation exercises. They count to 20.

In this particular case, the natural movement of the animals helped them to master the so-called two-foot jump (push-off with both feet), and at the same time, they learned to name the animals in English.

4 Conclusion

Physical activity, movement and games make it easier for children to come into contact with English. When physical activities are included, children are better motivated to learn English, especially if learning takes place outdoors or in the gym. What is more, the children's communication skills are better utilized during physical activity. Children can express their understanding verbally or nonverbally, whereby verbal communication is easier when expressed in combination with movement. Another advantage of integrating English and sports can be seen in easier content adaptation, as various topics can be added. In other subjects, the choice of a topic is somewhat more limited. Integrating English with sport enables cross-curricular teaching and provides the pupils with experience and knowledge and also helps them acquire motor and communication skills, all while giving them a chance to take better care of their health.

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3

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH DANCE: MOVEMENT AS LANGUAGE

Amy Anne Kennedy

Abstract

Movement in its various forms can be a useful tool in the classroom, its functions varying from preparing the brain for work and providing breaks to teaching and reviewing materials. In navigating the world of teaching ESL to children, another such function movement can take on is that of a neutral language with which all children can engage. In this sense, creative movement and dance can become a bridge between a child's mother tongue and English. Through an example class, I will demonstrate one way in which movement can be utilised as language in teaching English to Slovene speakers, although this method could also prove successful in teaching ESL to a multi-lingual class.

Keywords: movement, dance, ESL

1 Introduction

Many papers have been written and studies conducted on the topic of children learning through movement – be that as infants negotiating the world, tasting items, touching, and holding, or as older children jumping, running, and dancing. Not only does movement offer tactile learners a satisfactory way of learning, but it can also prove useful in preparing children for learning, providing brain breaks during a lesson, teaching new materials, and repeating materials already covered.

Most often, in teaching English to young children, teachers in Slovenia use Slovene as a buffer – as a bridge to English. Thus, the teacher and the children use the children's first language to teach and form connections with the second language. The children's resulting knowledge of English is connected to Slovene: they build the acquired language atop their existing building blocks of Slovene. However, English and Slovene do not come from the same language families. Their structures vary, they have their own specific collocations and sayings, and even the most basic phrases and words cannot always be directly translated from one language into the other.

What if we could lessen, or possibly eliminate, the use of the Slovene language in teaching English as a second language to young children? Immersion school is one such method of learning and developing a child's language knowledge. However, that would prove difficult in an English class that takes place once per week for 45 minutes. What if movement, creative movement, movement exercises, and games, could take on the role of Slovene? Creative movement and dance can bridge the child's existing language and English, thus offering the teacher the option to omit the use of Slovene mostly or entirely in teaching English.

2 Creative Movement and Dance

The difference (or even the lack thereof) between creative movement and dance has been discussed by many, and the difference is subtle. It seems to differ from scholar to scholar and teacher to teacher; their definitions of creative movement sometimes encapsulating elements of dance, while other times setting boundaries between the two. Creative movement is often described as teacher or child-led and created movement that is used as a framework for expressing feelings, ideas, and concepts in connection with the topic being taught. Lengel and Kuczala (2010) use the term "movement with purpose" for the following steps they apply in the classroom: preparing the brain, providing brain breaks, supporting exercise and fitness, developing class cohesion, reviewing content, and teaching content (ix).

In our case, the purpose is teaching and learning the English language and dance, and the steps in doing so are formulated differently.

How does, therefore, creative movement differ from dance in our case? Dance can be many things; there are many dance styles and techniques. The term "dance" includes a nod to teaching form and technique in movement, and the purpose of teaching dance is for

the student to gain and improve dance technique, learn exercises and choreography, explore movement and their limits in movement, and, ultimately, to have fun. One could even use creative movement exercises and games to teach dance. Creative movement, as I see it, is a tool used in learning, while dance, like English, can be thought of as a subject of its own. Dow (2010) uses the terms “creative dance” and “creative movement” and states that the terms *dance* and *movement* are interchangeable when referring to creative dance (p. 30). She teaches what she calls a creative dance class, so all three terms connect to the teaching of movement and not to the teaching of a subject, such as English. However, she does further her discussion to include using movement in teaching other subjects. She states that “it is a good vehicle for teaching themed sessions, such as weather, animals, transportation, and colours, and encompassing all learning domains—physical, social-emotional, and cognitive—and potentially addressing early learning standards” (p. 32).

In using movement and dance to teach English, we not only offer a non-verbal bridge between two languages, but we also create a physically active learning environment. In their study, titled “The Association Between Aerobic Fitness and Language,” Scudder et al. (2014) corroborated previous research in this field and confirmed the existence of a positive link between aerobic fitness and academic achievement in children.

A few years ago, I spent a year teaching English as a second language with the use of creative movement to students in grades 1 and 2 at two primary schools in Maribor. Each class would meet once per week for a 45-minute lesson. At the time, the acquisition of English vocabulary was the focus of the class, and there was no focus on learning how to move or dance. It was in this environment that I used creative movement as a tool to prepare the children for learning, to provide breaks during a lesson, to teach new vocabulary, and to repeat materials we had already covered. How could this be taken further? Soon after that first year of using creative movement in the classroom, I began teaching “English Through Dance” at a dance school in Maribor. I decided to immerse the children both in English and in movement. This is where the idea for the class was born: it was to be a full dance class for children conducted in English, where vocabulary acquisition and dance acquisition were of equal value.

3 English Through Dance

“English Through Dance” (“Angleščina skozi ples” in Slovene) is a class I taught for four consecutive years at the same dance school in Maribor. The class was meant for children aged between four and seven – during the first few years, the children were between four and six, while later, they were between five and seven. Throughout our weekly classes of 45 minutes, we focused equally on vocabulary acquisition and dance technique, using creative movement and movement games every step of the way.

I divided every class into the following elements: initial circle, little circle in the middle, warm up, diagonal, games, songs, choreography, and stretch. The initial circle was a space I held next to the radio, where the children and I would gather before the beginning of the class to

say “hello” and tick their names off the list. The order of the class elements would differ from week to week, so I will outline an example of one class. Following the initial circle, we move into the centre of the room and form a “little circle in the middle,” where we proceed to tuck our bodies into as small a ball as possible. The children know that we are playing “Follow me,” so they follow my movements in silence. We stretch out one hand into the centre of the circle and quickly withdraw it. We move our heads from side to side. We slither into a crouching position, and then we jump. We stretch our legs out in front while sitting on the floor and wiggle our toes. “Follow you” is up next, and each child gets to demonstrate a few movements for all of us to follow. While still seated, we begin the sequence of movements that goes with “Mr. Sun,” and soon enough, we are all dancing and singing one of our favourite songs. We finish our last rendition of the song with an explosion that carries us all the way to one side of the dance studio. This is the starting point for our “diagonal.”

Today, we begin our diagonal with a few animals. I call out “butterfly,” and the children move across the room to the other side like butterflies. I call out “snake,” and the children move back across the room like snakes. Each child then calls out their favourite animal one by one, and we all move across the floor as those animals. After thus repeating a few of the animal words we know, we move on to movement and action words, such as little steps, big steps, little jumps, big jumps, star jump, crawl, spin, tippy toes, kick, low down, high up, relevé, plié, and pirouette. Since we have just gone over a certain dance technique, it is now time for a brain break: how about a game?

We have been charging around the room, so let us calm down a little bit with the “Leading game.” I have the children form pairs (if there is an odd number of children, I join in). One of the children in each pair closes their eyes while the other child gently takes hold of their hand and elbow. The child who can see guides the other child around the room without them bumping into the walls or the other children. After a minute or so, the children switch roles. When they get the hang of it, they begin to trace ever more interesting paths across the room.

The children then spread out across the room, filling the space, and we all face the mirror. It is choreography time. We add on to our choreography in every class so that we are all set by the time we need to perform. Today, we add a few moves to our existing choreography; a star jump, three steps back, and a slide onto the floor. The children know these moves and words because we have practised them across the diagonal. I then have each child make up their own piece of choreography: three spring-themed moves, one of which should be a pirouette or a spin. We take a short video of everyone’s choreography, and over the course of the next few classes, we will string all the pieces together and add them into the dance for the performance.

After practising our choreography, we have five minutes left, so it is time to wind down. We began the class with a little circle, moved through a diagonal, played the leading game,

and practised our choreography – now, we will stretch. We move into our little circle in the middle and begin by circling our heads, then our shoulders, our arms, our hips, our knees, and our ankles, naming the body parts as we go. We then sit with our legs outstretched and practise pointing and flexing our feet. We breathe in while raising our outstretched arms above our heads and breathe out while moving into a forward fold. This stretch leads us into singing “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”. We tap each body part as we sing it, and we stretch very far to reach our toes. With a minute left, we scurry over to the speaker, back into our initial circle, and give each other high-fives before waving and saying “Bye-bye, see you next week.”

4 Conclusion

In seeking to lessen my use of the Slovene language in teaching English to children, I decided to use movement and dance as a bridge between the child’s mother tongue and English, thus mostly omitting my use of Slovene in my classes. In the beginning, I would have the children do exercises or play games that used only movement (such as the “Follow me” game), wherein the children learned to remain silent and attentive, and they learned that they could understand what they needed to do from my gestures alone. I then carried this into the explanation of games, exercises across the room, and choreography, gradually adding in more and more English words and explanations. After the first few classes, the children would know exactly what to do when I would say “Diagonal” or “Let’s play ‘Dance and freeze.’” After the first year, the children who had already taken the class would guide those who were new. Movement and dance provided more than creative movement exercises and brain breaks; they effectively took on the role of a new, movement-based language, bridging the gap between the language with which the children were already familiar and that which was unfamiliar. Movement as language can provide a universal starting point for learning a new language, and I can see its application as being useful in early learner English classes and in multi-lingual classroom settings.

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4

BE BRAVE, KEEP CALM AND – TEACH CULTURE!

Aleksandar Tonic

Abstract

Language and culture are closely intertwined. It is important for teachers to take their learners out of the frames of solely acquiring grammar and vocabulary and help them acquire the understanding of the cultural context in which the foreign language is to be used. Special holidays, famous people, major present and past events, national symbols, food, sports, and even language itself as a tool for communication are topics which require a certain cultural awareness, inter-cultural awareness, and inter-cultural communication in the classroom. This paper discusses theoretical input to help teachers with creating practical output focused on the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence and fostering an appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives among learners of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: ESL, teaching culture, communication

1 Introduction

In today's globalized world, English has become the language of communication in many aspects of our lives. Bayyurt (2006) argues that it is essential for teachers of English to have an active awareness and sensitivity in terms of lesson planning and adjusting classroom activities in such a way that the importance and status of English as a world language is thoroughly observed. Suzanne (2017) points out that cultural awareness, i.e., "people's understanding of the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values" (p. 295), is crucial in a foreign language classroom. Consequently, it can be argued that teaching culture in an EFL classroom is an essential part of language education. It is vital for us as teachers to work on developing our learners' intercultural communicative competence and building in them an appreciation of the diversity of cultural perspectives. In the Slovene education system, this is enhanced and enforced by the current Slovene curricula for teaching English as an elementary school subject. According to these curricula, learners shall, among other things, develop a communicative culture and an understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. Teaching English in Slovene elementary schools, therefore, contributes not only to bi- or multilingualism but also to a deeper and better understanding of multiculturalism – locally, Europe-wide and worldwide.

2 Bringing Culture into the Classroom

Careful lesson planning will quite probably have teachers ask themselves a range of questions when it comes to teaching culture. Why should culture be taught at all? How old should learners be to be ready to learn about cultural topics? When and how often should such topics be introduced to them? Which topics should be chosen? In which ways should they be presented? All these are relevant questions, and teachers have an obligation and responsibility to think actively and continuously about them.

There are several reasons to teach culture. Teaching culture develops our learners' intercultural communicative competence. It raises awareness of the aspect of interculturality, and it promotes the understanding of cultural norms. It empowers learners to become better communicators when it comes to communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, it motivates learners to think about, reflect upon, be more sensitive about their own culture, and make cross-cultural comparisons.

If planned and done right, there is no such thing as an inappropriate time to teach culture. It can be done with learners of all ages. Since learners in elementary education are at a relatively early stage of developing their foreign language skills, it is important to use various activities to introduce them to the culture of the English-speaking world. One effective teaching strategy of introducing culture to young learners is through songs and rhymes. Thus, nursery rhymes and folk songs can be used to teach the youngest learners new vocabulary, basic grammatical patterns, and pronunciation through music and possibly through dance. A further interesting teaching strategy is role-play. It can be used

to simulate different cultural situations, e.g., greetings, table manners, social customs, etc., through which learners will learn about different cultural practices and develop their social skills. Since young learners love stories, and stories can be a very effective medium to teach culture, storytelling is another way to do so. Stories from the target culture can be used to make learners think about and identify certain cultural elements, such as traditions and values, and to make comparisons to their own culture. Teachers can ask older learners in primary education to share personal stories about their cultural practices and traditions. Learners can learn about their own culture and explore differences regarding the culture of the English-speaking world. Enhancing lessons with pictures and other visual materials is also a way of bringing culture to the classroom. They can be used to teach elements of culture, such as festivals, landmarks, and food and ask learners to identify and compare them with their own culture. Projects based on elements of culture are another effective culture-teaching strategy. Learners can make posters, presentations, or even videos with elements of culture, and share or discuss them with their classmates. It is also important to incorporate elements of culture, such as games, discussions, crafts, and the like, into everyday classroom activities. Teachers can make use of activities such as traditional board games, depicting and recognising cultural symbols such as flags and emblems. Finally, if you have a chance, invite a native speaker to join you in the classroom and have learners prepare questions and topics of interest to strike up a conversation. Learning from people with first-hand target-language culture experiences can boost attention as well as interest among your learners.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that whatever the strategy and methodology behind bringing culture into the classroom, this should not be limited solely to learning about the culture of the English-speaking world. Rather, learners should also be aware and learn about their own culture and be able to make comparisons to see how cultures differ and thus develop a deeper understanding of today's multicultural world.

3 Topics, Topics, Topics – a Sea of Possibilities

When it comes to selecting topics for teaching culture, there is so much for us as EFL teachers to choose from. It is important to build the lessons in a fun and engaging way. You can have your learners “meet” the Royal Family. In terms of British culture, this is always a current topic, whether it be learning about present-time events such as the recent coronation of King Charles III or learning about parts of the rich history of the Royal Family. History-based culture lessons can be an interesting teacher's choice for learners. You can present to them certain important parts of British history, such as the Elizabethan and Victorian eras, or the time of the industrial revolution in connection to children's rights. You can teach learners about historic sights such as Buckingham Palace or Stonehenge, among others. Literature is another topic that is always in. The English-speaking world has a rich literary history with famous authors such as William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, J.K. Rowling, and Roald Dahl, to name a few. You can teach a little bit of Shakespearean drama in the context of learning about the Globe Theatre or learning about Romeo and Juliet, for

example. Also, topics involving food and drinks are always intriguing for learners. Have them learn about British cuisine in connection with certain holidays! There is Christmas pudding, fish and chips, hot cross buns, tea time, etc. Have them make comparisons to Slovene cuisine and culinary traditions. The worlds of sports, music and comedy can be interesting topics as well. Learners can discover some traditional British sports and compare them to sports in Slovenia or learn about famous sportsmen, fair play, etc. British music has had a huge impact on world popular music, and British comedy is renowned around the globe. Bring a current or an evergreen song into the classroom. Plan your lesson based on video prompts or other authentic audio-visual materials.

Whatever the topic you choose in primary education, focus on the most important aspects of culture and make connections to the learners' own culture, as delving into similarities and differences will probably be more engaging for learners, and they will be more motivated to learn.

4 From Challenges to Opportunities

Tran-Hoang-Thu (2010) notes that while teachers might feel the need to teach culture, teaching it "may not be as easy as one might have thought" (p. 30). As planning methods and activities for bringing culture to your classroom can be quite challenging, at the same time, it offers a world of opportunities:

- Understanding the cultural context of the language, albeit in artificial classroom circumstances, can help learners to better understand certain aspects of communication, such as idiomatic expressions, slang, and using language appropriately in certain situations.
- Learning about the culture of a target language can help learners to comprehend what they are listening to, what they are reading, or what they are talking about in a conversation.
- Teaching culture will help learners appreciate and respect cultural diversity, enhance tolerance, empathy, and understanding the way the world works in a cross-cultural context.
- Cultural knowledge built in the protective classroom environment will make it easier for learners to find their way in real-world situations later in life, e.g., when travelling, looking for a job abroad, meeting and communicating with peers from other countries, etc.

It is up to us, teachers, to see the value of these opportunities and make the best of them. From choosing the appropriate reading and audio-visual materials from textbooks and authentic sources to executing the lessons in a fun and engaging way with modern technology or in a more old-fashioned way, learning about culture can promote learning the language itself.

5 Conclusion

Language and culture go hand in hand; therefore, teaching a language at any level will sooner or later involve teaching culture. While planning lessons that include learning about culture might not be the easiest of tasks for teachers, it sure is an important and responsible one. Teachers can go about teaching culture in various ways, from songs, role-play, stories, (authentic) audio-visual materials to projects, games, discussions and crafts. By choosing interesting and engaging cultural topics and learning materials, we can promote our learners' perception and understanding of cultural norms, beliefs, and values, and encourage them to reflect upon their own culture. We can prepare them for real-world target-language situations and empower them to be able to communicate more easily and effectively with people across different cultures.

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5

GAMES AND GROUPS - GAMES IN GROUPS!

Andreja Mandeljc

Abstract

This article presents the benefits of group work in the classroom, as well as the advantages of using games instead of worksheets to practice what students have already learnt, monitor their progress, or even help them gain new knowledge. Group work allows the teacher to be a facilitator of student learning, not only the content provider, and can thus serve as a great tool to monitor the classroom environment and help students with their individual needs. When working in groups, students feel safer; they lose their inhibitions and get the help or drive they might lack when working individually. When adding a variety of games and group work strategies to the mix, learning can virtually happen on its own, and the teacher has the time to observe the students' progress. This means, on the other hand, that this kind of teaching requires prior preparation of the materials and instructions in order to make these kinds of lessons successful.

Keywords: group work, games, teacher as facilitator, strategies, classroom instructions

1 Introduction

Teaching and learning in the last century have undergone some turbulence, with new theories on different approaches to teaching and learning emerging every few years. The public demanded that students receive an education suitable to their needs through differentiated activities, less frontal teaching, elimination of (corporal) punishment, and others. Following Vygotsky's theories on learning that happens intrinsically and effortlessly, as a consequence of learner-based teaching, a variety of teaching strategies that support and promote collaborative learning emerged. Group work within the classroom and the teacher as a facilitator have since become a major field of education research and became an integral part of teacher training, as well as the basis for some of the worldwide school concepts (i.e., the IB programme, the Montessori schools, etc.). It is also easier to make lessons more engaging when working in groups by using games designed for specific purposes. Games develop skills essential to the 21st-century human (social, communication, digital) and support intelligences (digital, emotional, developmental and IQ). Furthermore, they also develop all four language skills at the same time, especially in a language classroom.

2 Group Work as the Essence of an ESL Classroom

It is said that today's learners are tomorrow's leaders – and teachers have been sent to pave their way to success (VVOB – Annual Public Report, 2019; Title). As such, it is of vital importance for us to be aware that we are not only responsible for the development of their language skills but also for their general development, i.e., social, communication, and thinking skills, to name but a few. All of the above cover an array of soft and hard skills that we aim to develop daily. The key to successful implementation lies, as Ibrahim et al. (2020) believe, in the simultaneous acquisition of a set of skills. This could be achieved faster and less strenuously if students work collaboratively, in groups, and obtain these skills *de facto*, i.e., not consciously or on purpose. As students tend to minimise their inhibitions when working in a smaller, familiar environment, learning, too, tends to be more successful and meaningful. The skills and knowledge acquired or practised during group work activities last longer and benefit them in other subjects as well, especially where interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary lessons take place. However, in order for all of the above to work, we have to determine the purpose and goals of a group work activity, as well as determine the factors to group students appropriately.

Sometimes, activities work best when students are *arranged by chance*. To achieve the desired outcome, we can use a variety of strategies. We can use a pouch and let the students draw a number of their group or a pre-determined factor that distinguishes the groups, we can play different sorting games (lining up, bar-graphing, etc.), or create entry cards or boarding passes where different seating arrangements are specified. Let me exemplify: we tried taking the stories we had read in class or those they had already known and applying them to most of the lessons in one way or another. Thus, the students were, at a certain point, arranged into groups based on the characters from these stories – they would draw a wooden pin from a pouch and find on it the name of a character. They

would then form groups by finding other characters from their stories and going to their assigned place in the classroom. What we have to bear in mind is that the prevailing teaching and learning environment in Slovenia is an oversized class population in an undersized classroom with next to no resources (especially digitally-wise). Therefore, group work can be a strenuous and loud activity for teachers and students alike; however, if we plan in advance, this, too, can be avoided.

Group work is sometimes, however, most effective if the groups are pre-determined and differentiated by ability, interest, and pre-knowledge or skillset previously observed. Especially when we are acquiring new knowledge, as opposed to rehearsing or practising the already-existing one, such division may benefit us best. We can prepare differentiated materials and realia to enhance and actualise students' learning. In group work, it is easier to monitor students' progress and understanding, especially if you know exactly where each student is at that moment – physically, as well as mentally.

3 The importance of Games and Collaborative Activities for an EFL classroom

Collaborative learning, as an answer to the demands for change in the education system, was a source of inspiration for many an activity still widely used and raged about today. The Think-Pair-Share activity for group discussion (Lyman, 1981) is a perfect tool for an ESL classroom, as students can first think on their own, rehearse their answers, and improve their product before discussing it with a partner (offering peer reflection and peer collaboration as the building ground of modern society) and sharing it with others, developing interpersonal, intrapersonal, collaborative and communication skills all at once. This activity, as well as some other activities developed within Lyman's research of collaborative learning, made it possible for teachers of English as a secondary or foreign language all around the world to make their students swim. This is especially true with Upper Elementary students, whose inhibitions have not only grown but built a wall, and to motivate them to share their thoughts in front of the whole class in a foreign language, is strenuous, if not impossible. In such cases, strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, Listen-Read-Discuss, Partner reading, etc., may prove much more effective than eliciting students through, e.g., popcorn reading, brainstorming as a class, etc.

In the Early Years Language Learning and Primary School students, however, games have a much bigger yield. In the age of digitalisation and gamification of virtually everything, it is group work and simple instruction for board or card games that make the students think and drag them out of their comfort zones, thus developing in them the essential skills to make them the aforementioned leaders of tomorrow. There are, however, a lot of web pages and applications to help the teacher design these games, so the process of going out of our comfort zones feels reciprocal. For the case-study basis of this workshop, I designed and tested in class several different games that everybody knows: a jigsaw puzzle to practice telling time (appropriate for Grade 5 level), a topic-based Dobble game with pictures connected to stationery and classroom objects (Grade 3 curriculum), a Memory game to

rehearse animals and their babies (Grade 4 and 5 curricula), a Snakes and Ladders board game to revise Present Simple (to be used in Grade 6), and combined with other games and activities I had created previously. Students were engaged throughout the lessons, as changing stations (they played a game at 1 station for 8 minutes and then moved clock-wise to another) not only helped them develop their language skills and enriched their knowledge but also catered to the needs of the students with SEN (short attention span, ADHD students), and little or no reading or writing motivated others (dyslexia, scotopic syndrome, etc.).

To connect the “old-school” games with the future and engage older students to participate better, my case study has shown that combining stations of paper-based realia, figurines, and straightforward instructions with interactive games that students can access on their phones is a perfect solution to making language happen in the classroom. Students experience just the right amount of frustration at the board game or Memory station to solve the tasks provided by the teacher (Jamboard posts, google Arts and Culture crosswords, Froggy Jumps on Educaplay, etc.) and which the teacher can then monitor remotely or even assess as part of the formative assessment.

4 Conclusion

It is not the teacher’s sole purpose to make learning fun but rather to make learning happen. If one can achieve that by having some fun along the way, the impact of learning may be even greater, more meaningful, and more committed to memory. Collaborative learning, or group work, in EFL classrooms, is a strategy, even a method, that benefits not only the learners but also the teacher, as it makes it easier for us to monitor students’ progress and engagement, offering us a facilitator role and making students take responsibility for their own learning. I believe that, especially in the past few years, we have forgotten that students are capable of thinking on their own and expressing their thoughts in their own words. If by working in groups and playing games, we can once again instill a sense of pride over their achievements, oversee their (possible) inhibitions and/or special needs and develop a skillset they will build on throughout their lives, our facilitation will have achieved its purpose.

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6

HOW CAN ONE IMAGE BE HELPFUL IN THE CLASSROOM?

Emina Rekanović

Abstract

The paper focuses on the use of teaching materials (photos and pictures) and ice-breaker activities (specifically *Flash the Picture*) in foreign language classrooms (in this case, English). *Flash the Picture* is an activity where the teacher displays an image and uses it as an introduction to the lesson, an ice-breaking activity for getting to know their learners, or an activity to teach specific topics. This activity aims to introduce the lesson, facilitate participation in the lesson and group interaction, both individual and teamwork, encourage thinking outside the box and creative thinking, and develop language skills (listening, speaking, understanding, and writing). This paper provides examples of how to use an image to have a more interactive and productive lesson and offers one short lesson plan, including photos as teaching materials.

Keywords: pictures, ice-breaker activity, participation, language development

1 Introduction

It is often said that a single picture is worth a thousand words. This illustrates how images and language are interconnected. Pictures can be a source of inspiration and trigger a profound use of language. Language learning is an active process where a learner should be exposed to a foreign language in as many different manners as possible. Almost everything can be used as a teaching tool, even mundane everyday things like pictures, photos, or postcards. We see pictures, images, and photos all around us, on a daily basis. Everything is preserved in this little colourful square. It is also well known that pictures have always held their place when it comes to teaching languages. Images present a great source for teaching languages and bringing the world into the classroom. They “make a powerful contribution to both the content and the process of language learning” (Wright, 1989, p. 16).

Baker (2015) continues,

“[a]ctivities in the language class are effective if they replicate the kinds of interactions that students encounter outside the classroom. In today’s world of smartphone cameras and Instagram and Facebook applications, images play a central role in our students’ lives, whether they are young learners or adults. Photographs should thus be part of the authentic learning experiences we strive to create” (p. 13).

2 Pictures in the Classroom

“Pictures are essential when it comes to engaging students who are learning a new language at any level” (How English Language Teachers Can Use Pictures in Class, British Council). Most language learners begin learning by observing pictures or flashcards and connecting words, sounds, and meanings to them. Textbooks and workbooks are decorated with images and are simply inseparable from language learning. As they present adjustable material and help learners learn, pick up, and acquire language, pictures are very much welcome in the classroom. One can ask themselves, what can pictures contribute? The span of their benefits is diverse, and they can facilitate interest and motivation, create a sense of context for the language, and present a specific reference point or stimulus. “Pictures can play a key role in motivating students, contextualizing the language they are using, giving them a reference and in helping to discipline the activity” (Wright, 1989, p. 10). Pictures are useful for teaching and practicing grammar, structures, syntax (cognitive development, independent thinking), expanding vocabulary, and improving the four skills – listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Images can motivate students to participate in lessons, and they can contribute to the use of the language in different contexts such as describing objects in an objective manner (*This is a bicycle.*) or subjective manner (*I like riding a bicycle.*). “Students can verbally describe their observations, ideas, and analysis in addition to listening to the ideas of their classmates” (Dell’Angelo, 2015, par. Imagery and Language). Taking all of this into account, photos and pictures present a stimulus when it comes to conversation, storytelling, describing, or discussions. And when it comes to teachers, this teaching material is suitable for all kinds of students, from beginners to

advanced, from kids to adults. “Images provide a means for students to interact with phenomena from across the world; observing images from different perspectives occurs in seconds and can be done by learners of all language levels” (Baker, 2015, p. 4).

Apart from the linguistic benefits in a foreign language classroom, images can be used as bonding material. Activities that include photos can be a great asset for learners to get to know each other better. “Relationships between learners are fundamental to successful learning in many approaches and methodologies, and ice-breakers are designed to begin the process of building a positive dynamic in the class” (British Council, Teaching English, par. Ice-breakers). For example, any picture can be displayed, and students can be asked to participate in the lesson by expressing their impressions of the image, saying what they think when they see it, asking questions, and expressing their feelings. “Because interpretation of what we see is subjective, analyzing images provides opportunities for meaningful student-to-student interaction” (Baker, 2015, p. 2).

3 Some Ideas on How to Use Pictures

When it comes to teaching a foreign language, pictures can be used to introduce and teach various topics – from simple vocabulary categories to complex subjects. Here are some simple ideas on how to use photos in everyday teaching.

When using photos to teach vocabulary and make it easier and more approachable, the vocabulary can be divided into categories such as colours, shapes, numbers, weather, professions, body parts, clothing items, and similar. Here are some ideas on how to use an image for vocabulary teaching.

1. *Teaching colours:* A teacher can show a particular photo aiming to teach colours. It can include an easy activity and a simple task of listing all the colours seen in the photo. The teacher can facilitate participation by asking students the following questions: *‘What colours can you see in the image?’*, *‘Can you tell me where red is?’*, *‘Where do you see blue?’*. The teacher can use an image simply to introduce the topic of colours and connect the content of the photo with the rest of the existing colour palette by asking what other colours exist and if students can name colours in their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, the discussion can include personal information where students can share what their favourite colours are. (Here, the image is used as a bonding tool between classmates).
2. *Teaching shapes:* An image can be used to introduce the category of shapes. A teacher can ask about shapes and what kinds of shapes exist. Using the photo as a reference, the teacher can ask students to point at the shapes visible in the photo: oval, circle, square, triangle, etc. The teacher can then ask students to identify shapes around them (Here, the image is used as a tool to set the language in their learning context).
3. *Teaching numbers:* Students can be asked to count a specific item in the photo (e.g., flowers). The teacher can motivate the students by asking simple questions: *‘How many white flowers are there? Can you count all the pink flowers?’* etc.

4. *Teaching about the weather:* Using an image to think about the weather and what kind of weather there is. Students can be motivated with simple questions: 'What kind of weather is in the photo? What is the weather like today?' (Again, the image is used as a tool to set the language into its learning context).
5. *Teaching about different professions:* If the chosen image contains people in it, a teacher could use it to introduce the topic of professions by describing the people in the photo, and asking what they could be: a teacher, doctor, model, etc. The teacher can then further encourage the students' discussion by asking about what different professionals do. They can also talk about the students' occupational wishes and what they would like to do in the future by using images to facilitate an open discussion about the subjective preferences of the students and getting to know each other better.

Besides being used for teaching vocabulary, images are also great for teaching grammar. Grammar can also be divided into categories, and depending on the age group, the teacher will decide on what to teach with the aid of the photos. Here are some ideas.

1. *Teaching about sentence structure:* The level of sentence structure and grammar will depend on the level of the learners' knowledge. However, images can be used to teach the basics and the word order in the sentence (SVO). As an example, the teacher can introduce a simple sentence: 'This flower is red.' or 'It is sunny. It is rainy.' Thus, the students are motivated to acquire the sentence structure and produce correct sentences.
2. *Grammar plurals:* A teacher can introduce more difficult aspects of grammar, such as singular and plural, by simply using individual parts of an image, for example: 'There is one orange flower. There are seven pink flowers.'
3. *Formation of questions:* A teacher may use the image to show the learners how to form questions and introduce the grammar topic: 'How many flowers are there? What are the people doing?'. Thus, the students become familiar with the word order in the questions.
4. *Teaching parts of speech:* A teacher can also use images to introduce different parts of speech - *nouns* (flowers, people, houses), *adjectives* (sunny, cloudy, warm, nice), and *verbs* (walk, talk, stroll, look). The parts of speech can be introduced at the same time as teaching vocabulary, and the idea of how to teach this is presented in the lesson plan later in the paper.

Photos can also be used as a facilitator to introduce difficult abstract topics, for example, *culture*. A teacher can choose an image and introduce the lesson by asking simple questions and facilitating critical thinking, such as 'What country could this be? Which city? What do you know about this culture? Can you share something about your culture?'. In this manner, the discussion is encouraged, and students can share their knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Apart from being a good tool to teach language aspects, photos are also a good aid for facilitating group interactions, individual and team work. An image can be used for exercises where students must work in pairs (write a short dialogue based on the image), an exercise where the students rely on themselves and display their individual work (describe the photo), or where the group work is facilitated (create a play based on the photo). It is important that during a lesson, all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) are equally represented and developed. An image can be used to facilitate writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills. For example, writing skills can be facilitated through simple tasks such as writing a short story based on the photo or writing a poem based on the words mentioned while describing the photo. Reading will be facilitated by sharing the story or the poem with the rest of the class. The development of speaking skills can be encouraged through the activities of storytelling based on the photo. While one or two students are telling the story, the rest of the class should pay attention to then be able to answer the follow-up questions that will be asked after the storytelling. To encourage participation during class and introduce the class peers to one another, the picture can be used as a source of subjective responses and sharing one's own individual preferences. (*I like flowers. I visited Italy once. I do not like traveling. I would like to be an astronaut. I love warm weather.*) "When using images in the English language classroom, challenge students to share the feelings that an image provokes or express why they like or dislike particular photographs. This kind of oral interaction is truly communicative" (Baker, 2015, p. 3).

3.1 Flash the Picture

Flash the Picture is an activity where the teacher displays an image and uses it as an introduction to a lesson, an ice-breaking activity for getting to know their learners, or an activity to teach specific topics. This activity aims to introduce the lesson, facilitate participation, group interaction, both individual and teamwork, thinking outside the box and creative thinking, and influence the development of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). It can be used as a warm-up or introduction to a lesson, as a break from hard tasks, or simply as a form of brainstorming. A teacher simply prepares interesting photos and decides how to manage the lesson and what teaching aims will be in focus (e.g., vocabulary or parts of speech). Apart from all the practical aspects, this activity is very funny and interesting. Still, the teacher must be careful regarding classroom management because the atmosphere might become chaotic, and many students may speak simultaneously; therefore, the teacher must set rules at the beginning of the activity. Another great thing about this activity is the fact that it is adjustable to every environment and does not have to depend on technology aids during the class. Teachers can simply bring printed photos, postcards, or original artwork into the classroom. The activity can just as well be performed outside the classroom. Furthermore, the activity is suitable for all learning levels - from pre-schoolers to advanced learners.

In the following part of this paper, a short lesson plan is introduced, where the activity *Flash the Picture* is used to teach vocabulary and parts of speech. This short lesson plan is just an idea of how to effectively use images in the classroom.

Flash the picture – teaching vocabulary and grammar

Age	Activity suitable for all age groups, the teacher has to adjust the content and the pace of the activity to the level s/he is teaching
Materials	photos, blackboard, pens
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	<p>SHORT-TERM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to teach new vocabulary • to teach grammar: parts of speech • to encourage students to engage and participate in the lesson • to encourage students to use acquired knowledge • to help students understand parts of speech • to effectively use images in the lesson • to help students create a poem <p>LONG-TERM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to develop a positive attitude toward learning • to create a supportive, engaging, amusing, and friendly atmosphere in the classroom for learning English • to develop the 4 language skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading • to encourage students to work in groups and to be a team member • to encourage students to participate in the lesson • to encourage students to share their ideas and opinions with the rest of the class • to encourage students to have fun while studying grammar • to effectively use images in the classroom
PROCEDURE	introduction, main part, final part
TIME	45' (Note: the lesson can be adjusted; if it is executed in a non-formal context without time restrictions, it can last longer)
DESCRIPTION	<p>INTRODUCTION:</p> <p>The teacher chooses one image s/he thinks is suitable for teaching vocabulary and parts of speech. The teacher displays the image with the projector on the board or shows the image in printed form or on a laptop.</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;">  <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p>The teacher facilitates participation in the lesson by asking questions such as: <i>'What can you see in the photo?'</i> <i>'Can you tell me how you feel looking at this image?'</i> <i>'Does the image remind you of something?'</i> <i>'Do you like flowers?'</i></p> <p>Students should provide their answers. It is important that the teacher encourages all students to participate in the lesson. The teacher makes a list of words students may use (for example, students might say: a flower, a sunflower, nice, blurry, still, etc.). The list could be written on the blackboard.</p> </div> </div>

MAIN PART:

The teacher explains grammar concepts such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. After this, the teacher suggests making word clouds (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), and students should fill the circles with the right words.

Note: This can be done in groups; one group could work on nouns, the other on verbs, etc., or it can be done individually or as a whole class activity.

(An example of word clouds is presented below.)



After this, the teacher introduces the next activity – writing a poem based on the vocabulary presented in the lesson and based on the image displayed. Students are divided into groups, and each group should write a poem using the word clouds they had created during the lesson.

Note: The groups could also write poems using just one word-cloud.

FINAL PART:

The teacher kindly asks the students to read the poems they created and share their final work with their peers. The lesson is finished with the teacher thanking all the students for their participation in class. Additionally, the poems can be displayed in the classroom together with the image and word clouds. This way, the students have a reminder of their good work and an interesting grammar lesson.

4 Conclusion

This short paper provides practical examples of how simple pictures can be used in the classroom as a teaching aid and how one simple activity can become a great teaching method. The paper contains some simple ideas for using images in the classroom and provides one activity plan with more details on how to teach grammar using images. All in all, using images in the classroom has many benefits, and they can be a great tool for incredible lessons.

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7

BE MINDFUL, NOT MIND FULL

Katja Apat Rožič

Abstract

We all have our minds full of various everyday situations that cause different kinds of stress. To somehow survive in this hectic world, mindfulness is the right solution against stress. This article will give you a glimpse of some useful mindfulness techniques that we can use for ourselves or, as teachers, for our students.

Keywords: mindfulness, techniques, pupils

1 Introduction

I acquainted myself with mindfulness a few years ago, and initially, I was quite indifferent to it. As time passed, everyday life became more and more stressful, and I was trying to find a way to cope with stress. That is when I took an Erasmus Course about mindfulness and learnt more about it. The course really inspired me. That is why I decided to deepen my knowledge about mindfulness, to be ready to pass it on to my students, and maybe afterwards start mindfulness classes at school as extracurricular activities for those being keen on it.

I also took a two-month mindfulness course in Ljubljana, which was a nice experience. If I want to start it as an extra activity with my students, I also need to practice it. I would like to encourage my students to use different techniques in their everyday lives to cope better with stress. I have already tried some of the techniques with my students, which turned out well. We have to be aware, though, that mindfulness takes time; it does not come over night. It is a long process.

2 Mindfulness and English Language Teaching

There can be a strong link between mindfulness and English language teaching. Integrating mindfulness practices into language learning can help pupils improve focus, concentration, and stress management. Teaching them relaxation techniques, time management, and positive self-talk can make a big difference. Mindfulness techniques can enhance listening skills, communication, and overall language comprehension. Mindfulness can create a more positive and effective learning environment for English language learners. Helping pupils calm down before exams is very important. One of the simple mindful activities that we can use before exams is deep breathing. It helps pupils clear their minds, enhance their ability to engage with the given material and improve their comprehension.

Before getting started with different mindful activities in your English classroom, you can do some preparation tasks first and then some reading activities to become familiar with mindfulness, to learn some new English expressions or phrasal verbs related to mindfulness. One of the activities is matching the phrases with the definitions (*Picture 1*), where you can also pay attention to some phrasal verbs, and the other is reading comprehension (*Picture 2*). Both activities are, in my opinion, very good for an English lesson before starting with mindfulness.

Magazine: Mindfulness – preparation

Match the phrases with the definitions.

4 items remaining

to plan for something  to be aware of something  to pay attention to something  to deal with something 

to know or notice that something exists

to find a way to manage something

to watch or listen to someone or something carefully

to think about and decide what you are going to do

 Finish

 Try again

Picture 1 – Mindfulness: Match the phrases with the definitions. (British Council)

Magazine: Mindfulness – 1

Are the sentences true or false?

6 items remaining

Really noticing a beautiful sunset is an example of mindfulness.

True False

To be mindful we need to stop ourselves from thinking.

True False

Technology has made our lives busier.

True False

Mindfulness can help you to feel calmer and happier.

True False

Mindfulness won't help you lose weight.

True False

To eat a raisin mindfully you should eat it quite quickly.

True False

 Finish

 Try again

Picture 2 – Mindfulness: Are these sentences true or false? (British Council)

3 Skills Gained During Mindfulness Practice

It is known that mindfulness has positive effects on both children and adults. According to Rehberger et al. (2020), the most important skills which are gained during mindfulness practice are:

- being able to navigate challenging feelings,
- being focused on the present moment,
- being better in communication skills,
- being self-compassionate and
- being able to relieve stress.

There are a lot of stressful moments at school for both students and teachers and having the knowledge of mindfulness can be very helpful. You can help yourself and your students (to) reduce the levels of stress by doing some of the exercises to become more aware of yourself and focus on the present moment.

My paper will give you a glimpse of the exercises and techniques and provide some examples for further use.

4 Mindfulness Exercises and Techniques

We must be aware that students must not be forced to do the exercises, and we cannot expect everything to run smoothly. The approach needs to be patient and playful. To gain the most out of it, we need to experience the mindful exercises on our own first.

When I first tried a mindful exercise with my students, their response was quite predictable. They felt strange, funny or did not feel anything. The second time, it was the same. However, after the third and the fourth time, their feedback was – interesting, relaxed, comfortable, and calm. Well, still not for everyone. What I want to say is that eventually, it is worth it, and it really works for the majority of pupils. You just have to be persistent.

Some of the short exercises that I have been using are based on suggestions of Rehberger et al. (2020):

- Mindful breathing - the “flower breath” exercise is an easy way to help pupils become aware of their breath, and it also calms them down. Besides the flower breath exercise, I sometimes use the one called “loving kindness breath.” You start it in the same way as the flower breath, beginning to tune in to the sound of your breathing – you take a deep breath in and exhale slowly. Then, each time you exhale, you think of sending love and kindness first to yourself, then to others, etc. You finish the loving kindness breath by coming back to breathing normally and by opening your eyes. It is a nice exercise when you need to slow down to express more love to yourself and to those around you.
- Activate all senses - I usually give pupils handouts with pictures of 5 senses, and they write down 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can

hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can savour. In the end, they write how they feel after the exercise. You can also do this exercise just by focusing on those five senses in your mind. It takes just a minute or two of your time and it helps you to release the negativity in your thoughts. There is no special reason for the different numbers of these things, but you have to engage different senses in this mindful activity to fully immerse in the present moment and enhance the sensory experience.

- A bouncy heart – you encourage pupils to jump up and down for half a minute or a minute. Then they sit down, close their eyes and put a hand on the heart while being focused on their breathing and how their heartbeat feels, especially as it starts to slow down. Whenever pupils are feeling stressed, they can redirect their focus to their bodies to feel grounded again.
- Thoughts in a jar – pupils are given small coloured papers. They write down how they are feeling in the present moment. After that, they fold the papers and put them in a jar. If they are in a bad mood, it is very good for them to express their feelings and let them go.
- A lollipop – pupils focus on the scent, how it feels in their hands, against their lips, the flavour on their tongue, the texture as they chew and the sensation as they finally swallow it.



Picture 3 – A list of different mindful exercises I created for the classroom. (Rehberger, T., Novak, B., Pfajfar, M., 2020)

5 Conclusion

We must not forget that mindfulness is a skill that needs to be trained. It is a long process. We can compare it to learning how to ride a bike. Once you have learnt it, you cannot forget it. It is the same with mindfulness – it becomes a habit, and by training it, we internalise it and it becomes a part of our life. The positive effects of practising mindfulness can be utilised in a classroom to everyone's advantage, both teachers' and pupils'.

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8

3D AND CREATIVE APPS IN ELT HISTORY-RELATED TOPICS

Lea Deržanič

Abstract

The paper discusses using 3D and creative apps in a set of English lessons, which focus on the history-related topic of The Tower of London. Students are encouraged to use various apps and online content throughout the different steps of research and learning processes, which promotes high motivation and the acquiring of linguistic knowledge on a deeper level. They practiced advanced ICT skills to complete diverse tasks such as research an interactive 3D app to gather specific information, browse the internet for contrasting information and use a creative app to design a brochure summarizing their work. The presented tasks aim to explore blended learning in ELT to enhance student achievement.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), mobile applications, ICT skills, blended learning

1 Introduction

As an English teacher, I repeatedly find myself searching internet sites, articles, books and whatnot to find the next different and intriguing thing to use in my classroom. Experience shows that combining various methods and techniques, traditional as well as more modern ones, is so far the best way to go if we want to motivate students further and thus enhance their linguistic achievement as well as their ICT skills. Considering the fact that mobile devices play a significant role in students' daily lives not only as a distraction but also as an educational tool, it seems only logical to incorporate their use into lessons as well. Lately, with the progression of various mobile technologies, mobile apps have tremendously increased in variety and have been explored in teaching and learning English to a great extent (Hankins, Irudayasamy & Yantandu Uba, 2021). Using apps in ELT has proven to be a successful motivational tool as well as a huge help in making learning authentic, diverse and natural, and thus extremely effective. Mobility, learning through real-life situations and self-regulated learning are mostly not available in the traditional style of learning, but are accessible in Mobile Assisted Second Language Learning (Persson & Nouri, 2018). MASLL facilitates second language acquisition and the development of linguistic knowledge, as it focuses mainly on the acquisition of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, listening comprehension, and speaking fluency (Persson & Nouri, 2018; Kaceti & Klímová, 2019).

2 The Advantages of Including Mobile Apps in ELT

For a long time, teaching has been performed in mostly the same, rigid manner. Students sitting in rows, facing the front. Teachers speaking, students listening, writing and repeating. I believe those days are gone, or at least they should be gone. The emergence of ICT has provided teachers with immense opportunities to include new educational resources and tools. Nowadays, everybody has a smartphone and almost all schools own tablets. It does not matter how advanced they are; they are good enough to use in the classroom. Most English language apps have required considerable financial investments and experts have put a lot of thought into them. Using apps to teach English offers students something visual to look at, which engages them and helps them do language tasks in the environment in which they choose to spend their free time. The traditional classroom alone cannot do that and this brings us a few steps closer to our students' interests and closer to achieving our goals more effectively and more easily.

Mobile apps can be used in numerous ways: as the main activity, as an extension to activities or as a supplement to in-class instruction. Students can use the apps anywhere, anytime and as often as they need. They are free, easy, and quick to download and update. They can be deleted if the students do not find them beneficial for further use. Many apps that target a specific skill offer a wide range of materials, various content difficulty levels and they use different approaches to skill development.

3 The Lesson Structure

The material has been constructed as a set of 4 lessons which the students performed in several steps within a week. The first step included the use of a 3D app, which offered a virtual walk around the Tower of London in the distant past. In this step, students received a handout with questions about this topic. They had to gather all the pieces of information as they browsed the app and its numerous possibilities. The task was performed in pairs or groups. The second step involved browsing the Tower's internet site, since the task was to research the differences between the past and present use of the building itself, the significance of the Tower of London today and its importance in tourism. The third step included the use of a creative app with which the students created an eye-catching tourist brochure about the Tower of London. In this step, the students prepared an overview of the past and the present and showed their gained knowledge from the previous lessons. In the last, fourth step, students were asked to present their overall work and display their brochure in the classroom. The lessons have been carried out with 9th grade primary school students.

3.1 Step 1: A Virtual Walk and Gathering Information

The students were first familiarized with the 3D app. They were guided through the process of downloading the app on school tablets or their own mobile devices and creating a profile in it. After all the students had completed the first task, they entered the settings, switched the language to English and began to look into the features of the app. They were shown all the features of the app, such as how to move around the building freely, where to find written information and audio recordings, how to find subtopics and animations and where to find the interactive quiz they had to complete after filling in the handout. The 3D model in the app is the distant past version of the Tower of London. The students worked in pairs or groups and divided their work so they could navigate the handout faster and more effectively. Each student covered a different set of questions and when they finished the activity, they had to communicate their part to their partner(s). When all students finished this task, they took the interactive quiz together. After the quiz, students participated in a class activity where a summary and conclusions were discussed by the students and the teacher. The learning aims of this step were searching for specific information in the texts (improving reading skills), extending their vocabulary, using ICT skills and exercising speaking competence.

3.2 Step 2: Internet Research – The Tower of London Today

In this step, the students were asked to research the following questions individually:

- Have the building's exterior or its purpose changed over time? If yes, how?
- What is its value today?
- How much does it cost to enter and what is there to see today?

The research was done in a computer science classroom where students browsed the internet, tried to find relevant information concerning the given questions and to form a bigger picture on the topic in their minds. They discovered that its purpose has changed tremendously and that the Tower of London is now one of the main tourist attractions in London. They got familiar with booking entrance tickets online and found out there are several different possibilities considering what to see and what to do there nowadays. Thinking ahead of the third step, where they had to create a brochure, they already had to think of the possibilities that would attract tourists, such as more affordable prices, inviting guided tours, combo tickets, etc. They were asked to write all the relevant information in their notebooks for further use. It turned out that different students chose different points of view on the topic. Some of the students chose to include legends, some of them focused on the mysterious side of the Tower of London, while others focused on selling the tour and the surroundings; therefore, the brochures came out unexpectedly varied. The learning aims of this step were searching for relevant information in the texts and videos (reading and listening skills) and using ICT skills.

3.3 Steps 3 and 4: Creative Work – A Brochure; Presentations and Display

The third step was also performed individually in the computer science classroom, and it was meant to be as creative as possible. They were allowed to create a tourist brochure to their liking, without specific instructions; they only needed to consider the form of the brochure. In this step they were expected to connect the past to the present, extract the relevant information for tourists and practice the use of a creative app that they had already been familiar with but have so far only used to create presentations. There was quite some peer collaboration during this stage of the learning process as well. The students who were more skillful with the app taught those who were not, and the end results have been beneficial for both. Students got to show their creativity as well as practice numerous ICT skills while performing this task. Finally, the students had to upload their work on the online classroom platform where they also received the teacher's feedback on the corrections needed.

After the individual corrections were tackled at home, they presented their work process and the brochure. After the presentations, the teacher and the students both evaluated the products as well as the effects of the learning process. The students were able to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with each stage and give reasons for their opinions, which has provided valuable feedback for future lesson planning. The learning aims of these steps were applying the gained knowledge, using ICT skills and exercising language competences (speaking and writing skills).

4 Conclusion

The presented English lessons show an example of blended learning in ELT. They combined face-to-face teaching and learning with the use of mobile 3D creative applications, online content and online classroom and communication. The outcomes of the diversely structured

set of lessons indicated that blended learning affects each of the language skills positively. Through using various modern methods, the students gained a considerable amount of knowledge as well as extensive practice in reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, since each individual part of the lessons offered something new and different. This combination enabled the students to learn comprehensively, collaborate, explore, and proceed at their own pace, as well as express themselves creatively. This set of lessons therefore enabled the implementation of several 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, technology skills and digital literacy. Naturally, it takes some valuable teacher time to plan and design the process, as well as choose the content that best corresponds to the students' needs and their learning style; however, when one manages to discover and adjust the content to merge with their classroom routine, it can be extremely rewarding for both students and teachers.

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9

ARE DIFFICULT LEARNERS AND/OR DIFFICULT LEARNING A NEW NORM?

Nada Đukić

Abstract

The difference between guilt and shame will be presented in terms of the factors that trigger one and the other and the negative effect they have on learners' self-confidence and identity. These processes are not straightforward and can be sub-conscious to a great extent. We will look at some tools of restorative practice that can be applied when we face difficulties in learning and teaching. The procedure to restore the damage caused will be presented in a case study format. The content of this paper is based on the Teaching Difficult Learners course organized by Pilgrims (the University of Kent, Canterbury) in the summer of 2019.

Keywords: difficult learners, difficult learning, restorative practice

1 Introduction

In the post-pandemic period, teachers are faced with an enormous workload due to an increased number of sick leaves; the needs of their students are extremely difficult to meet in terms of their educational development and academic progress, and the parents' demands are not only too high and unrealistic but also downright irrational. That is why the tools of restorative practice prove to be very useful in structuring some otherwise unpleasant, ineffective, and unproductive educational chats that are intended to discipline students.

2 The Difference Between Shame and Guilt

Teachers may not always be aware that shame can be triggered in students. Regrettably, when this occurs, students often experience a desire for retribution, resulting in an undesirable situation for all parties involved. Shame proves to be significantly more detrimental as it impacts an individual's personality at the identity level, leading to considerable anguish. In contrast, guilt is comparatively less harmful since it implies the possibility of an individual actively responding by altering their behaviour.

When talking about guilt, it means that a person has done something that was not acceptable. However, if one has done something, one has the possibility to change their behaviours, which is the so-called growth mindset. In an educational setting, the students' behaviour is being *developed*. What does that mean? Students are expected to behave in a certain way; however, they are often not told in advance how they should behave. Thus, teachers should tell students what kind of behaviour is expected of them rather than push them away.

On the other hand, when talking about shame, it means that one feels as a failure. In that case, nothing can be done, and that is extremely painful. That is why it is connected to the so-called fixed mindset, where no solution is offered. When a student does something unacceptable, one does not say: "You're bad!", but rather: "You did this, and it is not OK!" and then one leads them in the direction in which one wants them to proceed.

Teachers tend to think that students are doing something irritating or disruptive on purpose, yet that is not the case. Every human behaviour has a cause, and students misbehave because some of their needs have not been met. Only when one goes deeper and finds out what those needs are can one continue their teaching. This is also similar to teachers. Most teachers at least intuitively know what they need to be in an optimal state for teaching, and the more experienced ones deal with difficult situations better. Once the teacher's needs have been met, and they are in that optimal state, they can deal with any challenge that they are faced with when teaching a class or an individual.

If a student has done something disruptive and unacceptable, they need to know that there will be consequences. At the same time, that does not mean that teachers may be

contentious because they are still authority figures. It is, therefore, not that they “attack”, “dump on” their personality, yet rather try to analyse their student’s behaviour and what they did. It is very important that teachers do not show them up and tease them. They need to feel that whatever teachers say or do, it is because they care. One of my favourite quotes (Tsai, 2007) is: “When the teacher takes care of their students, the learning takes care of itself.” There should always be that element of care behind every action that a teacher takes or chooses.

3 Principles of Restorative Approaches

As Williams (2019) pointed out, there are three important principles of restorative approaches, that is, three stages that need to be acted out. The first one is reflecting on what has happened, the second one is repairing the harm caused by an incident, and the final and very important one is reconnecting relationships so that the two people involved can work together again.

Every behaviour has a reason. If the behaviour is disruptive, then the reason behind it is a need that was not met. The person on the receiving end of harm and the person who caused harm, that is, psychological harm, both have their needs. When their needs are compared, these needs are the same. Each affected person needs somebody to listen to their story. Each of them has their point of view. The one who has been harmed needs time to calm down, and the one who has caused that harm needs time to think. The person on the receiving end of the harm needs the opportunity to acknowledge the impact it has had on them (“Why me?”). The person who caused harm needs the opportunity to apologise (“Why did I do what I did?”). There needs to come a point when each of them can continue to communicate, or to put it simply, they need to have the opportunity to move on. That conflict cannot remain there forever.

4 The Restorative Questioner

When the so-called restorative practice is used, three people are involved. The first one is the questioner. This is the one who got hurt. The second is the person who caused that harm, and the third is the observer. How is this done? It is done outside the classroom and not in front of the whole class to not publicly humiliate any of the involved students. How is the teacher in the role of the restorative questioner supposed to act? They should appear curious and ask open questions; that is, they ask questions in such a way that they do not expect only ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers. Apart from open questions, they should also use open body language and have good eye contact. The teacher and the student need a good rapport the whole time. The attitude of the teacher is neutral and non-judgmental, and that is very important. The teacher is “gently relentless” so that they are putting discipline in a nurturing context. They are kind, yet not too kind! They expect compliance. The teacher also makes a very sensible use of silence. When they ask a question, they do not snap or immediately ask another question; rather, they wait for the answer. What they are asking the student—if they have done something unacceptable or hurtful to them as

teachers or even individuals—is not very pleasant or easy. That is why the student needs time to think, to ponder, and then to give the teacher some meaningful and sincere answers.

4.1 The Restorative Chat Prompt Card

Restorative Chat Prompt Card
> Tell me what happened.
> What were you thinking at the time?
> What do you think about it now?
> Who was affected? How were you affected?
> What's needed to make things right?
> How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?

Table 1

When a teacher is having that important restorative chat (Williams, 2019) with their students, they ask only the questions from the prompt card (Table 1). Why is that so? That is precisely to make it neutral and non-judgmental because they do not want to trigger guilt or shame. Namely, if they trigger guilt or shame, the students will not cooperate, they will not be open enough. Then the learning environment will not be nurturing enough, and, very importantly, they will not be able to cooperate after the incident. The questions are very simple. It is useful for teachers to have cards on them at first; however, in time and with experience, they should be able to ask them in a.

5 The Observer

The role of the observer is also very important. They need to pay attention to the set-up of the restorative chat, and especially to the quality of questioning and presence. The teacher needs to be with the student “there and then.” The observer also follows the pace of the restorative chat, the conversation, the use of silence, the teacher’s questions, and the student’s answers. The observer focuses on the needs of both parties and on the outcome that they reach or that they may have had in mind beforehand.

6 The Observer Feedback Guidelines

When the observer gives feedback to the questioner, that feedback needs to be constructive, and it needs to make the questioner aware of their strengths and of how they can build on them. The observer also helps them to become aware of the areas that need more attention for the questioner to maintain their confidence. The feedback needs to be delivered in such a way that the observer would like to hear themselves.

Scenario A: Jacob (Williams, ²2019, p. 1)

This is an example of a case study. First, one needs to identify and analyse Jacob's unmet needs. The main cause of this student's disruptive behaviour is boredom. However, in this scenario, it is not so much that the student is bored and does not have anything to do. In a way, he is covering up his academic difficulties, and that is why he is creating all the "fun" in the class. The real reason that he cannot follow or that he cannot excel is that he is not good at writing, and to distract from that, he is being disruptive. What he said to his teacher should also be addressed. Jacob and his teacher would go through all the events of that day. The teacher would use the questions from the prompt card. They would then come to some conclusions and agree on how they can get along better in the future.

7 Conclusion

Every inappropriate behaviour on students' part indicates certain unmet needs that need to be addressed. Learners' self-confidence and identity are built with their teachers' help via the so-called restorative practice tools. Teachers face many challenges when it comes to meeting the academic and especially the social and emotional needs of their students. To avoid feeling powerless, they need effective tools and strategies. Delaney (2009) pointed out that she had to deal with students that nobody else could. At the end of every week, she used to feel down, and then she realised that she was feeling, or was affected by, all those feelings of her students. That is why it is also very important to distinguish between what is really "ours" and what is "theirs" to prevent the teacher from taking too much responsibility upon themselves. Delaney (2009) also emphasised the use of "clean language" (i.e., without criticism, accusation, or condemnation) in class. Restorative practice definitely fosters that. It is one of the effective tools that pave the way for a new culture of communication in school practice.

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10

HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUNG LEARNERS?

Nataša Kuselj

Abstract

Motivating young learners is very important for English teachers, and it is the key to effective learning and increased academic performance. Motivation is what encourages learners to keep going even when things are difficult. Students who are not motivated will not want to learn; therefore, it is important for teachers to keep our young learners motivated and excited. The benefits of motivating young learners are various: motivation leads to effective learning, increases learners' confidence and classroom achievements, motivates students, and encourages them to develop a love for learning and participating in the classroom. In this paper, I will introduce and describe some practical tips to help teachers keep their young learners motivated, such as, for example, how to have a reward system, how to make your lesson fun, how to teach your classes with energy and enthusiasm, how to be positive, etc.

Keywords: young learners, motivation, effective learning, active students, practical tips for teachers

1 Introduction

Have you ever planned for what you thought was an excellent class and then walked into the classroom to see tired students looking back at you? Do you ever feel like you are doing the same thing over and over again until it becomes monotonous? Do your students seem less than enthused some days? Here are some simple tips that even the most tired teacher can put into practice to inject a little more motivation into the language classroom.

2 What Is Motivation?

The term “motivation” describes why a person does something. It is the driving force behind human actions, and it is the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviours. Motivation causes people to act in a way that gets them closer to their goals. It includes the biological, emotional, social, and cognitive forces that activate human behaviour (Beffa-Negrini, 2002).

We are familiar with two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation arises from outside of the individual and often involves external rewards such as trophies, money, social recognition, grades, etc. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is internal and arises from within the individual, such as doing a complicated crossword puzzle purely for the gratification of solving a problem (Beffa-Negrini, 2002).

3 Why Is Motivation So Important?

Motivation serves as a guiding force for all human behaviour. It can:

- increase your efficiency as you work toward your goals,
- drive you to take action,
- encourage you to engage in health-oriented behaviours,
- help you feel more in control of your life,
- improve your overall well-being and happiness (Budden, 2005).

4 How Can I Motivate Young Learners?

Based on my experience and practice, here are some top tips to help you keep your young learners motivated.

4.1 Change Your Activities Frequently

Sometimes the easiest type of work is individual work. Perhaps we add some pair work or group conversation, but we do not tend to deviate too much from our normal routine. However, if we always do the same thing, then our students can start to feel unchallenged. There are many different interactions and types of work that we can use, e.g., pair work, group work, project work, presentations, creative writing, songwriting, guessing games, quizzes, and competitions. All these activities challenge the students, and they do not have to take up the whole class but can rather be used to gain interest or for larger sections of the lesson. Simply getting your students up on their feet or asking if other classes can

answer a few questions for a survey can take limited preparation time but change the mood in the room.

4.2 Personalise

Sometimes learning a language can seem unachievable and impersonal, but by including your students in the language wherever possible allows the students to take ownership of their learning process. If we take the time to find out some information about our students, this can change everything. Are they athletes, dancers, singers, or artists? What is their favourite subject at school? Where did they go on holiday last year? When we present language for the first time, we can use the answers to these questions to make these activities personal and relevant to our students. As Hur and Suh (2010) state, many studies have found that when students do not find the topics relevant, they can become demotivated. Therefore, why not personalise the topic, vocabulary, examples, or situations? Maybe, at first, this can be a little daunting; however, practice makes perfect.

4.3 Set a Routine

Routine is very important for your students to know where they stand or how they are progressing. It is also a chance for them to get a reward, for example, time to relax by playing a game. These elements of the lesson make them feel comfortable and can help them to feel less anxious.

4.4 Create Competition

Many students, especially younger ones, like to add a little competition to the lesson. This provides a “short-term” motivational goal for them, i.e., to beat the opposing team. This competition can take the form of points, rewards, or prizes, or you can play a game to start or finish the lesson.

4.5 Use the Students’ Skills and Strengths

All our students have different personalities, which can be used to help us, the teachers, and other learners in the class. We can appoint students with these personalities as organisers, helpers, or point-keepers, or we can divide students into “houses” where they can collect prizes, recognition, or rewards at the end of the lesson. When my students finish first, instead of letting them sit bored, I give them a task. This might mean that they come to me, I mark and correct their work, then give them a “helper” badge and a coloured pen. They then walk around the classroom and ask other students if they need help or if they can correct their work. This is a task in which they continue to learn by explaining the answers to their classmates, and their classmates are practising their listening skills. Additionally, we can use their energy to help us tidy up, organise, write a new task on the board, count up the points, or do any other task that we need help with. Thus, this can be anything that means that they are not simply just sitting in their chairs, becoming bored and demotivated. Use this energy to your and their advantage!

4.6 Change the Ambience

Students learn in many different ways, and we often talk about them being auditory, visual, or kinaesthetic learners. This has been advanced by Howard Gardener's "multiple intelligences theory" (Budden, 2005, p. 27), which included 8 and later 10 different types of learning styles (musical-rhythmic and harmonic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, existential). These can affect motivation levels. By merely adjusting things such as music, posters, and lighting, being aware of the reasons to learn, or allowing the students to get up and move around the classroom, a teacher can positively affect their learners. These factors go beyond the activities that you use and do not always entail a lot of extra planning. There are some limitations that we may all face, such as small classroom size, for example; however, there are usually a few elements that we can incorporate.

4.7 Reward Their Hard Work

Put students' work on display around the classroom. This shows them that you are proud of what they have produced. Moreover, these pieces of work can act as educational aids for future learning. They provide vocabulary and can help create a relaxed atmosphere as opposed to a stuffy classroom. Give praise and tailor that praise to them and the task that they have completed. As mentioned above in 4.4, give points, prizes, certificates, and the "student of the week" prize, and thus make sure to show them you recognize their hard work.

4.8 Create a Learning Contract

Let your students create some classroom rules. This means they are invested in keeping and policing them to create an environment in which they want to learn. This might mean that they decide what happens if students break the rules in terms of a fun forfeit, choose a game, or listen to classical or popular music on Fridays, for example.

4.9 Highlight Their Progress

Your students are not a homogenous group, even if they are all studying from the same textbook or will sit the same exam. Unfortunately, in most educational settings, assessments do not recognize this. What is progress for one is not necessarily progress for all. Some students have a steeper hill to climb, and for others, it is just about maintaining the level at which they already are. Moreover, for some, just showing them that they have improved and highlighting this is the most important reward (Todaka, 2017).

5 Conclusion

Motivating young learners is very important for English teachers. Motivation is what encourages learners to keep going even when things are difficult. It is important to have a reward system, make your lessons fun, teach your classes with energy and enthusiasm, and be positive. This will, in the end, yield higher results in terms of better knowledge and higher grades, as well as satisfied and even more motivated students.

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WHAT A WONDERFUL PLAY: THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

Tjaša Rotar Komel

Abstract

Is it possible to engage weaker and stronger pupils in the same activity so that all of them can contribute and feel satisfied in the end? The use of drama in the classroom can certainly help the teacher to achieve this goal. This article presents the experience with a group of 6th graders who were keen on acting in the theatrical adaptation of L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The paper begins with the presentation of some theoretical background concerning the use of drama in an EFL classroom. It proceeds with a detailed description of the whole process of staging the play - from the very beginning until the final performance itself. The conclusive part of the article includes an analysis of the work done and presents the benefits and drawbacks of staging this play.

Keywords: drama, staging a play, foreign language learning, developing soft skills

1 Introduction

As teachers of pupils of different ages, we can notice that all the textbooks that we use in the EFL classroom include some kind of activities that involve drama, such as photo stories, comic strips, or role-plays of everyday conversations. Involving drama activities in foreign language learning can have positive effects because such activities stimulate the learners to think and give them the opportunity to simulate a real-life situation. Thus, the learners can use the newly learned vocabulary and structures in different circumstances and, hopefully, in a more creative way. Based on my own experience, I have noticed that pupils can also have a break from those more demanding exercises, and they really enjoy doing drama activities.

In the previous school year, I had the opportunity to challenge my 6th-grade pupils and myself with a drama activity on a higher level. In the appendix of the pupils' textbook *Sprint 1*, we came across L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* turned into a play, and we decided to stage it. Since we could not afford to deal with such a complex project during regular classes, a group of pupils agreed to engage in this activity within the after-school club *Ustvarjalna angleščina* (i.e., *Creative English*). The preparations took a few months, yet it was worth all the efforts because, at the end of the school year, we made a successful performance for the parents.

2 The Theory Behind the Practice

Various authors emphasize the fact that using drama in teaching English as a foreign language has many benefits for learners. According to Angelianawati (2019, p. 126), drama enables the EFL learner to learn English more effectively because the students can actively participate in the learning process, and they can practise all language skills through drama. This enables them to learn to communicate in a contextualized way. Moreover, Ozdemir and Çakmak (as cited in Angelianawati, 2019, p. 126) stated that drama can improve the students' intellectual skills, like creativity, problem-solving, communication, socialization and empathy. The learners also have the opportunity to experience teamwork and to develop their sense of shared responsibility. Similarly, according to Moore (as cited in Angelianawati, 2019, p. 126), drama plays an important role in the personal development of students. Through drama, they acquire qualities and soft skills such as teamwork, creativity, leadership and risk-taking. Another important advantage of using drama is that it can improve the pupils' ability to concentrate and pay attention. According to Celce-Murcia (as cited in Gorjian et al., 2010, p. 3), even if the learner is assigned a mute role, e.g., that of a tree, they may listen carefully while silently playing their part, since they need to pay attention to what happens on stage to perform successfully. In my opinion, such roles are adequate, especially for weaker learners, who may be frustrated while speaking in front of an audience. By taking a silent role, they can still contribute to the performance, thus experiencing a sense of confidence and satisfaction.

3 A Step-by-Step Preparation for Staging the Play

Once the play had been chosen, we could start to work with it. We did a brainstorming activity first in order to find out whether the pupils were familiar with the original story.

Then we watched a short clip from the original film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) starring Judy Garland, and we listened to the original version of the famous song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. In the following lessons, we started to study the material in the appendix of the pupils' textbook. The pupils learnt some basic information about the life of L. Frank Baum, the author of the original story, and became acquainted with the characters and the plot of the play. After that, we listened to and read the drama adaptation in the textbook. We concluded this introductory part by doing some attached vocabulary and reading comprehension exercises.

4 Taking Part in a Unesco Project and Festival

When the pupils were well-acquainted with the content of the drama adaptation, it was time to assign the roles. Surprisingly, there was no quarreling over the role setting because each of the pupils knew exactly which role they wanted to perform. In the beginning, I only assigned the roles that appeared in the last two scenes of the play because the pupils were supposed to participate in the Unesco project *Festival Jezikajmo – zbliževanje kultur* (i.e., *Let's chatter – convergence of cultures*). Every year, the participating schools are asked to prepare a 5-minute presentation, which is then performed at the final festival. This performance was a valuable experience for the pupils, and it represented a perfect starting point to prepare for the staging of the whole play.

5 Putting up the Final Performance

In the weeks following the performance at the Unesco festival, a number of organizational activities were discussed and assigned. In the first place, the remaining roles were cast. In the next step, we talked in detail about the costumes and props. It was the pupils' duty to provide them. As for the scenery, we could borrow most of it from our branch school. Furthermore, a PowerPoint presentation with some additional pictures was also made.

When each task was set, we started to practise scene by scene, and, at first, we did that in the classroom. In the beginning, the pupils were reading their parts; however, they gradually learnt their roles by heart and became more confident with the text. From one rehearsal to another, they were also able to pay more attention to their body language, gestures, and facial expressions, as well as intonation. When they were ready enough to perform the whole play, I chose some suitable musical inserts as a background to create the right atmosphere, and some special effects as well, e.g., the whirling sound of the tornado. Then we rehearsed the whole play from the beginning until the end.

It turned out that the play was too short for a full-length performance, so I decided to combine it with a musical recital. Thus, the first part of the show involved some singing and playing musical instruments, whereas the second part started with the performance of the play. Some other pupils were asked to perform the songs, and two pupils were invited to take the role of the hosts of the evening. Furthermore, a sound system, additional headset microphones, and recording were also provided. The last thing to do before the

premiere was the preparation of leaflets and posters, which were then hung in a few places around the school.

After approximately four months of preparations and rehearsals, the play was finally ready for staging. The performance for the parents took place in the middle of June and was very well accepted by the parents and the pupils alike.

6 Analysing the Performance: Benefits and Drawbacks

The process of the staging of the play was quite long and demanding. Nevertheless, my opinion is that the pupils obtained many advantages from this experience. Firstly, they had the opportunity to learn English in a different way, and they were more relaxed during the lessons. Secondly, they were encouraged to use their imagination, and they actually came up with some creative solutions and suggestions. One pupil, for instance, badly sprained her ankle so that, in the final performance, she appeared on stage with crutches. Another pupil suggested that we could adjust the script accordingly by including the injury in the play. The idea was accepted, and it really added an inventive and realistic touch to the performance. Thirdly, the pupils had the chance to develop their sense of responsibility. They had to bring their own costumes, and they had the opportunity to use their own ideas to elaborate the props. I was surprised at how seriously they took those assignments, and all of them kept to the agreements. Another important benefit was probably the fact that weaker and stronger pupils could appear on stage together, each being equally important for the play, yet in a different way. Actually, the weaker pupils did not have any lines to say, yet they had a very important role in adjusting the scenery. Since they had to follow the action on stage very attentively, they could also improve their ability to concentrate.

Although the staging of the play brought a lot of enthusiasm to the teacher and the pupils, on the other hand, we also had to cope with various problems and challenges. To start with, the final performance was almost cancelled because two pupils got injured. Fortunately, both of them recovered and could perform their roles in the show. Secondly, my expectations about the play were too high at first. I was not aware of the fact that I was overestimating the pupils' ability to perform independently because this was the first time that I was staging a play. As Lemut Novak (2015, pp. 269, 273) suggests, it is very important to consider and form a stage management team while doing such an activity. It is advisable that the director, who is usually the teacher, has a certain number of assistants. During one of the final rehearsals, I noticed that the weaker pupils, and even the narrator, who was actually one of the best pupils, had some trouble following the action on stage. To solve this inconvenience, I asked two teachers to assist us in the play and help all those pupils by giving them directions from behind the scenes. Thirdly, I have realized that the timing chosen for the final performance can be challenging because students have several extracurricular activities that may overlap with the final performance. Thus, I had serious trouble finding two hosts for our show, as the invited pupils were already engaged in other activities.

7 Conclusion

Staging a play is a long and quite demanding activity. Nevertheless, it can represent a rewarding experience for the teacher and the pupils. Due to the many benefits that drama brings to the learners, it is highly recommended to use some kind of drama activities in the classroom. They really give our learners an opportunity to improve their intellectual and soft skills – skills that they will need outside the classroom in the future as well.

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12

USE OF MOVIES IN THE INTERACTIVE CLASSROOM

Tjaša Šuc Visenjak

Abstract

The brave always like to propose new and different teaching methods. Movies or other short videos can contribute considerably to a lesson with their diversity and intriguing topics that can address the students. English lessons with the help of ICT equipment can lead to a successful outcome with their interactive movie content. Some teachers may believe that using a movie or a short video during a lesson only shortens the lesson; therefore, the right combination is the key. The use of video material and interactive elements during a lesson builds the students' motivation. Students' skills are activated, and therefore, the students become more motivated. A teaching example of the efficient use of a movie during an English lesson is presented in this article. Several ideas on how to use videos in the classroom are illustrated in this research, ones that are going to further motivate other teachers to use video content in the classroom (not only for teaching languages but also for other subjects) to show that the brave ones are always looking forward to something modern and new.

Keywords: English, movies, ICT, teaching

1 Introduction

Teaching is gaining dimension in the use of computer technology. In this way, the lessons remain interesting and diverse. Whereas students prefer to connect with topics that are close to them, teachers want useful and, above all, educational content. The research is based on the diversification of lessons through movie content and its further analysis with the help of interactive content. A movie in the classroom should not only present an easier way to get through a lesson without achieving the learning goals but also a meaningful enrichment of the lesson. Students actively use all four components of memory in class, such as auditory, visual, tactile, and verbal. The use of movie content in teaching, especially in foreign language teaching, enriches these components, especially the audio-visual component, which is a key skill in our everyday lives. Due to the presented content, the movies also represent various groups of people, cultures, and situations that contribute to the intercultural and social relationships of students on their learning path. Motivation and the way of working are of key importance in achieving learning goals; therefore, the starting point of the research is the interactive work with a movie during an English lesson. Based on the presented lesson, it is simply proven that the use of movies during a lesson is not only the watching of a certain movie clip but a useful starting point for teaching various learning contents. In combination with ICT equipment, due to the increasing expansion of technology today, students find it easier to gain knowledge and achieve the set goals through active participation.

2 The Lesson

Lessons change in primary schools every year in terms of the content, as well as visually in the structure of a lesson. Several factors depend on this: time periods, method of work, the teacher, students, motivation, type of material, etc. Movies in lessons can be used with most subjects. They can be used either as a part of the lesson or as its main part.

Students prefer to connect with topics that are close to them, and teachers, of course, want useful and mainly educational content.

The lesson took place in the 8th grade, where students learn English since the 1st grade (optional) and since the 4th grade on a regular basis. Some basic data about the lesson itself can be seen in the table below.

class and subject	topic	objectives	didactic aids
8. a/b class (12 students – group classes)	Movie in the classroom: <i>Rescued by Ruby</i> (90 minutes)	Improvement of vocabulary skills, expressive skills, gaining knowledge about animal care and the relationship between humans and animals.	Mobile phones, tablets, personal computers, interactive whiteboard, educational applications (LiveWorksheets, AhaSlides).

Chart: Lesson information

Our students were divided into three groups of 11-12 students at the beginning of the school year. Therefore, teachers can thoroughly devote their explanations and teaching ideas to the students. The lessons and the movie content were divided into three lessons of English, where the presented class 8 watched the movie during the first two lessons and analysed the movie with interactive applications during the second and the third one. The students broadened their horizons during a movie lesson, where they were able to enrich their vocabulary on the topic of animal care and relationships between humans and animals, as well as improve the basics of communication (to understand the movie).

The movie *Rescued by Ruby* is about a man chasing his dream to join an elite K-9 unit, state trooper partners with a fellow underdog: clever yet naughty shelter pup Ruby. It is based on a true story. The movie had English subtitles, and all the students could follow easily. It is a family movie, appropriate to use during a lesson, and suitable for other foreign languages (by changing audio and subtitles into German, English, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Ukrainian, and Spanish. It covers many topics, and the one I would like to emphasize is the fact that officer Dan O'Neil suffers from dyslexia and hyperactivity; therefore, Ruby and he both know where each other is coming from because the officer has also had challenges with learning and focusing at times, much like Ruby. From this, a teacher may emphasise the importance of acceptance, animal-human relationships, animal well-being, success, etc.

The lesson began with an introductory motivation, where I asked the students about the problems that learning a foreign language may cause and what they expected from watching a movie during a lesson. The students gave interesting answers: they mainly worried about how to use certain vocabulary items properly, especially phrases, they had to think for a long time about how to form sentences correctly, and that sometimes made it impossible for them to communicate more easily. I told them that the essence of communication is, above all, that the speaking partner understands you, even if the sentence is not grammatically correct. In this way, they would also get to know the main purpose of the movie and see how educational a movie during a lesson can be.

Then I explained the timeline of the lesson to the students. The students received a short handout where they had the movie's vocabulary explained (e.g., what a K9 unit is, etc.). While watching the movie, we had a 10-minute break in the middle of it, where we debated what we had seen so far, and the students exchanged their opinions. Each student was then given a tablet, and they were instructed to find the link to the interactive LiveWorksheets, where they could work on the first part of the task. The interactive worksheet contained several types of tasks: choose a statement (true/false), put the events in the correct order, and describe the characters with three words according to their appearance or character (it can be a noun, verb, or adjective). Below are examples of the structured exercises:

Answer the questions.

Why was Ruby surrendered to the animal shelter?
 What breed is Ruby the K-9 dog?
 How many times was Ruby adopted and returned to the shelter before finding a home with Dan O'Neil?
 Was it State Trooper Dan O'Neil's dream to work in the K-9 unit?
 Are most search and rescue dogs bred and raised for the job from birth?
 Does Officer Dan O'Neil suffer from dyslexia and hyperactivity?

Determine whether the sentences are T (true) or F (false).

The *Rescued by Ruby* true story confirms that Ruby was surrendered to the Rhode Island animal shelter when she was four or five months old because she was "unmanageable."
 T F

Ruby in the movie is a collie.
 T F

Ruby was adopted 3 times and returned to the shelter before finding a home with Dan O'Neil.
 T F

State Trooper Dan O'Neil's dream was to go work in a hotel.
 T F

Officer Dan O'Neil suffers from dyslexia and hyperactivity.
 T F

Exercise examples



Sequence the story



1 2 3 4

5 6

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Finish!!

The students solved the tasks and watched the rest of the movie. After the movie ended, I also gave them the task to evaluate today's lesson in the given application. The results are presented below in the lesson analysis.

3 Lesson Analysis and Further Ideas

The students actively participated in the lesson, conscientiously solving all the tasks given and visibly having fun with the interactive tasks. This was confirmed with a short analysis of the lesson, where I asked the students to assess the lesson using the AhaSlides application: *Describe today's lesson in three words.* The students gave many interesting answers: *great, interesting, different, working with the movie, good movie class, different lesson class, good, interesting, different, etc.* Using a movie in the lesson may be a novelty in how the teacher covers a topic. It does not have to be the central part of the lesson; it can be used simply as a cue or a short clip as part of a certain task.

Christl Reissenberger, a German teacher who spoke about the purpose of movies in lessons for the magazine of the Goethe Institute (Magazin Sprache, 2019), also emphasises the importance of using movies in lessons, pointing out that movies offer great potential for teaching foreign languages. They motivate students, give them an insight into another culture, and create many authentic opportunities for speaking and writing. It is important that students identify with the movie's theme and cultural background. The movie enriches the teaching of foreign languages by developing several competences. Movies are an authentic reflection of culture; therefore, working with them contributes significantly to the development of students' intercultural and media competences. Feature movies tell a story through image and sound, allowing students to confront the conflicts and viewpoints depicted and encouraging them to change their perspective. Connecting emotions with cognition encourages and supports the affective-emotional side of foreign language learning.

The system of working while watching a movie or video material is also helpful when choosing to work with a movie in class. Various ideas can be used before, during, and after watching the clip. I focused only on a longer recording with an interactive worksheet, as I first wanted to get feedback from the students while working on the movie.

Since the feedback was more than positive, I will certainly use some further ideas: using pictures or clips from the movie or focusing on the movie poster with quotes or photographs before watching the movie. Thus, we could infer the content of the movie and talk about the characters and possible events. A mind map could be created, where students would indicate the associations they get when observing the title, photos, or snapshots. Before the actual viewing of the movie, it is important to point out the explanation of the vocabulary used in the movie, especially for students who have problems understanding the vocabulary, especially if it is slightly more difficult. It would also be possible to add descriptions of people and their characteristics (to upgrade the vocabulary of one's appearance and character), add speech bubbles with optional dialogue, or create your own dialogue or imagine one's own end of an action. There are several ideas that can be adapted according to students' age group and the subject matter.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the appropriate choice of a movie that it is suitable for the age of the students. The theme of the movie should coincide with the curriculum or the target lesson topics. The level of students' language skills is also important. In my case, the differentiation was manifested in interactive worksheets in such a way that students received a handout of words that might cause them difficulty in understanding, especially those who still had problems with understanding certain vocabulary items (they all received a copy; therefore, students that might have bigger problems with understanding were not exposed). The worksheets were set interactively in such a way that certain available online applications were used, where students were solving tasks with the help of modern technology, in this case, with a tablet. For the chosen example, the students typed a specific answer or selected the appropriate one by touching it. Pupils are extremely attracted to working with a smart board and interactive content, and thus participate more actively.

4 Conclusion

A movie in the classroom is a meaningful addition to the lesson. It is one of the options that can be used for the entire lesson or only part of it. It should not only be used throughout the entire lesson without a debate, worksheets, and thus without achieving learning goals. A movie should be, despite its length, one of the means to achieve certain learning goals, getting to know the culture behind the foreign language, the main message, and other everyday topics it could address. With this type of work, students use all four language skills in lessons, writing, reading, listening and speaking. The goals of the curriculum are the following: acquiring vocabulary, improving understanding of short and longer conversations in a foreign language, getting to know the cultural aspect (of a country, tribe,

a certain group of people), acceptance, animal well-being, respectful way of handling animals, etc.

The use of movies in lessons, especially in foreign language lessons, enriches especially audiovisual skills which are key skills in our everyday lives. Because of the presented content, the movies also introduce certain groups of people, cultures, and situations that contribute to the students' intercultural and social relationships on their learning journey. Students are more open to new cultures and get more information on accepted behaviours across cultures. Based on the presented lesson practice in combination with ICT equipment due to the increasing expansion of technology in today's time, students will more easily acquire knowledge of the set goals through active participation. In this way, a movie or recording during lessons can also be used for other school subjects.

A successful English lesson with interactive movie content presents effective English teaching and learning with the use of ICT equipment. The brave also like to take risks. Remember: no risk, no fun. You and your students learn and benefit from each experience.

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13

LET'S TAKE ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Veronika Frešer

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to adapt to new ways of teaching learners, with many children spending more time than ever before behind screens. While outdoor learning has been advocated for some time, the situation has made it more relevant than ever. In the article, firstly, some of the benefits as well as problems that might occur during the outside lessons are presented. Secondly, some examples of activities that can be done outside the classroom are provided. Most of the activities are very simple and can be performed as warm-up or wrap-up activities. Lastly, a lesson with attachments that my colleague and I have created, which involved taking students outside to explore our hometown, is added.

Keywords: ELT, outdoor learning, outdoor teaching

1 Introduction

In the past two years, a situation that no one had foreseen forced us into different ways of working with learners. Generations of children who had already spent a lot of time in front of screens before the epidemic became “compelled” to spend even more time behind computers, tablets, or phones during school closures.

Outdoor learning is not a new thing, since many countries have systematically included outdoor learning in their education (Šebjanič in Dimec, 2019). However, I believe the issue has become even more relevant after the Covid-19 pandemic.

I had practiced some outdoor teaching before the pandemic; however, during the lockdown, I spent a great deal of time thinking about how to place my lessons outside the classroom after returning to school.

I have also gained some experience with outdoor lessons at camps for gifted learners, which I organised at Centres for School and Outdoor Education (CŠOD).

This article provides some examples of outdoor English lessons, all of which have been “tested” by my learners and me.

I believe that outdoor lessons will become an important part of the curriculum in the future, as they have a positive effect on children’s cognitive development, behaviour, physical and mental health, and, last but not least, motivation to work (Dillon, 2013).

2 Reasons for Taking English Outside

2.1 Outdoor Learning Is Fun.

We all need a break from books, desks, computers and projectors from time to time. While learning outside, children can move, walk around, and be active and productive at the same time. It is known that children learn best while playing.

2.2 Learning Becomes “Real”.

Many children nowadays experience natural processes through media and do not have opportunities to experience the natural processes; it is, therefore, more difficult for them to develop a healthy attitude towards nature (Kranjčan & Habe, 2018). When learners are exposed to real-life situations, their motivation increases, and they learn better and faster.

2.3 Nature Provides Us With Limitless Resources.

We do not need much preparation when going outside. There are many items, buildings, places, and materials waiting for us to explore.



Figure 1 - Learning in the forest

2.4 *Learning Outside Nurtures Learners' Creativity and Imagination.*

Somehow, when learners are taken outside their classroom, their minds unfold, and their imagination starts running wild.

2.5 *It Is Healthy.*

Even before the pandemic, the importance of taking learners outside was often emphasised. According to Dillon (2013, p. 234) "... exposure to the natural environment can lower the effects of various mental health issues that can make it difficult for students to pay attention in the classroom." Both, the learners as well as the teachers will benefit from fresh air and some exercise outside.

2.6 *Outdoor Learning Reduces Behavioural Problems.*

Hyperactive or impulsive learners will benefit more from outdoor lessons since they will be able to move around more and explore things in their own ways. Even for learners without diagnoses, outdoor learning represents a more stress-free kind of learning, which improves their motivation and willingness to learn (Dillon, 2013).

2.7 *Last but Not Least: You Will Love It Too.*

Taking learning outside gives the teachers ample opportunities to explore their field of knowledge from a completely different point of view. You just have to dare and let your imagination run free.

3 Challenges

There might be some downsides to taking lessons outside the classroom. These include, for example, classroom management, focusing on the task, lack of space, and bad weather. Therefore, when taking learners outside, make sure to set basic rules (similar to those you have in your classroom). The teacher has to know WHY he/she is taking his/her learners outside. When provided with clear and simple instructions, most of the learners will get more engaged in a task as if it were performed in the classroom (even if it is the same kind of task).

The most important thing for the teacher is to be persistent. Some learners might have trouble focusing or performing the tasks at the beginning.

A hint: even the most "difficult" learners will do the task if they know they will have to stay inside the next time if things are not be done.

4 List of Activities That Can Be Done Outside the Classroom

Before providing you with a list of activities you may try with your learners, just a reminder. Even if you do not like taking your learners outside, or the weather is bad, you can still do most of these activities inside the classroom too.

4.1 In the Hall

When practicing, learners take their worksheets or learning stations outside the classroom (to the hall, other classrooms, and other available corners at school or outside).

Make sure to set clear rules. For example, those who do not finish their assignment or who are running up and down the hall will have to stay inside the classroom the next time you send the learners outside.



Figure 2 - Practicing in the hall

Most of the time I gather my learners in the classroom at the end of the lesson (10 minutes before the lesson) and check the worksheet if needed.

If you do these kinds of activities, more advanced learners will be thrilled because they finally get a chance to do something on their own, while the weaker ones can stay with you and you can guide them through their assignments.

4.2 Choose a Word

Each learner writes a certain word on a piece of paper (the most difficult one, the most interesting, a new one, ...) and walks around with it while saying the word out loud for at least 10 times. Then the learners exchange their words and repeat the activity. It can get pretty loud while performing this activity which is why it is better to take learners outside for this one.

You can upgrade the activity by telling learners to write the word on the blackboard, on their backs, on the floor, in the air, or in their workbooks.

4.3 Books, Books, Books

Take learners to the library, borrow some books, and take them outside. Do not forget the blankets.

4.4 Has Someone Mentioned a Phone?

For these two activities, learners need to use their favourite toy – a phone.

- a) When starting with a new topic (e.g., animals, ecology, etc.), take learners outside and ask them to take some pictures connected to the topic (you can brainstorm the words in the classroom). Learners take some pictures, get together and use them for class discussion. A follow-up; learners can send you the photos to upload on the internet and present them as an introduction for the next lesson.



Figure 3 - Reading in the park

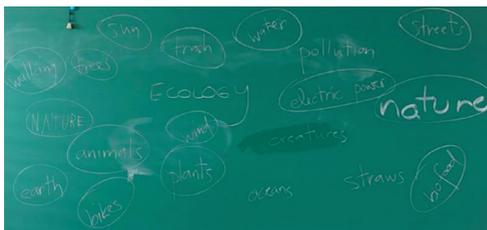


Figure 4 - Brainstorming

- b) When practicing comparison of adjectives, learners take their phones, find some things/people to compare and film them/themselves. They send you the recordings, you show them at the beginning of the next lesson. You put the recordings on mute, learners have to guess what they represent.

As a follow-up, you can use the adjectives from the recordings for writing sentences or even a story.

4.5 Around the Town

This activity needs a bit more preparation and organisation. You are probably going to need help from another colleague to carry it out.

When learning about places in town, take your learners around town. Put learners in small groups (3-5 learners). Provide each group with an envelope with a map of the route and some activities that they have to perform along the way (include some writing, drawing, exercise, or whatever you need). Follow-up; learners make a short video presenting some of the attractions of their hometown.

5 Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, there are limitless resources waiting for you outside. These are just some of the activities I do with my learners. All you need to do is take a few steps away from your everyday routine. When you see the sparkles in their eyes, the things they are capable of, I guarantee you, you will start planning another day out soon.

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14

TURNING A TEXTBOOK UPSIDE DOWN WITH “FREEDOM WRITERS”

Alan Paradiž

Abstract

The topic of a fresh start/change in the *Success Upper Intermediate* (McKinlay, Hastings 2012) is presented in a rather unattractive, unrelatable way, consisting of activities that do not seem to really speak to students or engage them in a way that 21st-century students desire.

The present paper focuses on *The Freedom Writers Diaries* (1999) by Erin Gruwell and her at-risk students, and the 2007 film *Freedom Writers*, which better engage students in class. A selection of the diary entries and the film, along with carefully planned tasks for (before-during-after) reading and watching on the issues of prejudice, ignorance, inequality, racism, white privilege in American society, etc., have made a difference and boosted students' interest and level of participation in the above-mentioned topic.

Keywords: Freedom writers, American culture, authentic text, language acquisition

1 Introduction – The Textbook

Having used *Success Upper Intermediate* for about two years, I realised that the topic on change/starting anew, covered at the beginning of the third year in the grammar school programme, just did not strike a chord with 17-year-old students the way I hoped it would. I might not have arrived at the same conclusion, had it not been for a rather lukewarm feedback and response from students to the way the topical issue of (facing and going through) a change was addressed in the textbook, which indeed called for a change.

Even though well intended, the sequence of activities in *Success Upper Intermediate* that addressed the aforementioned topic fell short with students. The activities included tasks as follows:

- (1) Adjectives (and their opposites) describing one's character and outside appearance.
- (2) Also, (2) (made up) stories on how an (imaginary) individual had worked hard to become a doctor, but the profession failed to meet their expectations due to an overload of paperwork that burdened them and how they decided to make a change, change career paths and do something more fulfilling. The task was equipped with further activities on comprehension check, vocabulary work (i.e., completing idiomatic expressions from the description), and an activity to boost personalization via a set of questions.
- (3) Furthermore, a set of instructions for a writing or speaking task (Describe someone whose life changed because of an unexpected event / Describe a person who has changed the way you see yourself) might be found in the textbook.
- (4) The topic of Fresh Start was further investigated via a reading comprehension on Johnny Depp, an A-list actor, who made a real fresh start. There is an additional task with a gap-fill activity (word bank given) to teach vocabulary; however, with no semantic families/relations between words to create meaningful clusters of words.

Despite the wealth of possibilities and potential that an English teacher might see in the above-mentioned sequence of tasks, these somehow did not meet the students' expectations. Students themselves are, undoubtedly going through a rollercoaster-of-emotions period in their lives, undergoing transformations (on so many levels), facing obstacles and hardships, and making new friends while letting go of some people, so they *should* relate to the topic of a fresh start/making a change at some level.

2 An Alternative – *The Freedom Writers Diaries* and the Film *Freedom Writers*

I was introduced to *The Freedom Writers Diaries* – a set of diary entries by the English language teacher Ms Erin Gruwell and her students, by a fellow English teacher. Having later seen the film adaptation based on the stories of underprivileged teenagers and seeing the potential to exploit this authentic text and the film, I decided to substitute the textbook covering the said topics with authentic and more attractive content.

2.1 Introductory Activity – Getting Students to Immerse in the New Topic and Speak Up

Some of the tasks I had used prior to my discovery of *The Freedom Writers Diaries* served as lead-in activities.

The introductory speaking activity in pairs (later groups of four and so on) proved beneficial since it encouraged students to speak on a new topic and collect new vocabulary. Two sets of questions (1) What is a fresh start?, Is a new school year a fresh start for you and if yes, why?, What does it take/what skills does one need to make a fresh start? Or (2) What makes us change? Is change a good thing? Why? Have you made any changes recently? If yes, why?, Why is it so hard to follow a new way of life and let go of old living patterns? were used to gather as much information and new lexis as possible.

After a 10-minute discussion in small groups or pairs, students report their ideas, and the teacher collects relevant vocabulary pertaining to the topic and adds their own to develop a wide range lexis (e.g., lapse back into the old habits, relapse, a vicious circle, persistent, determined, supporting environment, comfort zone, to name but a few).

2.2 Historical Background on the Civil Rights Movement

Now that students are equipped with basic vocabulary, they watch a video addressing the topic of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and establishing a context. This will help students understand the follow-up reading task about the text and film. Students are mostly already familiar with civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King and his famous *I Have a Dream* quote, Malcom X, and they might have heard of Rosa Parks, who refused to follow the bus segregation policy. Most have, however, never heard of *freedom riders* (see the world play with *Freedom Writers*), who were, as defined in the online edition *Encyclopedia Britannica* “a series of political protests against segregation by blacks and whites who rode buses together through the American South in 1961«.

2.3 Introducing the Authentic Text – the Diary and Providing an Insight into American Society

Before the text *The Freedom Writers Diaries* is presented, the students need to be further informed about the essential vocabulary that will aid them in understanding the context of the book while providing an insight into American society, i.e., depicting the life stories of underprivileged teenagers in the 1990s in the USA (cf. Rodney King riots).

The expressions that students need to be acquainted with are as follows: the American dream, a melting pot, (de)segregation, multiracial, civil rights (activist), being underprivileged, a WASP, racial tension, prejudice, ignorance, white supremacy, (living in) projects vs. gated community, holocaust, the Jewish community, blood is thicker than water. With the help of (digital) dictionaries and credible sources, students learn about these culturally conditioned terms.

2.4 Autonomous Reading

With the students now understanding some fundamental vocabulary and concepts linked to the American culture, they are given a week to read 9 diary entries (the first one from Ms Gruwell, the teacher, and further 8 from her students) from the beginning of *The Freedom Writers Diary*. These diary entries have been intentionally chosen from the beginning of the book since they provide an in-depth look into the hardships of teens prior to their change and transformation that occurs with the help of their teacher's changed approach to teaching.

Using a chart I have compiled, students are required to collect new vocabulary items for each diary entry and provide a short summary. They are encouraged to help each other in terms of splitting/sharing the texts, working in pairs, providing peer help, and peer checking with new words. I advise them to pay attention to the language as well. The English teacher writes her diary at an advanced level, using grammatically correct sentences with diverse vocabulary, while her students use basic, repetitive language with curse words, slang, and colloquial expressions that they might find only in an urban dictionary (and even words from their native cultures, i.e., *mi barrio*, *mi vida* by Eva, a Latin American girl).

After a week, students might ask any questions connected with the weekly reading assignment. I try to elicit some information about what they have read. Some of the *textual evidence* students share is as follows:

- (1) The stories of young writers reveal their background, a common denominator being *a broken home*. They come from a place of poverty, living paycheck to paycheck, the vicious circle of living on welfare, residing in projects (i.e., government subsidized housing for the poor), abuse (verbal, physical), eviction, homelessness, gun violence, drugs and alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, single-parent family, an environment where gang life controls everything, where a gang equals family.
- (2) On the other hand, juxtaposed to the dire living conditions of at-risk students, there is the first-time teacher Ms Gruwell's diary entry (p. 13), in which she is optimistic and idealistic about her first job as an educator at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School. This used to be an almost all-white school in a safe neighbourhood, she writes, but with the new policy of inclusion, the school has become desirable to the extent that "a lot of students that live in what they call the "hood" take two or three buses to get to school every day. [...] Rich kids from the shore sit next to poor kids from the projects ... there's every race, religion, and culture within the confines of the quad." She continues, "Since the Rodney King riots, racial tension has spilled over into the school. Due to busing and an outbreak in gang activity, Wilson's traditional white, upper-class demographics have changed radically. African Americans, Latinos, and Asians now make up the majority of the student body". Already in her first diary entry, it becomes evident that the path she has chosen (with the students plagued by prejudice, ignorance, and intolerance, who could not care less about their education, let alone their new teacher) will be an uphill battle with the education system.

2.5 The Film Adaptation *Freedom Writers* and Guided Watching Activity

Having collected information from the selected diary entries, students are encouraged to predict what is going to happen in the film, why they think I have chosen it, and in what way it could address the topics of starting afresh and making a change. They are given the worksheet with a set of questions to answer while watching.

During an almost 2-hour film, students answer the questions. After that, an in-depth discussion follows where I collect ideas from the class. Again, peer help/teaching is used where students share and compare their answers. An extra amount of time is dedicated to the transition that both students and their teacher have undergone during their teaching/learning experience. Students see that *the change* for both parties (in the film) is multilayered and that it has occurred because everyone allowed each other to be heard, understood, and, after some time, accepted as an equal. The racism, prejudice, ignorance, and intolerance are deeply rooted in everyone involved, but everyone has overcome these obstacles because they have consciously worked toward this (common) goal.

Students are encouraged to further speculate what they think might have happened to these at-risk students, the first ones in their families to graduate from High School, after leaving the safe space of Ms Gruwell's class with no safety net to catch them.

2.6 Further Exploitation of the "Texts" – Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Watching

Students then either discuss or write on the following topics/questions (alternatively, these could be used as a writing/speaking task at oral/written examination). Some of the questions or statements used for grading are: How can I contribute to this world?; No one should ever go against their people; It is always the right time to do what's right; Everyone deserves respect; One needs to earn respect. In addition, The American Dream/Melting Pot in *Freedom Writers*, Prejudice/Ignorance in *Freedom Writers*, Everyone deserves the right to quality education – no matter their race, gender, or beliefs are topics that could be employed for grading.

An additional selection of book and film titles are suggested to students (students add their own) to further investigate the American culture in terms of (in)equality, (in)tolerance, prejudice, and race. Some are *Freedom Writers diaries*, *Push*, *The Hate U Give*, *Seedfolks*, *Hillbilly Elegies*, and *Nomadland*. Many of these are also movies. Other well-known films are *Dangerous Minds*, *Selma*, and the recently made *Till*, all addressing African American lives in the 1950s-60s.

3 Conclusion – Feedback and Implications

As a two-week project ends, it can be said without a grain of doubt that (especially compared to the textbook tasks) students have been highly motivated, responsive, and engaged in the work. They show a great amount of empathy and sensitivity to (social) injustices, rooting for underprivileged students (they are almost the same age) to do well

and succeed in completing their secondary education. Some borrow the book and read all diary entries (recent reprints include a “twenty years after” section in which Ms Gruwell’s first students write about their lives today).

Students have also become cognizant that even though various laws on racial and ethnic equality might have been passed and should be implemented, the reality and real equality do not necessarily exist or are rather not exercised, which is, unfortunately, heard on the news daily.

Unlike the textbook provided, the text and film *Freedom Writers* provide insight into American culture of the 1990s and today and teach students about the cultural contexts as well. The topical issues of racial abuse and intolerance, prejudice, and inequality (along with gun violence) plague the present-day USA perhaps more than ever (cf. Black Lives Matter movement).

In terms of didactics of English language teaching and learning, the sequence of activities fosters four language skills, namely, (autonomous) reading, writing (summaries), listening, and (guided) watching and speaking (via debate and discussion), altogether facilitating language learning.

Finally, the content addresses us, teachers, as well. Often, we make the change, adapt, adjust, and learn (from students), and consequently change others.

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15

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN ELT

Bojana Nikić Vujić

Abstract

In this paper, we will explore some types of Special Education Needs (SENs), such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, and Autistic spectrum conditions. Further on, we will look at the strategies for developing inclusive and supportive environments in language classrooms. The last part of the paper will be dedicated to practical activities for each SEN mentioned.

Keywords: SEN types, strategies, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic spectrum, practical classroom activities

1 Introduction - Inclusion and SEN

The concept of inclusion in language classrooms is not new and has been discussed in various forms, such as individualization (Brookes & Grundy, 1988), scaffolding (Foley, 1994), differentiation (Dutton, 1997), and integration (Dam & Legenhausen, 2013, pp. 116–17). However, inclusion requires a broader and transformed view of language teaching that encompasses all aspects of schooling, including infrastructure, financial resources, school communities, and personnel training. Inclusion requires a social and interactive perspective that goes beyond individual differences and involves the entire school system.

Today the definition in the UNESCO document *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All* is broadly accepted:

“Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13)

2 SEN types

Teachers need to be familiar with the common types of SEN in order to apply the above-mentioned strategies. There are several types of special education needs, and they can be classified into different categories based on the type of disability or disorder (Delaney, 2016):

- Cognition and learning, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.
- Communication and interaction are most common in Autistic spectrum conditions.
- Social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties, such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, and conduct disorder.
- Sensory impairment, such as hearing or visual impairment.
- Medical conditions.
- Gifted students with a particular ability or talent in one or more subjects.

3 Strategies for Developing an Inclusive and Supportive Environment

In order to create an inclusive and supportive environment for students with special education needs, it is essential to provide individualized support, accommodation and resources to help them overcome their challenges and reach their full potential, both academic and social. Some strategies that can be used to create a supportive environment for students with special education needs involve:

- **Build positive relationships:** Building positive relationships with students is key to creating a supportive environment. Teachers should get to know their students, their strengths, and their challenges. They should also listen to their concerns and provide positive feedback to help build their self-esteem.
- **Foster a safe and inclusive environment:** Students with special education needs may be more vulnerable to bullying and exclusion. Teachers should foster a safe

and inclusive environment that values diversity and promotes respect for all students. They should also teach social skills and provide opportunities for students to practice these skills in a safe and supportive environment.

- Provide adjustments and modifications: Adjustments and modifications are essential for students with special education needs. Adjustments are changes made to the learning environment or teaching methods to support a student's learning. Modifications are changes made to the curriculum or expectations to meet the student's needs. Teachers should work with the special education team to determine the appropriate accommodations and modifications for each student.
- Use a variety of teaching methods: Students with special education needs often require different teaching methods to support their learning. Teachers should use a variety of teaching methods, including visual aids, hands-on activities, and technology, to support their students' learning styles.
- Involve parents and families: Parents and families play a critical role in supporting their child's education. Teachers should involve parents and families in their child's education by providing regular updates on their progress, sharing strategies for supporting their child's learning at home and soliciting their input and feedback.
- Provide access to resources and support services: Students with special education needs may require additional resources and support services to succeed academically and socially. Teachers should work with the special education team to ensure that students have access to the resources and support services they need, such as assistive technology, counseling, and therapy.

4 Practical Activities

With the strategies and most common types of SEN in mind, we will provide examples of some of the teaching activities designed in the *Guide Through Inclusive Education* (Bozic et al., 2021).

Dyslexia is a difficulty in processing information that primarily affects reading and writing. Students most often have a challenge with phonological processing of information - connecting sounds with words; visual processing of information: spotting words and letters; and working memory - remembering what was just said/read, i.e., by converting short-term into long-term memory. They may also have problems with organization, sequences, and numbers. (Delany, 2016)

Activity 1

Goal: to develop an understanding of the challenges students with dyslexia face

Activity description

Before dictating the text of their choice, a teacher gives the instruction: "To demonstrate the challenges faced by people with dyslexia, we will do one short task. For this task, you will need paper and a pencil. You need to write down the following text that you

will hear in the audio track below, but you should follow the following rules:

Instead of writing number 4, write +.

Instead of writing the letter 'e,' write the number 3.

Instead of writing the number 6, write the number 6.

Instead of writing the letter 'b,' write the letter 'd.'

After finishing the dictation, the teacher and students discuss the challenges, feelings and thoughts they had during the activity.

Activity 2

Goal: to recognize parts of speech and form sentences

Activity description

The students are given sample phrases or sentences, and they have to use colored sticks to replicate them. After that, they can use sticks to make their own sentences. (Photo 1: author's own)



(Photo 1: author's own)

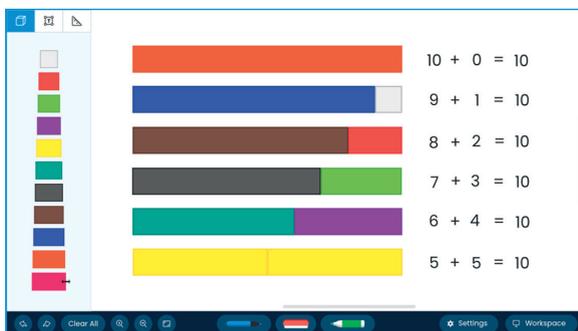
Dyscalculia is a difficulty in forming mathematical concepts and acquiring mathematical relations and operations. Sometimes it occurs with dysgraphia and dyslexia. Developmental dyscalculia is formed very early, and it manifests as soon as one starts with mathematical operations. (Delany, 2016)

Activity 3

Goal: to develop an understanding of numbers and accounting operation

Activity description

The teacher gives the students tasks with certain accounting operations and asks students to compare rods and use them to perform accounting operations.



(Source: brainiac.com)

Dyspraxia is a developmental coordination disorder that includes difficulties in coordinating body and muscle movements when performing everyday activities. Students may have difficulty with gross motor skills, such as running and jumping, and with fine motor skills, such as picking up small objects from the floor or stacking blocks. (Delany, 2016) It is a big challenge for them to remember the timetable and what books they need for the day. They are often late and bring the wrong books. A teacher can agree with students to make a checklist for each check if they have brought everything. Students can also use colors to help organize and remember - they can choose book curlers and notebooks in different colors for each subject if they have trouble recognizing textbooks and notebooks.

Activity 4

Goal: to visually represent the timetable in order to associate the colors and pictures with the school subjects and their place in the timetable.

Activity description

After talking with the students, the teacher prepares a layout for the timetable and gives them instructions on how to design a timetable using colors and pictures. The students make the timetable with the teacher's and peers' help.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8.45-9.00	Registration				
9.00-10.00	English abc	Maths ABC	English abc	Maths ABC	Science ABC
10.00-11.00	Maths ABC	English abc	Maths ABC	English abc	R.E. ABC
11.00-11.15	Break				
11.15-12.15	Science ABC	Science ABC	P.E. ABC	Science ABC	French ABC
12.15-1.00	Lunch				
1.00-2.00	P.E. ABC	Music ABC	French ABC	Art ABC	Technology ABC
2.00-3.00	Technology ABC	IT ABC	History ABC	Citizenship ABC	Geography ABC

(Source: okcseminari.rs)

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is marked by an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development. People with ADHD experience an ongoing pattern of the following types of symptoms: Inattention, Hyperactivity and Impulsivity. (Delany, 2016)

Activity 5

Goal: to understand and improve the rate of following the rules

Activity description

The teacher and students discuss the important school rules and agree on the rules for their classroom. The ADHD student, with their peers' help, designs and makes a poster for the classroom which will be revisited each time it is necessary.

Autistic spectrum condition involves challenges that can be classified into three groups of difficulties: communication, social interaction and imagination.



(Source: okcseminari.rs)

Activity 6

Goal: to use PECS flashcards in order to initiate interaction and, therefore, understand the very concept of interaction.

Activity description

Initially, a teacher and a student use cards to establish communication. After the student understands the principles of communication, a teacher can introduce a new set of flashcards in order for the student to use them for (social) storymaking with the teacher's support.

Cards for Visual aid Special Ed, Speech Delay Non-Verbal Children and Adults with Autism or Special Needs, Amoney)



(Source: My Essential Needs Cards: 12 Flash)

5 Conclusion

There are four key features of inclusion that can be used to set expectations and evaluate inclusive practice in schools. These are students being present, participating, achieving, and supported. The above-given strategies and practical activities can help build a supportive SEN environment.

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THREE TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING DIGITAL EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN AN FL CLASSROOM

Dragana Vasiljević-Valent

Abstract

This paper introduces three free, easy-to-use online tools that can be used in a foreign language classroom without long preparation. Additionally, the author provides a variety of activity ideas with these tools that can be applied both in offline and online learning environments. The proposed activities aim to help students develop their digital emotional intelligence, including working with avatars, emojis, and fake text messages. Each activity can easily be adapted according to the students' age or language level.

Keywords: digital emotional intelligence, avatars, text messages, emojis

1 Introduction

The pandemic has brought ICT into almost every classroom and home, enhancing remote and hybrid work. Our students use the internet on a daily basis and even socialize online. Nevertheless, they dive into the online world unprepared. As teachers in the post-COVID era, we should not think of the internet only in the context of learning and teaching but also ask ourselves: How can we prepare students for the world of today and tomorrow, considering the fact that many of them will make friendships online, date or even work in a remote team? Just as emotional intelligence is necessary for successful real-life interaction, digital emotional intelligence is required for the same purpose online. As language teachers, we can introduce tools and activities to help our students develop their digital emotional intelligence.

2 Digital Emotional Intelligence

DEQ (Digital Emotional Intelligence) is defined as our ability to digitally sense emotional responses — our own or the ones coming from other people — and to use this affective information to manage our thoughts, behaviors, and decisions (Avery Dennison, n.d., p. 17). According to the DQ Institute, an international think-tank dedicated to setting global standards for digital intelligence, digital emotional intelligence is one of the 8 critical areas of digital life, consisting of the following three skills:

- Digital empathy – the ability to be aware of, sensitive to, and supportive of one’s own and others’ feelings, needs, and concerns online.
- Self-awareness and Management – the ability to recognize and manage how one’s value system and digital competencies fit with one’s digital environment.
- Relationship Management – the ability to skillfully manage one’s online relationships through collaboration, conflict management, and persuasion.

Formularbeginn

The activities presented in this paper are aimed at helping high-school students and/or adults develop the ability to be empathetic and build good relationships with others online through working with avatars, emojis, and messages.

2.1 Avatar Maker

AvatarMaker is a free online tool that works on all devices and operating systems, allowing users to create avatars in four different styles. We are used to thinking of avatars only as electronic images that represent users online (on forums, in video games, on social media, etc.), but they are also a great tool for FL classrooms. In an online or hybrid learning environment, students can use avatars when they feel uncomfortable publishing their photos. AvatarMaker can be of great help when introducing vocabulary about appearance and looks for warm-ups and icebreakers, as well as for storytelling.

Activity 1: The teacher prepares descriptions of different people in written form and divides students into groups to draw an avatar that looks like the description. After the time is up, each group presents their avatar with the description, and the other students assess how accurate it is.

Activity 2: One student comes up with a secret person, a celebrity, a prominent historical figure, or someone all the students know in person and describes the face, hair, and clothing of this person. Meanwhile, other students make the avatar and try to guess the person. The winner is the student who guesses the person first.

Activity 3: The teacher introduces pre-made avatars to the students. Students are describing not only their appearance but also their personality. At higher levels, this activity can gradually become a conversation about visual identity and prejudice.

Activity 4: Students are asked to make an avatar of themselves during the first lesson and post it online (e.g., on a Jamboard or Padlet) or send it to the teacher, who displays it on the screen. Then, students are tasked with finding the avatar corresponding to each person and discussing the meaning of the details, such as jewelry, headwear, and tattoos.

Activity 5: Students not only create an avatar but also develop an alter ego and act accordingly during a role-play activity or when retelling/writing a story from the alter ego's perspective.

2.2 Emoji Translate

"Emoji Translate" is a free website available on all devices that translates words in any language into their corresponding emojis. It can be used for vocabulary revision, warm-up activities, icebreakers, and creating speaking or writing prompts. This tool can be used both with young learners and high-school students or adults.

Vocabulary revision: The teacher writes a text about a particular topic, such as clothing, food, or professions, using the website emojitranslate.com and displays the text on the screen. The students are then asked to replace the emojis with words.

Warm-up activities: The teacher can use Emoji Translate to create emoji-based descriptions of book titles, movie titles, song titles, historical figures, countries, etc. The students must then guess the correct answer, which serves as an introduction to the corresponding topic (books, movies, music, history, travel, etc.).

Icebreakers: Students choose their last emojis and explain their usage. They choose their favorite emoji or a couple of them, or describe each other with emojis, explaining their choices.

Narrative tenses, prepared task: The teacher creates a set of 3 to 5 random emojis followed by phrases "last weekend" or "during a summer holiday" and uses them as writing or speaking prompts for students to write a paragraph or a story based on the phrases and the emojis.

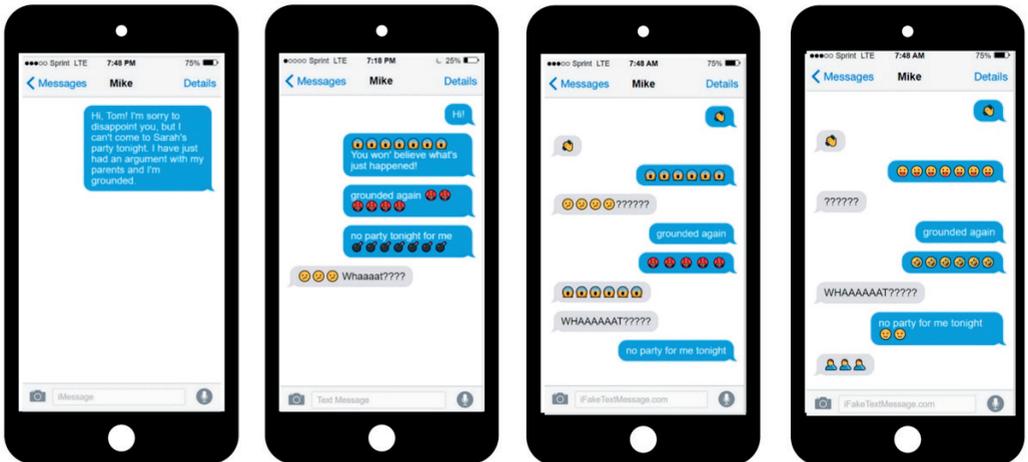
Narrative tenses, creative task: Students are given a topic such as weekend, holiday, childhood, 19th century, and a task to choose 3-5 emojis by themselves and to write or tell a story.

Retelling and note-taking: Emoji Translate can be used to motivate students to retell a text or make notes. Since the website automatically turns some words into emojis, younger learners may be more motivated to complete the task this way than by traditional writing.

2.3 I Fake Text-Messages

"Ifaketextmessage.com" is an online tool for creating fake messages on social media and setting different details, such as colors, battery level, and connection type, to make the messages look more realistic. This tool can be used to create samples of text messages that students should reply to. Once the messages are created, students are supposed to read the messages, analyze the text and emojis, and think of an appropriate answer. Depending on the lesson goal, the prepared messages can be used as a prompt for a writing exercise or as a tool leading to a discussion about emotions, rules of communication, and safety on the internet. In order to help students recognize different emotions, the teacher can create a set of messages with the same information expressed differently in order to draw students' attention not only to the word choice but also to the emojis, length, punctuation, etc.

For example, the teacher can divide students into four groups, giving them different messages with the same information expressed in different ways with the following tasks: to recognize the emotion, explain it, and answer the message in the same manner.



3 Conclusion

There are many tools that can be used to develop the digital emotional intelligence of students. As teachers, we are not always able to dedicate extra time to developing these skills. Therefore, it is a good idea to choose tools that can be used to introduce or revise vocabulary and grammar lessons that are already a part of the curriculum while also enabling students to recognize emotions in the digital environment, understand them, and react appropriately in order to build meaningful online relationships.

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17

GOING MENTAL!

Jana Mlakar

Abstract

The article discusses the topic of mental health. The first part presents the research of the National Institute of Public Health that was published in 2018, and a more recent survey conducted by UNICEF as part of the campaign "Kako se počutiš?" and the project "P-ODPORNİ mladi." The focus of my lessons was the definition of mental health, as well as myths and stigmas that are still attached to mental health problems and disorders. The students took a mental health test and had to find sources of help available in Slovenia, which were later put into the form of a poster. To end the topic on a positive note, we watched a TED Talk on what makes a good life.

Keywords: mental health, myths, stigma, mental health test, happiness

1 Introduction

In recent years, especially during and after the Covid pandemic, the topic of young people's mental health has become a common public and media issue. I teach at a secondary school in Ljubljana and our students mostly come from middle- or upper middle-class families and therefore do not have to struggle with life's basics. However, students I teach still experience quite a few challenges in their daily lives. Another reason for choosing this topic was the fact that I have been struggling with mental health problems since my teenage years. When I attended secondary school, mental health was not an expression we were familiar with, no one talked about it and the stigma attached to seeking psychiatric help was very much present. In the last decades, things have somewhat improved, yet research shows that many people still do not seek help when they have problems with their mental health. My goal in discussing this topic was to see how familiar my students were with the issue, to discuss various aspects of mental health and its issues, and finally, to see how students could help their friends or family members experiencing problems in this area. I did not focus specifically on students who may be suffering from depression, anxiety or other disorders, due to the sensitivity of the issue.

2 Mental Health in Children and Adolescents in Slovenia (Child and Adolescent Mental Health in Slovenia)

Searching for data on the mental health of teenagers in Slovenia, I found the publication entitled *Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Slovenia* (NIJZ, 2018). It concluded that most children and adolescents are mentally healthy, i.e., they do not show signs and symptoms of mental illness. Satisfaction with life declines with age and socio-economic status. The impact of inequalities is worrying since higher satisfaction with life was reported by adolescents who perceived that their family was doing well financially and who had good support from parents, peers and teachers (NIJZ, p. 36). Most young people in treatment suffered from eating disorders, anxiety disorders, and mixed behavioural and emotional disorders. Those disorders were more common in girls, with the highest gender difference in eating disorders (NIJZ, p. 51). One cause for concern might be the increase in medication used to treat mental and behavioural disorders in people under 20 years of age, which was 48% between 2008 and 2015, where the highest increase was among adolescents aged 15-19 years, climbing up to 73% in 2015 compared to 2008. An increase in medication use was mainly due to a large escalation in the use of antidepressants and psychostimulants (NIJZ, p. 52). When looking at specific mental disorders, about a third of young people had at least mild symptoms of depression. On average, the rate of outpatient admissions for anxiety disorders was higher compared to the rate of admissions for depression. The number of outpatient and inpatient admissions for depression and anxiety was higher for girls and older adolescents. Suicide among Slovenian adolescents (age group 15-19 years) has been among the top three causes of mortality almost every year over the last decade. It is three times more common among boys than girls. Slovenia has been above the European average in terms of suicide mortality among adolescents over the last decade (except in 2012). At the same time, suicide among adolescents has been

declining over the last decade and is approaching the European average (NIJZ, p. 221). UNICEF conducted a more recent survey in 2021 as part of the campaign “Kako se počutiš?” and the project “P-ODPORNi mladi.” The findings were based on the responses of 400 children and adolescents, aged between 10 and 18 years. Almost half of all respondents rated their mental health as fair or poor, most felt stressed or under pressure all the time. 70% had experienced unexplained stomach pain, chest pain, feeling unwell, sleep disturbances, prolonged sadness or despair in the past year. Of these, 64% thought that the symptoms were due to mental health problems. Most deal with their problems alone and do not talk to adults about it. Without enough support at school, they were more likely to feel tense, stressed, or under pressure when they returned to class.

3 Mental Health – Definition

To introduce the topic in class, I asked students to respond in a word-cloud form, an updated version of brainstorming. Each of them was asked to give a one-word response to the topic of mental health. In three classes, there were three different words given as the most common answers: happiness, sadness and depression. I found that quite interesting, as each of us sees the topic in his or her own way. The next step included definitions that can be found online. We chose the WHO definition, which states that “mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community” (WHO, 2023). We all found it interesting that mental health is seen as a basic human right, crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development. Students came to the conclusion that with the lack of help available to people with mental health problems, their human rights were being violated.

4 Mental Illness: Myths and Reality

Looking for suitable materials to use in class, I found the website *PositivePsychology.com*, which has numerous activities on the topic that can be used in class. I did not even need to adapt the first activity I decided to work on with my students. It was a simple jigsaw activity meant for elementary school students; however, it worked very well with my eighteen-year-olds. Students worked in pairs, each pair receiving an envelope with myths and facts. They had to decide which were myths and which facts and then match them correspondingly. They were given 10-15 minutes for that task. Some answers were very easy and some a bit more challenging. We checked their answers as a class, commenting on each of the pairs, especially with regards to the situation in our country. To conclude, students answered the questions on how to distinguish a myth from a fact, why that difference mattered and how they believed mental illness myths impacted people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness.

5 Understanding Mental Health Stigma

The materials I used to work on this aspect of mental health are taken from the same source as the previous ones, *PositivePsychology.com*. I adapted them a bit to create another matching activity, this time on a simple handout. We discussed the meaning of the word

stigma and how mental health stigma has decreased in the last two decades. Nevertheless, it is still present in the world today. When it comes to young people, it is boys who still have difficulties sharing information about their personal problems. For girls, it is easier to share them with their friends, which is the first step towards getting help. We all learned that we need to be better informed about the issue, that listening helps us understand the signs and symptoms to look for, and that negative labels need to be avoided even when joking. Furthermore, we need to ask questions and speak up when we feel others are stigmatising individuals with a mental health condition.

6 Mental Health Test

With my second-year students, I did the mental health test prepared by the American Academy of Paediatrics. I gave them the test on a handout and asked them to also complete the questionnaire on their mobile phones. They were able to partly assess their score with the key given in the questionnaire. I explained to them that the goal of this task was not to determine whether they were depressed or not but rather for them to become aware of the possible symptoms. I made it absolutely clear that for a definite diagnosis, they would need to be assessed by a professional.

Since they also completed the survey online, I was able to see the results. Even though the results were not representative, with only 23 students answering the questions, I was surprised by certain responses.

The test was comprised of 13 questions, 9 of which focused on the period of the past two weeks with possible answers: not at all, several days, more than half the days, or nearly every day. When asked how often they had been feeling down, depressed, irritable, or hopeless, most students answered with “several days,” and 4 felt this way nearly every day. 7 out of 23 students answered the question on showing little pleasure in doing things with “more than half the days” or “nearly every day.” Consequently, I was not surprised by the answers on feeling tired or having little energy; half of the students answered with “more than half the days” or “nearly every day.” They also have problems concentrating on things like schoolwork, reading or even watching TV. This might partly be due to the overuse of smartphones and the syndrome of scrolling through feeds on social media, in my opinion. 6 students felt bad about themselves, or felt that they were a failure, or that they had let themselves or their family down, marking the answers “more than half the days” or “nearly every day.” This result is significant. 7 felt depressed or sad most days in the past year, which made it somewhat difficult for them to do their work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people. 2 students answered yes to the question if there had been a time in the past month when they had had serious thoughts about ending their life.

I did not share the results with the class as I did not want them to be looking around the class, guessing who were the two students that were thinking about ending their life. However, they were able to check how they scored on the second page of the handout. At the end of this lesson, I again stressed that the test was not a proper medical diagnosis,

and if they found their score worrying, it did not necessarily mean they were suffering from depression but that they might want to talk to somebody about it.

7 A Poster on Finding Help

After taking the test, students had the task to find as many available sources where they could find help if they felt that they or their friends might be having mental health issues. One of them then designed a poster that we posted in our Microsoft Teams group and also on the school's social media.

8 What Makes a Good Life

To conclude the topic on a positive note, I shared the video I had found online years ago. It is a TED Talk presented by Roger Waldinger, MD. He is a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the current director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development which started in 1938 and is still going. I prepared a handout with tasks on the video since my experience is that students pay more attention to what they are watching when they have a task to complete. The answer to the question of what makes a good life - good relationships - was surprising for many of them. The people in the strongest relationships were protected against chronic disease, mental illness and memory decline – even if those relationships had many ups and downs. After watching the video, we discussed the main findings of the study and their reactions to the video. They were impressed with how comprehensive the study is and how long it has lasted. Here, a possible expansion of the topic could be looking at how studies are conducted and the problems with their representativeness.

9 Conclusion

I did not do all the tasks in all the classes in which I worked on mental health, I chose them based on what I felt would be more appropriate for them, or the ideas simply appeared after I had completed the topic in one class. I shared some of my experiences with mental health issues, which helped create a positive atmosphere. The students' feedback was extremely positive, there was no ridiculing, and I believe my goal of creating a safe environment to discuss this sensitive issue has been accomplished. I hope that the students who have mental health problems, especially the ones thinking about ending their life, feel encouraged to seek help. My goal for the future is to work on this topic with all my students, so as to promote open discussions about mental health.

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18

UNPACK SUCCESS CRITERIA WITH CHECKLISTS

Karmen Goršak

Abstract

The present article discusses the use of checklists as a tool to unpack the success criteria in EFL classroom assessment. Standardised assessment criteria are used to assess students' language acquisition, and both teachers and students may find them too vague or too broad to be easily explained or understood. Using checklists to unpack success criteria has a positive influence on how students understand a teacher's judgment of their performance. Checklists break down the criteria into separate items that are easy to follow and implement. Students internalize the items in the checklist and improve their language performance. Checklists can become an integral part of any classroom assessment, be it formative or summative. They help teachers and students define the learning goals and focus on the assessment requirements.

Keywords: assessment, success criteria, checklists

1 Introduction

Assessment of a student's performance is based on the teacher's judgement. Teachers use assessment criteria to assess different language skills and rate students' achievements according to these criteria. "Too often we assess when it is convenient for our systems rather than when it is helpful to students' further development" (Brown and Glasner, 2003, p. 11). Assessment must be valid, reliable, objective, and transparent. When teachers use the standardized criteria, they usually rely on their tacit knowledge when they 'decode' the marking criteria. According to Boud (1995), students can escape bad teaching, yet they cannot avoid bad assessment.

Students often ask their teachers to explain the marks awarded for their performance (e.g., written assignments or oral presentations) as they do not understand why they have been given three out of five marks. A teacher cannot merely dismiss the question by saying, "*Because I know why.*" Their students do not necessarily know why. They must feel comfortable with the teacher as an assessor and rater of their performance. Their and teacher's perception of the criteria may differ.

To make the assessment criteria useful, meaningful, and easy to follow, teachers can use checklists to demystify and unpack the descriptors. The checklists make the students aware of what is expected from them, what is being assessed and how. A teacher's role is to make their students become better users of English and not just better test-takers. Therefore, the checklists are a valuable tool in enhancing the students' learning, as they become active agents and equal members in the assessment process.

2 Assessment

In today's educational environment of high-stakes assessment, teachers employ criteria to assess students' performance. Teachers can only assess what they have taught their students and they may feel uncomfortable with the prevailing situations where they need to teach for the classroom-based tests and final exams.

Boud (1995, p. 3) claims that

"Too often staff-driven assessment encourages students to be dependent on the teacher or the examiners to make decisions about what they know, and they do not effectively learn to be able to do this for themselves. Well-designed assessment practices should be oriented around the key concepts and ideas that students should be able to deal with /.../".

With the use of predefined scoring criteria and rubrics, teachers can clarify expectations, identify students' weaknesses and strengths, and guide or direct students' learning outcomes, respectively.

Using standard criteria may not improve the reliability, objectivity, or validity of assessment if teachers as raters cannot explain the marking criteria to their students or do not know

how to employ the criteria effectively. Teachers' professional experience, their criteria literacy and the rating methods used may affect their judgements and rating of students' work that undergoes the assessment procedures. Not only do the students expect fairness in the assessment methods applied, but they also want to understand why they have been awarded a certain grade and how they can meet the requirements to achieve the best mark in each criterion.

Teachers' classroom assessment practices are in need of a brush-up to provide the fairness, objectivity, validity, and reliability of the assessment. Successful reporting of student achievement and effective and meaningful feedback through grading are key elements if teachers want to promote and support learning and not merely quantitatively measure students' work or the quality of their performance in a test. Teachers need to radically review their assessment strategies and the implementation of the criteria.

3 Unpack Success Criteria

The success criteria teachers use to assess their students' achievements explain what successful performance means. Students want to understand what they are required to learn and how they can achieve the best grades. They need to understand the success criteria and the standards they need to reach.

When the criteria are clear, and easy to use before, during and after the learning takes place, students are able to work towards the learning goals. Students can direct their learning if teachers explain and decode/unpack the criteria they use to assess their performance.

However, when the language in the standard criteria is too vague and too difficult to understand, we usually run into problems. Consequently, the criteria must be meaningful, easy to understand, transparent and clear. Both teachers and students must be criteria literate to apply the criteria that will enhance learning and provide a valid, objective and meaningful grade. Students can rate their own work and judge whether they have achieved the highest marks or not. If they understand the criteria, they recognize the quality of their own work, identify their strengths and weaknesses and are able to improve their performance. This results in speaking the same language, students understand what their teacher means by saying, for example, *'complex grammatical structures'* or *'a wide range of advanced vocabulary'*.

To start unpacking the success criteria, teachers can train their students to peer- and self-assess their work. The implementation of 'Can do' statements may be of great help, as such statements are already integrated into many modern coursebooks; unfortunately, they are neglected, overlooked, or not used at all. Teachers can give students two pieces of written work to compare; one piece reaches the highest standard, and the other does not. Using the success criteria and the 'can do' statements, students understand what to look for, and they are able to identify the items in both texts and recognize the quality of the compared

works. They can recognize the most important aspects of the assessment criteria. This leads to improved performance once they produce and present their own work.

Giving their peers and themselves feedback with the unpacked criteria presents a framework for their future performance. The evidence they gather from this activity will very probably lead to a better performance in high-stakes assessment. Their work will be aligned with the criteria teachers use to assess the students' performance.

Teachers' use of marking criteria and their decisions when rating students' performance can be improved and made transparent by student involvement in the assessment process, which means any classroom assessment ranging from formative to summative assessment.

4 Checklists

Teachers can help students develop an understanding of the success criteria by using checklists. "A checklist is a list of specific characteristics with a place for marking whether that characteristic is present or absent. Checklists by definition break an assignment down into discrete bits (the "list"). This clarifies what is required for the assignment - namely, to do this list of things" (Brookhart, 2013, p. 77).

Using checklists and unpacking the assessment criteria can improve students' performance in productive skills. At the same time, checklists can promote learning and improve the understanding of the learning goals. Research shows (Vasu, Nimehhchisalem, Fung, & Rashid, 2018) that checklists are an effective tool in that they reduce teachers' workload regarding the amount of time spent providing feedback to students. Checklists help students create awareness of their writing ability and assist them in performing different productive tasks more systematically. Vasu, Nimehhchisalem, Fung, & Rashid (2018, p. 209) find that "[T]he checklist can serve as a tool for the learners to develop a deeper understanding of the process and mechanics of writing an argumentative essay. It also helps to monitor their own progress and promotes students' metacognitive skills."

Teachers can discuss the checklists they will use with students. They can present a clearer view of what is required from students to successfully accomplish a task and how they can demonstrate the mastery of their language skills. "Checklists are great for helping students see whether they have followed directions, included all required elements of an assignment, adhered to format requirements, and the like" (Brookhart, 2013, p. 81). According to Vasu, Nimehhchisalem, Fung, & Rashid (2018, p. 216) the checklist is found to be guiding students to approach writing in a very systematic manner. Detailed step-by-step items on the checklist encourage students to view the process of writing and approach it in a systematic and manageable manner.

Another important factor that should be taken into consideration is the fact that checklists help students enhance and self-monitor their learning as they can be used before, during

and after an activity. Students use the checklist independently to prepare for the assignment, they use the checklist during the assignment to see whether they have included all the required elements, and after the assignment, they can re-use the same checklist to re-edit and self-assess their performance. This approach is very systematic and gives the students a notion of ownership and responsibility. They internalize the items and when it comes to high-stakes assessment, students will be more likely to recall the items on the checklist they used during their learning, resulting in an improved understanding of the teacher's or examiner's grading of their performances.

5 Designing Your Own Checklists

Teachers must have sufficient understanding of the learning goals, success criteria and knowledge if they want to design a checklist. To avoid confusion, checklists should be easy to implement and should be user-friendly. Ideally, a checklist could be designed by students themselves as this would provide a deeper insight into the development process of the checklist and their learning outcomes respectively. Checklists cover each stage of the learning process and are used as a step-by-step approach to achieving the learning goal.

Checklists include elements that are required in a criterion and make them understandable to students. It must be made clear to the students that they do not need to master everything that is included on a checklist. To train the students how to use a checklist, teachers can prepare a to-do list when they assign students a task. Students follow this checklist; they include the elements mentioned on the to-do list and afterward self-edit their work by identifying whether something is present or not. One of the drawbacks is that there is no judgment of whether the work is excellent or merely good.

The layout of the checklists and the language of the items in the checklist must be made simple for the students to understand. It is also better to use fewer items when breaking down a criterion or rubric into smaller bits. Standard marking criteria in EFL assessment include concepts like '*relevant ideas*', '*coherence*', '*justification of the arguments*', '*varied vocabulary*', or '*complex grammatical structures*.' It is essential to provide clarification on these terms to help the students monitor and improve their own progress. A checklist can also provide the components that must be included in student language production, e.g., in various written compositions or oral presentations. Students may become aware of what "they were missing out on without the checklist" (Vasu, Nimehhchisalem, Fung, & Rashid, 2018, p. 216).

Teachers can select and determine the tasks and skills they want their students to perform. They break down the descriptors in a criterion into single items using positive language, e.g., '*the essay is divided into three to five paragraphs*', or '*uses conditional clauses appropriately and accurately*'. If teachers often integrate the checklists into their teaching, students will soon recognize them as a tool for improving their performance.

Law and Eckes (2007, p. 158) state that “checklists encompass features that you determine you want to assess in students.” Teachers can design their own checklists or use the ones already designed by others making adaptations to suit their situations.

“Using a form without thinking it through or modifying it deprives you of the benefit of involving yourself in the process. Checklists are worth the effort to create because, if properly conceived and used, they can yield a great deal of information” (Law and Eckes, 2007, p. 161).

6 Conclusion

The language of the standard marking criteria in EFL assessment tends to be too complex, too vague, too generic, or too broad. Students may not understand what is expected of them and do not understand the grade they have achieved for their performance. The criteria or the rubrics that are systematically explained, decoded, or unpacked with checklists can assist the students in identifying their strong and weak areas. Checklists can break down the criteria into more meaningful and easy-to-follow step-by-step ‘bits’, providing items that can be implemented before, during and after an activity to improve students’ performance. Students might be better able to internalize the ‘look-fors’, understand the success criteria and apply them in the self-assessment of their language acquisition.

Checklists may provide more specific (corrective) feedback as they highlight the elements/items that should be implemented to improve the quality of students’ performance.

With the use of checklists, teachers help their students to become more ‘assessment literate’ and independent as learners. In the light of the 21st century approaches to learning and teaching, there is a necessity to make a shift in assessment practices and methods. Checklists may serve the purpose as they promote life-long and sustainable learning.

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HOW TO READ AND DECONSTRUCT DRAMATIC TEXTS: A CASE OF HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

Klavdija Kremlj Slana

Abstract

Literature is a tool that makes students read texts originally written in the target language and provides them with an insight into not just the author and the literary period of the text's production but also the form and genre it is written in. Although most teachers rely on teaching prose and poetry texts, plays can also cater to the needs of language and literature students. This article will focus on how to read and analyse dramatic texts based on a case study of a particular literary work. A set of dramatic features will be introduced and explained with the help of the 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. It will also provide readers with an insight into how this text was discussed and analysed in class, thus providing a platform for implementation in their own classrooms.

Keywords: literature, drama, Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

1 Introduction

The main part of our job as language teachers is to develop and teach language skills and language systems. This is mostly done through the lenses of different non-literary texts, either consisting of purely textual, visual, audio, or a combination of different modes of meaning. However, reading and teaching literary texts both for educational and enjoyment purposes is part of the ride. Many of us read and analyse poems and novels in our English classes, whereas plays are rarely used. This paper will focus on how to teach literature in class, specifically drama. It entails the study of the following set of dramatic features: structure; setting; plot and conflict; stage directions; speech directions; characterization; and language. By studying all these components of plays, the students will be able to understand the characteristics of plays and how they differ from other forms of literature. It will also provide them with an understanding of literature in general and how its different forms are used by the author to convey the main ideas and concepts. In addition, every piece of literature is also highly reflective of its time and place and can serve as a valuable tool for comprehension and reflection on it, thus, providing a framework for learning about the many contexts that surround a piece of literature.

To put theory into perspective, the 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry was used. This text was chosen because it is a literary masterpiece written by a young, gifted, and black African-American female author amidst one of the most tumultuous times in American history, during the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement Era. It also provides insight into African American Vernacular English of that time with its many inflections and varieties, as displayed through the play's characters. The play is one of the literary works found on the reading list I designed for the International Baccalaureate class at II. gimnazija Maribor for the subject English A: Language and Literature. It is aimed at students aged 17-19 whose level of English is least Upper-Intermediate and above. However, it could, without a doubt, be adapted to a class of English learners aged 17-19 in the national school leaving examination program, depending on the objectives and anticipated outcomes set by the teacher.

2 Implementation in the Classroom

A detailed study of a work of literature usually comprises three separate but well-interconnected continuums: the author–the work–the reader. To be able to fully understand the author's motivation for writing a text, we must learn about the period he lived in and how it may have contributed to the creation and writing of the text.

This is why, firstly, a set of pre-reading/analysis activities is done in class: the students do a research on the historical context of the play and get familiar with the Great Migration (of which one of the main migration corridors from the American South to the North was directed to Chicago where the play is set), the Harlem Renaissance which was an intellectual and artistic revival of African American culture in the 1920s and 1930s New York, mainly looking at the works of Langston Hughes whose poem *Harlem* is alluded to in the title of

the play and illustrates the limitations of the American Dream for African Americans, and the 1950s and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and its most prominent activists and pivotal historical events. Since the main conflict of the play is how to spend the 10,000 dollars the Younger family get from their insurance company after Big Walter's death, the students, for example, also examine how much that amount was worth in the 1950s America and what one could buy with it. We also watch the American Masters documentary devoted to the life and work of Lorraine Hansberry: *Sighted Eyes, Feeling Heart* (2017), which invites students to reflect on her life and work and, at the same time, provides substantial insight into the time and place she lived in.

What follows is a direct interaction with the play where we analyse a set of dramatic elements in detail, rereading and discussing numerous pivotal scenes from the play and interconnectedly discussing its form and content. At the same time, we pay attention to the author's (literary) craft since the students need to have a wide and round understanding of the work to be able to use it for the examination components in the IB¹ English A program.

In the post-analysis segment, the students do a handful of creative activities such as dramatizations, character studies, and writing activities (biographical poems, essays, alternative endings...). As regards the time needed for the execution of the set activities, it usually takes one and a half to two months in class to do everything planned.

3 Drama vs Playscript

According to Philpot (2019), the word 'drama' has two definitions: one referring to a play written for theatre, film or radio; the other referring to a highly emotional experience. Writers achieve drama in both senses of the word through 'playscripts' which are written for the purpose of performance. While they are meant to be memorized, rehearsed, and performed by actors on stage, they are often explored by students in language and literature classrooms. While we analyse playscripts, we should keep in mind that playwrights write with the expectation that actors and directors will understand how to bring their words to life. Namely, they wrote their plays to be performed, not just to be read (p. 67).

3.1 Conventions of Drama

When analysing a play, we should discuss the following elements that help shape meaning: structure; setting; plot and conflict; stage directions; speech directions, sound, music and lighting; characterization; language and atmosphere. It is not enough just to identify these elements but to establish why they were chosen and how they influence our understanding of the text, namely, going below the surface of the text and deconstructing authorial choices and the effects they create on the audience.

¹ International Baccalaureate.

4 A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

A Raisin in the Sun is Lorraine Hansberry's most celebrated play that debuted on Broadway in 1959. The title comes from the poem "Harlem" (also known as "A Dream Deferred") written by Langston Hughes in 1951. It is a realistic portrait of a working-class black family struggling to achieve the American Dream of careers and home ownership while gripped by the reality of their lives as African Americans who must survive in a racist society. (enotes, n. d.)

4.1 Structure

According to Philpot (2019), most plays are divided into acts and scenes. Scenes are significant for framing the dramatic action, dialogue and setting. *A Raisin in the Sun* is organized into three conventional acts with their distinct scenes.

Yet, she also employs techniques of absurdist drama, particularly the scene in which a drunken Walter Lee walks in on Beneatha's African dancing and is able to immediately summon a memory that psychically connects him with an African past that his character, in reality, would not have known. He is able to sing and dance and chant as though he had studied African culture. (*A Raisin in the Sun* Park Square Theater Study Guide, n. d.)

4.2 Conflict

The Younger family are an African-American family living in the Southside of Chicago. After the death of Walter Senior, they receive a 10,000 dollars insurance check. The main conflict of the play represents the question of what to do with the insurance money since every family member has their own idea on how to spend it. The matriarch of the family, Mama, wants to buy a house to fulfill a dream she shared with her husband. Mama's son, Walter Lee, would rather use the money to invest in a liquor store with his friends. He believes that the investment will solve the family's financial problems forever. Walter's wife, Ruth, agrees with Mama, however, and hopes that she and Walter can provide more space and opportunity for their son, Travis. Finally, Beneatha, Walter's sister and Mama's daughter, wants to use the money for her medical school tuition (Sparknotes, n. d.).

4.3 The Setting

A Raisin in the Sun takes place in an apartment in the South Side neighborhood of Chicago, sometime between the end of World War II and 1959. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the South Side was racially segregated, with Black people confined to a slum area known as the Black Belt. The circumstances of their life in Chicago's South Side weigh heavily on the spirits of the Youngers, who are a working-class family with their sights set on upward social mobility. Despite their longstanding dream of moving out of the neighborhood, they have not been able to establish the financial security necessary to do so (Sparknotes, n. d.). The apartment is a visual testament of the family's poverty. The apartment reflects the disappointment and growing despair of the family; it also reveals the financial struggle and racial obstacles, as well as limitations that the family are facing.

The action takes place in the cramped (5 people living in it), roach-infested apartment where 3 generations of the Younger family have resided for years. The apartment is part of a building in a black neighborhood in Southside Chicago. It is a tiny 2-bedroom apartment with a communal bathroom. The apartment is too small for the number of people who live there; there are only 2 bedrooms: one for Mama and Beneatha, and one for Ruth and Walter Lee. Travis sleeps on the couch in the living room which also serves as the dining room. The carpet is threadbare from vacuuming; the furniture is worn from dusting; the apartment is sprayed weekly to keep roaches away. The only window is in their small kitchen. The stage directions indicate that the furniture, though apparently once chosen with care, is now very worn and faded. There is limited natural lighting. (Hansberry, 1959)

As Hansberry puts it in the set description at the beginning of her script, the primary feature of the apartment's furnishings "is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years ... Weariness has, in fact, won in this room." (p. 26)

4.4 Stage Directions and Staging

As defined by Philpot (2019), this broad term refers to any text that is not part of the dialogue. It tells the actors where and how to move around the stage. It also includes the assembly of props, the set, and the placement of characters in relation to each other. In a broader sense, it also includes lighting, music, and costumes as well (p. 75). In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the majority of the play takes place in the Younger family's cramped, roach-infested 2-bedroom apartment with a communal bathroom and only one small kitchen window which serves as the only source of natural lighting in the apartment. It accommodates five people.

4.5 Characterization

Writers mostly engage readers through the portrayal of the characters involved. When studying the characters in your literary texts, we should answer these two questions: What function do the characters serve in the story? How does the author bring their characters to life?

Authors bring their characters to life by using the following techniques of characterization: character's name, character's words (dialogue), actions and behaviour, character's thoughts, character's physical appearance and personality traits. In most works, there are main and secondary characters, all of which contribute to the story in their own way.

Thus, we distinguish between the following types of characters: protagonist (the main character who propels the story towards a certain goal), antagonist (who stands in the way of protagonist), round / complex character (a fully developed, psychologically believable character that undergoes development) vs. flat character (static, built around one main idea), foil (a character whose qualities contrast those of the main character to expose them

to the reader), antihero (the protagonist who lacks the traditional heroic qualities), and stock character (a one-dimensional stereotypical character, often included to make a point or represent an idea rather than a realistic portrayal of a person) (Philpot, 2019).

A Raisin in the Sun features the following set of characters: the protagonist Walter Lee who is Mrs. Younger's eldest child. He wants to start his own liquor business against his family's wishes. Walter wants things that no one else believes he can have. In the stage directions, he is described as "a lean, intense young man in his middle thirties, inclined to quick nervous movements and erratic speech habits—and always in his voice, there is a quality of indictment" (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 1959, p. 28). He undergoes a major transformation at the end of the play transitioning into manhood.

There are three female characters in the play which represent three different generations of women:

1. Walter Lee's wife Ruth, who wants a tranquil home but has trouble communicating with her husband. In the stage directions, she is described as a woman who

"was a pretty girl, even exceptionally so, but now it is apparent that life has been little that she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face. In a few years, before thirty-five even, she will be known among her people as a settled woman." (Hansberry, 1959, p. 27)

2. Walter Lee's younger sister Beneatha, who plans to go to medical school after college and is representative of the Natural Hair Movement of the 1960s when she changes her hair and leaves it natural. She also transitions from the Old Negro to the New Negro attitude², taking pride in her own roots and identity. In the stage directions, she is characterized in the following way:

"His sister BENEATHA enters. She is about twenty, as slim and intense as her brother. She is not as pretty as her sister-in-law, but her lean, almost intellectual face has a handsomeness of its own. She wears a bright-red flannel nightie, and her thick hair stands wildly about her head. Her speech is a mixture of many things; it is different from the rest of the family's insofar as education has permeated her sense of English—and perhaps the Midwest rather than the South has finally—at last—won out in her inflection; but not altogether, because over all of it is a soft slurring and transformed use of vowels which is the decided influence of the Southside." (Hansberry, 1959, p. 38)

3. Walter Lee's mother Lena Younger, who is the matriarch of the family. She is a retired domestic worker and has strong values and ideals about how to run her. In the stage directions, she is characterized as

"a woman in her early sixties, full-bodied and strong. She is one of those women of a certain grace and beauty who wear it so unobtrusively that it takes a while to notice. Her dark-brown face is surrounded by the total whiteness of her hair, and,

being a woman who has adjusted to many things in life and overcome many more, her face is full of strength. She has, we can see, wit and faith of a kind that keep her eyes lit and full of interest and expectancy. She is, in a word, a beautiful woman. Her bearing is perhaps most like the noble bearing of the women of the Hereros of Southwest Africa—rather as if she imagines that as she walks she still bears a basket or a vessel upon her head. Her speech, on the other hand, is as careless as her carriage is precise—she is inclined to slur everything— but her voice is perhaps not so much quiet as simply soft.” (Hansberry, 1959, p. 42)

She is the one that holds the family together and is the beneficiary of the insurance check the family receive.

There are some other male characters in the play: Beneatha’s suitors Joseph Asagai, a politically active student from Nigeria; and George Murchison, who is a college student and the son of a wealthy businessman. Finally, there is Karl Lindner, a white man who visits the family and who wants to make a humiliating deal with the family, trying to make them to not move in the white neighbourhood.

The characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* are probably its most prominent feature to be able to understand the play’s pivotal role in the 20th-century American literature since each of them is a symbolic representation of the different generations of African-American men and women living in the USA at that time, each of them being driven by their own motivations and desires and dreams, which are in most cases unattainable due to internal and external conflicts.

4.6 Speech Directions

Philpot (2019) states that stage directions can include speech directions which tell the actors how to use inflection, accent, or intonation in their voice (p. 75). Speech directions reveal the characters’ unique way of speaking, i.e. their idiolect. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha, who is a college student, speaks with an educated diction; in stage directions, however, Hansberry directs the actress to keep in mind the family’s Southern origins. Walter Lee uses the language of the ghetto but is contemptuous of the subservient language he must use as a chauffeur when addressing his employers. One of Beneatha’s suitors, Joseph Asagai, speaks in an inflated language that promises great and wonderful things, but he has also a bit of a fraud in him. Throughout the play, Hansberry’s characters use African American Vernacular English which was the language of the Southside Chicago Ghetto in the 1950s.

4.7 Language

Besides the setting and the props, the dramatic plot is also revealed through the interaction between the characters on stage. This is done either through dialogue or monologue. According to Philpot (2019), dialogue refers to the exchange of words between characters.

A monologue is when one character speaks for a longer duration for other characters to hear but not for them to necessarily respond. A soliloquy refers to a character speaking aloud to himself or herself privately, with the audience listening in. A dramatic aside is when a character speaks directly to the audience, conscious and aware of their existence (p. 75).

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, by putting plays on our students' reading list, we can greatly contribute to their learning of the language by being exposed to authentic texts and, at the same time, introduce them to literary terminology and literary craft and how it achieves its meanings and creates an effect on the readership. Plays especially seem a viable literary choice to be analysed in the classroom because they appeal to the students' eyes and ears by making the text come alive in the classroom. Students can enjoy a variety of class activities, making them interact with the text and see for themselves how dramatic features define plays. Finally, plays help them reflect on the characters' circumstances and connect them with their own lives. They learn about the context of production and are consequently able to understand and critically approach phenomena typical of certain times and places, such as the 1950s America (depicted in *A Raisin in the Sun*) and its aftermath in the form of the American Civil Rights Movement.

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THE NTC LEARNING SYSTEM AND THEATRE PEDAGOGY IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Lucija Kuntner

Abstract

Our intellectual abilities are closely related to the number of synapses. Even though this process never ends, it is most intensive in the first years of a child's life. The NTC learning system provides many playful activities to enhance motor and cognitive abilities among children, especially in preschool and primary school. Nevertheless, some of the NTC activities, along with theatre pedagogy, can also be used in secondary schools, such as NTC codes, associations, hidden words, etc. Students who are stimulated through play can be motivated to learn and thus acquire functional knowledge more easily.

Keywords: NTC learning system, theatre pedagogy, play, functional knowledge

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, there seems to be a substantial need for change in the education system. The old approach of teaching seems to be more and more outdated. Considering the fact that we are preparing students for professions that were literary non-existent very few years ago, it is only logical to implement new learning methods and approaches to teaching in which pupils and students can be active, and thus have both their cognitive and creative potentials stimulated.

However, there is no doubt that parents' roles regarding a child's optimal biological development are crucial. Research has shown that learning disabilities (reading, writing, calculation), speech disorders (dyslexia, etc.) and problems with motor skills happen due to physical inactivity in early childhood.

One of the methods that can be applied in schools, especially in preschool and primary school, is the NTC Program. Neurophysiologist Ranko Rajović, the author of the NTC learning system, claims that this programme encourages children to think divergently. Instead of using reproductive learning, children learn through the activation of associative regions in their brains.

2 The NTC System of Learning

The NTC learning system has so far been implemented in about 20 countries –Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Macedonia, Finland, England, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, etc., and is divided into three phases (Rajović, 2018):

- 1) Early stimulation (synapsis development)
 - Motoric exercises
 - Grapho-motoric exercises

- 2) Associative thinking development
 - Visualisation and abstraction
 - Mental seriation and classification
 - Music and association

- 3) Functional thinking development (problem solving and problem posing)
 - Enigmatic histories
 - Enigmatic questions for convergent thinking
 - Enigmatic questions for divergent thinking

In phase one, the emphasis is on the importance of developing motor and graphomotor skills that help the children's physical and intellectual development. Activities such as rotation, jumping, balance, eye dynamic accommodation and similar are used at this stage (Rajović, 2012).

The second phase presents several levels, from recognizing abstract concepts to their connection and skillful handling through abstract classification, seriation, music and association (Rajović, 2018).

In phase three, stimulating divergent and convergent thinking, as well as functional knowledge is highlighted, and thus activities such as mysterious stories, enigmatic questions, problem solving, etc. are used (Rajović, 2018).

All three NTC phases are implemented through play that constitutes a key factor in the NTC learning system (Rajović, 2019).

3 The Connection Between Motor and Cognitive Functions

Due to our sedentary lifestyle, we seem to forget that physical activity is a necessity, not a luxury (Rajović, 2019). Hillman and his team have conducted a study which has shown that preadolescent children perform better in school tests after 20 minutes of walking prior to the test (Hillman et al., 2009). In addition, physically fit children have better language skills and more robust neuroelectric brain signals during reading than less physically fit children (Rajović, 2019).

Preadolescent children, who are given enough regular exercise, also show greater hippocampal and basal ganglia volume, elevated and more efficient patterns of brain activity and superior cognitive performance and scholastic achievement (Rajović, 2019).

All in all, regular and sufficient physical activity has shown positive and beneficial long-term effects in preadolescent children.

4 Art With NTC Learning Method and Theatre Pedagogy in Secondary School

Neurophysiological discoveries show that for the holistic development of a child, this system of learning can be well integrated into formal education, especially by the age of seven up to twelve, due to the fact that at this early stage of a child's life, most synapses are being formed. However, to a certain degree, it can also be applied with secondary school students. The NTC learning method was used with first-, second-, third- and fourth-year students at Prva gimnazija Maribor.

Firstly, the students are asked to find a hidden word within the sentence *How old was Mozart when he composed his first simple piece of music?*, which reveals the topic of the lesson (Answer: art). Afterwards, via the Mentimeter app, they individually give their own definition of art.

Furthermore, the students learn the three major categories of art (fine arts/visual arts, performing arts and literature) by learning the subcategories first. Using the theatre pedagogy method, the students are divided into groups of 4-5. One student within each group is a

sculptor; the others are the so-called smart clay, which can be moulded by the sculptor. After creating a 'sculpture', other groups guess what each group has created. Thus, the first subcategory of visual arts – sculpture – is presented. The second one – painting – is given by using a PowerPoint presentation about the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh. The students are given a riddle on how number 43 relates to the painter. The objective of this approach is to encourage the students to guess and give their ideas, even though they may not know the answer that he painted 43 self-portraits. While guessing, they can learn some biographical facts about his life, which is the main aim of this activity. The third subcategory – architecture – can be presented by using another question such as: *Which old building in the centre of Maribor, built in 1850, hosts about 800 students today?* (Answer: Prva gimnazija).

Subcategories of performing arts – theatre, music and ballet – are introduced through NTC codes. On the blackboard, the students are given certain words, for example, *plot, chair, dance, actor, short, early, ballet*, and the code number 4251535. They then guess that if they single out one letter within each word and connect them into a new word, they get the word *theatre*. By heart, the same (yet with different choice of words) can be done for the subcategories of music and ballet.

Subcategories of literature – drama, prose, poetry – can be presented through rhymes and/or hidden words again. For example, *Which word rhymes with llama?* (Answer: drama); *Which word rhymes with rose/compose?* (Answer: prose); *Which story did Edgar Allan Poe try to write in 1842?* (Answer: poetry).

At the end, students can be asked to draw the definition of art taken from the Cambridge/Oxford dictionary. By doing so, the associative regions in their brains are stimulated.

5 Conclusion

The NTC learning system offers both parents and teachers an opportunity and a challenge to stimulate children's motor and cognitive development. Children engaged in play-based activities can acquire knowledge without having to undergo reproductive learning. Even though all three basic phases – synapse development, associative thinking development and functional thinking development – are crucial for implementation at an early age, some of the NTC activities can also be applied with secondary school students. Thus, students can learn alternative approaches to learning and be actively involved in the learning process.

To conclude, a lesson designed as purposeful play can stimulate the students' speed of thinking, linking and concluding, and thus functional knowledge. After all, it is believed that – in George Bernard Shaw's words: "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

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STORY VALLEY – INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

Maja Osterman

Abstract

Story Valley is an international project whose main goal is to strengthen students' literacy skills and familiarise them with their oral history, language, and cultural heritage in a fun and engaging way. The project itself is not specifically aimed at language teachers but is modular so that each teacher can pick and choose the modules he/she wants to use. In collaboration with various organisations, the teachers involved in the project have developed various activities to inspire other teachers to use this approach in their work. These activities have been particularly successful when integrated into several subjects in the students' curriculum, such as English or photography at the Ljubljana Multimedia and Graphic Technology Secondary School (Srednja medijska in grafična šola Ljubljana (SMGŠ)).

Keywords: international project, literacy skills, oral history, cultural heritage

1 Introduction

Story Valley is an international project introduced to help students develop their storytelling skills and increase their confidence to communicate their ideas effectively. All the teachers involved in the project aimed to teach students about their oral history, language, and cultural heritage in a fun and engaging way. By working with our international partners, the students also had the opportunity to learn about other cultures and compare their experiences with those of their peers in Scotland and the Netherlands.

2 The Four Modules

The beauty of Story Valley is that it can be adapted to virtually any type of setting, whether it is an extracurricular activity or a part of the regular curriculum. It is modular; therefore, teachers can choose the parts of the project they want to use. The four modules are *Find the Story*, *Tell the Story*, *Get Creative*, and *Share Your Work*. As the first two modules are mainly aimed at teachers working with students to improve their literacy skills, there are numerous activities, case studies, and videos explaining how to approach the topics of oral history and cultural heritage. These have been prepared by teachers from all the schools actively involved in the project (currently SMGŠ, Edinburgh College, and Friesland College). They are published on the Story Valley website and are available to teachers (Story Valley resources).

3 Creating the Newspaper

Last year, the teachers at SMGŠ approached the project by first selecting a group of students to study the topic of migration, especially that of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their arrival in Slovenia. Throughout the year, in cooperation with the Vodnik homestead (one of the project partners), we prepared various activities and workshops where they learned about the topic and then researched it themselves. Some of the activities are described in the module *Find the Story*. Their work culminated in a special edition of the school newspaper in Slovenian and English, entirely dedicated to the Story Valley project. This phase corresponds to the modules *Tell the Story* and *Get Creative*. The best combination of the two modules was the collaboration between two students that produced a fun comic (*Picture 1*). The students were involved in every stage of creating the newspaper, from writing the different articles to

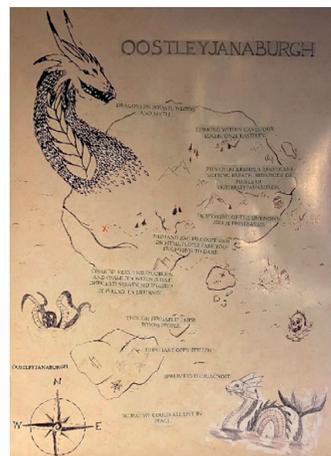


Picture 1: Comic story from the newspaper

designing the newspaper, editing the photos, and printing the newspaper (SMGS Pixel, March 2022). After the newspaper was published, the students presented their work to the public at the Vodnik homestead, completing all four modules of Story Valley.

4 International Student Exchange

In October 2022, SMGS students had the opportunity to visit Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. At Friesland College, we tried to put the theory of Story Valley into practice. Within a few days, the students were divided into multinational groups and had the task of coming up with a story featuring all their mother tongues and then presenting this story in a creative way. All groups worked with at least three different languages (English, Slovenian, and Dutch), some even with five, as the Edinburgh College students came from different European countries. In the end, the groups presented four very different products. The first group wrote a poem and created a poster with different illustrations on the themes of the poem (*Picture 2*). The second group wrote down their story in an interactive children's book, which they illustrated themselves. The third group made a short silent film with subtitles featuring all three languages in short sentences (Student youtube video). The last group recorded a song and created a website explaining the story and translating the words from different languages.



Picture 2: Poster with a multilingual poem

5 Conclusion

The aim of the project was to get students to engage and talk about their cultural heritage. After participating in the project last year, the students reported that they felt more confident writing stories in both Slovenian and English. They also managed to bond as a group, which was especially important as they were a mixed group from different classes, and many of them told very personal stories about migrations that touched them a lot. The experiences from working on the project last year came in handy when they had to work with students from different colleges during their stay abroad in October. Sharing stories and developing a new way of communicating that included all the languages spoken by the members of the group was fun, and all the students stayed active even after the student exchange ended.

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REPORTED SPEECH AND BACKSHIFT OF TENSES IN EFL TEXTBOOKS

Nina Kremžar

Abstract

Reported speech in the English language represents a complicated grammatical chapter for many Slovenian students. The confusion becomes greater when certain EFL textbooks disregard the basic grammatical rule of tense backshift in certain examples. The article compares these textbooks to established grammar books and considers the real language use of reported speech. The article emphasizes that it is important to include fundamental grammatical principles in EFL textbooks and implement the influence of real language use in appropriate situations since providing rules that are inappropriately explained severely hinders the process of learning.

Keywords: reported speech, tense backshift, EFL textbooks, grammar books, language in use

1 Introduction

Reported speech demands different changes; however, the change of tense is the most grammatically challenging for EFL students. Since this grammatical structure is used to report the utterances of another person at a *later* occasion, the reporting verb mostly appears in past tense, meaning the tense backshift rule that is required also occurs more often than not.

However, results of studies “revealed that the transformational principle (tense backshifting) is not always obeyed in the real language use” (Šegedin, 2008, p. 202) even when the reporting verb is used in a past tense. The usage of reported speech also “significantly varies across registers” (ibid., p. 204). This tendency of English has started influencing the grammar rules of reported speech and has found its way into EFL textbooks and grammar books, which, however, underdevelop these “additional” rules. Not only the examples but also the rules are bereft of context, which creates unnecessary confusion for the EFL student.

2 Reported Speech in EFL Textbooks

A quick overview of certain EFL textbooks shows that the grammar rules concerning reported speech surprisingly differ quite often. All selected textbooks emphasize the backshift rule but are not consistent in the treatment of past tenses. While some textbooks do not deviate from the backshift rule, others strive to observe the influence of real language use and offer alternatives to the backshift rule.

Both *Destination B2* (Macmillan, 2002) and *Use of English B2 for All Exams* (MM Publications, 2009) provide rules for the tense backshift without deviations. They do, however, mention that the backshift is not observed when reporting general truths or information that is still true. On the other hand, other textbooks, such as *Enterprise Grammar 4 Student's Book* (Express Publishing, 2000), want to move closer to the everyday use of reported speech, providing the following rule:

past simple → *past simple or past perfect*

past continuous → *past continuous or past perfect continuous*

There is no additional explanation offered besides the example: “*He said he was writing/had been writing a letter at five o'clock.*” which makes the student believe that both options are equally interchangeable. In this particular situation, this might actually be true¹ for the given example; however, without a detailed explanation, the student will be convinced that the rule applies to every sentence that uses the past simple or continuous tense. Similarly, *Face2Face Intermediate* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) states in an additional rule that the past simple does not need to undergo a change. The example given is very similar to the example from *Enterprise* since it also provides a definite past moment (*She said she met him*

¹ See the rules stated in Modern English Grammar in the following section.

in 2011), but again there is no further explanation that a reference to a definite past moment is actually obligatory. Furthermore, *On Screen B1* (Express Publishing, 2017) offers the same rule of opting for no backshift with the past simple and continuous tenses. However, while *Enterprise* and *Face2Face* at least offer an example that is, grammatically speaking, correct, *On Screen*, besides disregarding any additional explanation, offers the following two examples: a) *He said he stopped/had stopped using his car*, and b) *She said they were talking/had been talking about the new homeless shelter*. Neither of these two sentences creates an appropriate context to allow the omission of backshift.

As was shown, the EFL student might be faced with contradictory or at least confusing rules and, therefore, might start looking for other sources to find a clearer explanation. The next logical step is grammar books; however, as will be shown, a similar situation occurs even there.

3 Reported Speech in Grammar Books

The grammar rules for the tense backshift that the vast majority of grammar books offer are as follows:

DIRECT SPEECH		REPORTED SPEECH
<i>present simple</i>	→	<i>past simple</i>
<i>present continuous</i>	→	<i>past continuous</i>
<i>present perfect simple</i>	→	<i>past perfect simple</i>
<i>present perfect continuous</i>	→	<i>past perfect continuous</i>
<i>past simple</i>	→	<i>past perfect simple</i>
<i>past continuous</i>	→	<i>past perfect continuous</i>
<i>future (will)</i>	→	<i>future-in-the-past (would)</i>
<i>past perfect (simple or continuous)</i>	→	[no change]

Nevertheless, there are some deviations. Most often, we can notice that certain grammar books are more careful in offering the rules about the tense backshift. For example, the Collins Dictionary online site claims that the past simple tense can either backshift into the past perfect tense or remain unchanged, yet no additional explanation is offered, which might persuade the student that the backshift is entirely optional. *English Grammar in Use* (edited by Raymond Murphy) claims that “if you report something and it is still true, you do not need to change the verb.” (p. 94) However, in this case, backshifting the verb is still correct, and backshifting is obligatory when there “is a difference between what is said and what is really true” (ibid.), which might be helpful to EFL students since it shows that observing the backshift rule might offer a better chance at correctness. The Cambridge Dictionary website also claims that no backshift is needed when the reported information is still “true or relevant or has not happened yet.” One of the examples given is:

She said she’s getting married next year. (For the speakers, the time at the moment of speaking is ‘this year’.)

The comment given in brackets emphasizes the importance of shared context between the speakers (the person reporting and the listener) when omitting the tense backshift. But the very moment such a reported statement is moved from an oral environment to the written one, where messages transcend space and time, the people involved (the writer and the reader) no longer share the same context. Thus, tense backshift is quite possibly grammatically obligatory again.

Modern English Grammar (Blaganje & Konte, 1995, pp. 512–515) offers the most detailed overview of the situations in which the tense backshift is not observed:

- a) THE PRESENT TENSE does not change when
 - i) something is presented as universally or logically true,
 - ii) something is presented as habitual,
 - iii) something is still true at the time of reporting.
- b) THE PROGRESSIVE PRESENT TENSE FOR A FUTURE ACTION does not change when “the event referred to has not yet taken place.”
- c) THE FUTURE TENSE usually changes even if the event referred to has not yet taken place.
- d) The change of THE PRESENT PERFECT does not change when the situation at the time of reporting remains unchanged.
e.g., *Mr. Brown said, “My wife **has been** ill for a week.”*
→ *Mr. Brown said his wife **has been** ill for a week. (Reported on the same day)*
- e) THE PAST TENSE does not change
 - i) when a definite past moment is indicated,
 - ii) after the subordinating conjunction since,
 - iii) when the time of the action of the main clause is fixed by an adverbial clause of time with the verb in the past tense (in this case, the verb in the main clause can either change or not):
e.g., *Tom said, “When we **lived** in London, we **saw** the Prime Minister quite often.”* → *Tom said when they **lived** in London, they **saw/had seen** the Prime Minister quite often.*

As we can see in the cases of the progressive (or continuous) present tense with a future time reference and the present perfect, for the tense backshift to not be observed, it is of key importance that the speakers know when the reporting is taking place in comparison to the reported event. It is, therefore, of equal importance that the students understand that a test situation necessarily removes us from a shared temporal frame. Or, in other words, when a student is solving an exercise on a test, they are not the actual reporter since they are not actively involved in the situation (and cannot claim to know how the reporter interpreted the situation), which means the backshift rule will become obligatory. Indeed, only when the sentence refers to an actual universal truth (e.g., *Tokyo is the capital of Japan*) can the students opt to disregard the backshift since they can claim they are directly involved in the context.

4 Reported Speech in Use

The classroom situation, which is detached from actual everyday language use, is only one of many the EFL student is going to find themselves in when using or hearing reported speech. Teachers not only prepare their students for examinations but also for real-life communication situations. That is why EFL textbooks and grammar books should be expected to offer formal grammar rules but also develop sociolinguistic skills.

In her article, Silvana Orel Kos (2014, p. 340) concludes that the usage or omission of the backshift is often connected to expressing an attitude, more than the temporality or reality of a statement. She claims that certain verbs (e.g., mental verbs) are “strongly connected with the time of their first occurrence” and are therefore likely to prompt the backshift; other communication verbs (e.g., *show, suggest*) are associated more with the communicated message than the original one and therefore do not trigger tense backshift, while speech act verbs (e.g., *say, tell*) are neutral in nature and do not automatically trigger backshift but depend on the mediator’s attitude. In other words, the speaker is very often the one to decide if they want to occupy an external (backshift) or internal (no backshift) position in relationship to the reported statement, thus creating distance or expressing emotional connectedness to the reported statement. This choice, however, “is not purely random. It is governed by a set of pragmatic conventions as well as semantic, stylistic, and syntactic restrictions” (Orel Kos, 2014, p. 343).

5 Conclusion

As was shown, EFL textbooks and grammar books often offer formal rules alongside certain usages that stem from real language use but fail to differentiate or explain them. Since the rules for the possible omission of tense backshift are very transparent (as provided in *Modern English Grammar*), there is no reason why EFL textbooks and grammar books should not include them. Since “[o]ver-generalized grammatical descriptions of tense-back-shift in English indirect discourse will not provide sufficient or reliable guidelines for the development of the communicative competence in indirect discourse” (Orel Kos, 2014, p. 350), it is the teacher’s responsibility to establish the boundaries of when and how reported speech rules (and their exceptions) apply.

Orel Kos (2014) emphasizes the importance of a diverse and authentic discourse and points out that

“English indirect discourse should be taught and studied with respect to its occurrence in different types of discourse (written and spoken, diegetic and mimetic) and with a heightened awareness of the communication mediator, who, on the basis of the type of discourse and his/her own involvement in the communicative situation, forms indirect discourse.” (p. 350)

In other words, for EFL students to understand when the backshift rule is optional, they need to learn in which situations they themselves act in the role of the mediator (e.g., in-class discussion, oral exam, authentic dialogue) and when they are only passively filling

the gaps in another speaker's reported message (e.g., test situation). When EFL textbooks fail to contextualize grammar rules, the teacher needs to be the one to balance the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic components.

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23

TRAVEL BROADENS THE MIND...

Petra Krhlanko

Abstract

“Travel broadens the mind” is a popular adage; therefore, what better way to stimulate students’ intellectual curiosity inside the classroom and inspire their passion for travel than by making them draw up a travel plan? By sharing my experience of travel plan class projects, I hope to encourage other teachers to take a creative approach to oral assessment or at least inspire them to book a trip. Let me quote Paulo Coelho: “Travel is never a matter of money, but of courage.”

Keywords: travel plans, class projects, authentic learning

1 Introduction

Teachers always look for creative and authentic ways of oral assessment, which also develop skills and competences relevant to real-life situations. Project work teaches and tests higher cognitive skills; it allows the student a measure of choice and responsibility for their learning, and as a consequence, is a great motivator (Henry, 2012). In a travel plan class project, students can take an active role in not only the research process of designing a travel itinerary but also in the assessment of oral presentations through peer and self-evaluation. By carefully setting up the project, teachers can provide their students with an opportunity to enhance their life skills.

Drawing on my own classroom experience and the final products of my students, the following guidelines offer advice on how to design an effective travel plan class project.

2 Getting Started

A class project can seem overwhelming, but taking the first step makes the process much easier. To start with, it is advisable to conduct a short class survey on students' preferred destinations, duration of the trip and budget, as well as their suggestions concerning which elements should be included in a travel plan, presentations (i.e., the length, slides/posters/videos/etc.). In addition, the assessment criteria should be decided on (categories, points). This can be done through a written questionnaire or as a class discussion. It generates the necessary motivation in the students for the project and helps set up its aim.

Furthermore, reflect on what you have learnt on your travels that can be imparted to your students, making use of your own personal travel experience, whether you enjoy backpacking around the world or you only travel with your trusted travel agency. Consider possible cross-curricular connections with geography, history, math, and other foreign languages, or running projects at your school, e.g., a student exchange program.

If you benefit from team-teaching with another teacher or native speaker, include them in the project – their contribution can be of immense value. Their different cultural background can bring a fresh perspective and a unique set of skills to the project.

While working in pairs or small groups facilitates the development of collaboration skills, individual presentations of travel plans may be more suitable in order to avoid the difficulty of fairly assessing teamwork when the final outcome is a collective effort. It also allows each student to showcase their own ideas, research, and creativity without the ambiguity of shared credit.

Here is an example of the “City Break Project” aim:

Students individually research and present a 3-day travel plan for two to a European capital, adapting it to the companion's abilities and personal interests.

You have decided to surprise one of your relatives with a weekend trip to one of the

European capitals. Individually plan a 3-day weekend trip for two tourists according to your chosen companion. Put together a class presentation of your travel plan (up to 10 minutes, speaking freely for at least 5 minutes). You can design a gift certificate for your trip for bonus points.

3 Timeline

The project can be adapted to various levels and ages. Nevertheless, in a Slovene school setting, it is recommended doing it with your 3rd-year secondary school students in the second half of the school year since most of them are turning 18 and might also be thinking about their first parent-free summer trips.

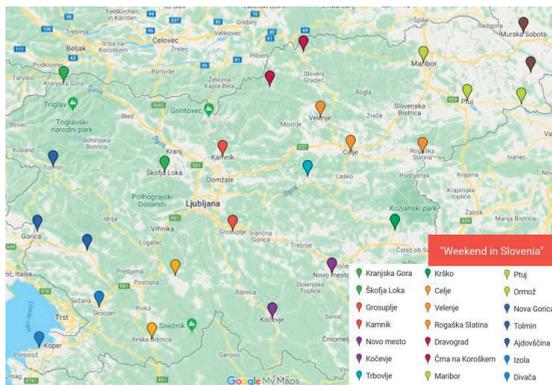
The timeline is as follows: the students commence the project by selecting their preferred destinations, travel companions (see the Companions section below), and the date of their oral presentation online, e. g., in a Moodle e-classroom, on a first-come, first-served basis. Then they spend at least two months on their research, with clearly set deadlines in order to help them organise their individual work. During that time, the necessary vocabulary is also covered in class via a range of activities, e.g., reading articles (The Travel Magazine's *24 hours in ...*), listening to radio shows (Radio Si's *Come Away With Me*), watching TV shows (Channel 4's *Travel Man: 48 hours in ...*) and films (*Hector and the Search for Happiness, 2014*), holding short Q&A sessions, and even hosting guest speakers. A month before their oral presentations, students hand in their outlines based on the provided template and checklist, which also facilitates the development of metacognitive skills. Working in groups of three or four, students can compare and exchange ideas on how they have addressed potential obstacles, developing their collaboration skills. Finally, all students submit their presentation materials by the same deadline, even though their oral presentations are scheduled over several weeks. Thereby, they all have equal time to finish their project, which ensures a level playing field and cultivates a sense of shared responsibility among students, encouraging them to take the assignment seriously.

4 Destinations

We will now look at some examples of how the project has developed through the years. In my initial class project titled "Backpacking Holidays around Europe," inspired by my bucket list and supported by a non-Slovene teacher who has travelled extensively around Europe, students planned an educational one-week backpacking trip to a European country. Later, when I began team-teaching with an American teacher, the project evolved into students planning an educational 10-day backpacking trip across the USA.

The year my school participated in a student exchange program, students had to individually research and present a 3-day travel plan for an Italian exchange student, titled "Weekend in Slovenia Project: Experience Authentic Slovenia in 3 Days." As they were limited to various Slovenian towns, students became conscious of their limited knowledge of their homeland, inspiring a couple of family trips.

In recent years, I have settled for short city breaks in major European cities, allowing students to choose their own budget. Going forward, students might plan their dream holidays, focus on green tourism, or perhaps plan a holiday in space. Nonetheless, I am pleased to report that I have received a few postcards and a heart-warming note from a parent who appreciated the practical learning opportunities presented in the project.



Picture 1

5 Companions

According to Tiny Dragon (Norbury, 2022), it is the company that is more important, not the journey or the destination. Therefore, I have created a list of companions as a way of challenging my students out of their comfort zones and developing empathy. Students can choose among four imaginary characters of different ages, genders, interests, abilities, dietary restrictions, and travel experience, mimicking real-life scenarios, which makes planning the trip more realistic.

Here is an example:

Ann is your 65-year-old grandmother. She's a freshly retired English teacher and has an interest in linguistics. She's a seasoned traveller, but her hip injury limits her mobility, i.e., she walks with a cane. She loves shopping and seeking authentic cuisine. She's diabetic.

6 Content

The following is a list of mandatory topics students must include in their presentations. Students should not just list the facts but explain and justify their choices.

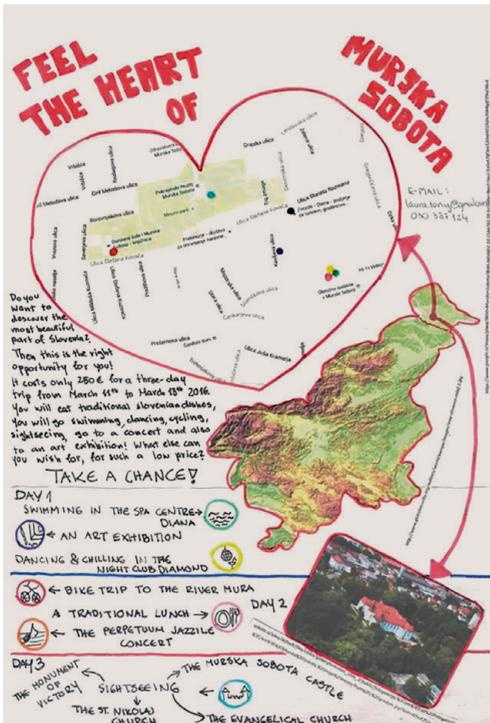
- Destination: present interesting features of your chosen city;
- Budget: low or high, present all expenses in a pie chart or infographic;
- Time: three-day weekend; decide on the best time to travel;
- Transport: public transport or rent-a-car only, start and finish at home, decide on the best option based on cost, distance, duration, and environmental impact;
- Accommodation: no freebies!;
- Meals: at least three meals a day;
- Activities: include at least six activities - two educational, two recreational, two entertaining - that present the city's (or country's) natural and cultural heritage, taking into account your companion's abilities and personal interests;
- Travel advice: show cultural awareness (currency, language obstacles, cultural differences, festivals & holidays), include safety precautions, helpful tourist advice for foreigners, travel checklist – what to pack, etc.;

- Day-by-day itinerary;
- Pros and cons of the trip;
- Your opinion/recommendation;
- References.

7 Final products

The main focus of the assessment is on the in-class oral presentations, which are supported by visual aids created through either familiar applications such as PowerPoint and Canva, or hand-drawn. In my initial class projects, students were required to write reports in addition to giving presentations, thus practising the form of a short composition for the Matura exam. Working with my foreign teacher, who is also a graphic designer, students sharpened their design and advertising skills by making brochures and adverts. *Picture 2a*

One of the most imaginative and inspiring outcomes of the project is gift certificates that students make for their fictional companions, marking special occasions such as birthdays or graduations. *Picture 2b*



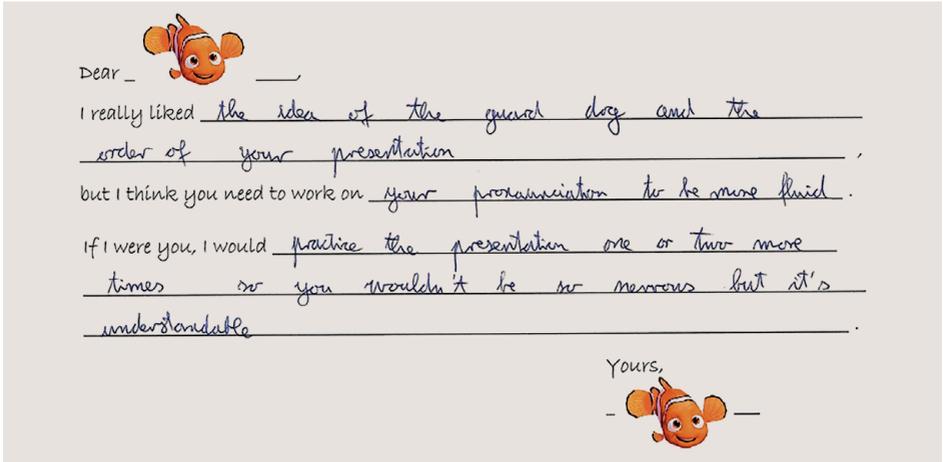
Picture 2a



Picture 2b

8 Assessment

When it comes to the assessment criteria, a strong emphasis is on the content, given the considerable amount of time students devote to conducting research. The use of vocabulary and grammar accounts for approximately 25% of the final mark. Additionally, students may earn bonus points for optional gift certificates. *Picture 3a*



At the end of the project, students fill in a self-evaluation form to promote self-reflection. Peer feedback is also greatly encouraged, either in the form of a letter or a colourful Post-it note, and should always adhere to the FISH principle, i.e., it should be Friendly, Informative, Specific, and Honest. *Picture 3b*



9 Conclusion

All things considered, I would highly recommend trying out a travel plan class project with your students. This engaging and practical project develops language skills and numerous essential life skills, such as time management and financial literacy, that are crucial for future generations. Above all, even if your students or yourself are homebodies, you might get itchy feet and find yourself quite ready for another adventure.

Please feel free to contact me at petra.krhlanko@ssdomzale.si for any specific materials mentioned in the article - I would be delighted to share them with fellow teachers.

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PRESENTING ... PRESENTATIONS! (DEVELOPING PRESENTATION SKILLS IN STUDENTS)

Andrej Ivanović

Abstract

This paper discusses why making and giving presentations is a useful if not necessary skill to develop in students early on. It specifically tackles the questions of how to direct students toward making a good presentation (guidelines, pointers, advice, and feedback), how to assess students' presentations (the criteria, what is reasonable to expect, what we should aim for), how and by whom should feedback be given, and how it plays a role in the development of students' critical thinking capacities.

Keywords: presentations, speaking, students, criteria, feedback

1 Introduction

The idea itself and what it has formed into arose from pursuing a student-centred method that would bring forth visible results in a rather short period and within the frame of a somewhat constricting curriculum. The maxim behind the pursuit has been that the students should be doing something meaningful, useful, and worthwhile.

The idea of class presentations is not new, but I have wished to exploit its full potential. I had had pre-existing notions and assumptions, as well as experience with presenting as a student. I had largely – but not always – been quite successful in my presentations. I thought about those presentations and what had made my classmates and teachers appreciate them. That is why I started designing criteria that double as guidelines for making and delivering a compelling presentation for my students. I had studied presentations in schools and in the workplace to enrich my ideas and have altered them in accordance with my observations and newfound knowledge.

2 The Reasoning Behind Implementing Presentations

When the idea came to my mind about seven years ago to implement the presentation methods in my English classes, I asked myself: “To what purpose?”

Public speaking is known to be one of people’s biggest fears. Students of any age face a significant challenge when speaking in front of a group. As teachers, we could and should create opportunities for students to alleviate or overcome this fear.

As teachers, we take on manifold roles: leader, overseer, facilitator, navigator, friend, role model, confidant, authority figure, and sometimes one can even serve as a bad example. If we are to truly act out our roles in a manner that is more than just serviceable, we should appreciate the additional benefits that come with implementing presentations into the classroom, namely:

- Giving your students the *opportunity* and *responsibility* to co-create their English lessons.
- Getting to know your students better.
- Getting insight into what your students are genuinely interested in.
- Getting to learn yourself.
- Laying the weight of responsibility for one’s academic and personal growth on the learners’ shoulders.

I would like to elaborate on this last point in the following section.

2.1 Opportunity and Responsibility

Opportunity:

Sometimes, as teachers, we have to give *special* students the opportunity to be themselves. This involves openness and flexibility on our part and qualifies, I believe, as an act of bravery

as well, and we have fully established at this year's IATEFL Slovenia Conference that teaching is for the brave only.

Responsibility:

Responsibility and accountability are words that are often used carelessly. Teachers bear much responsibility and are regularly subject to a fair bit of scrutiny. Sometimes, however, we tend to take on more than our fair share. We do so with the misguided notion of doing our students a favour. Really, we bereave the students of the satisfaction and a sense of meaning that bearing responsibility and seeing the fruits of one's own labour brings.

2.2 Easing Students Into Performing in Front of an Audience

Confident public speaking can be cultivated through initial nonthreatening activities, followed by gradually more complex challenges throughout the school year (Boyce et al., 2012, p. 142).

The following four activities can be carried out in pairs, in groups, or in front of the class.

- Mini presentations: One-minute presentations on topics from the students' textbooks (Diwali, initiation rituals, social media ...).
- Just a minute – Students get appointed a random topic (e.g., aliens, fire safety, school lunch ...), whatever topic they had come up with beforehand, and they must talk about it for one minute without stopping.
- Expert – A student is appointed a random topic and acts as an expert on a "talk show." You can assume the role of the host or appoint this role to another student or students.
- Quirky intonations – Assign students quirky intonation traits when reading/acting out textbook dialogues. For example, yell/whisper all your lines, read backwards (Yoda-like), preface every utterance with "well, well, well ...", repeat the last word of every sentence, read everything as if it were a question ... The possibilities here are almost limitless.

2.3 What Subject Matter to Pick?

Take away most constraints and your students do not know how to cope with all the academic freedom. My advice to them is to do one of the following:

- Pick something you are knowledgeable about.
- Pick something you are interested in and would like to research more deeply.
- Pick something current and topical.
- Pick something close to you – share your personal experiences and pictures.

Whatever angle they choose to approach their task from – one commonality binds them together: "Good presenters must learn their subject matter through reading, research, direct experience, or other means" (Baker & Thompson, 2004, p. 218).

2.4 Creating the Presentation

The process of creation should start as soon as possible. Only this will give students the leeway to modify their presentations and sufficient time to send in their work for a preview and feedback.

At this point, students should be well-familiarized with the criteria they will be evaluated on. My criteria for creating and delivering presentations intertwine; therefore, I will present all the categories of said criteria at this point:

- Content and conveyance (coherent and in-depth).
- Grammar and vocabulary (functional, rich, topic-specific ...).
- Speech and body language (clear, dynamic, open, confident ...).
- Visual presentation and structure (appealing, structured, adhering to the time limit, equipped with captions ...).

2.5 Delivering the Presentation

Students require and request guidance. The teachers should formulate the “ground rules” and design a well-thought-out and transparent rubric as their criteria. The criteria themselves may double as guidelines, and these should be presented to and discussed with the students. Presenting is not a single event but rather a process of growth in many areas of one’s personality and work ethic – from planning, drafting, altering, and rounding off a presentation to delivering it in a confident and captivating manner.

A post-presentation activity should follow the main part of the presentation. This segment is still part of the students’ presentations, and they are the ones who plan it and carry it out. It may be a Q and A or a mini discussion (I leave this up to the students and do not exclude other forms of checking comprehension).

2.6 Feedback

Would you agree with Gilbert (2014, p. 28) that “any form of critical feedback is not so much a magnifying glass held up to your work but a mirror reflecting the reviewer’s own preferences, prejudices, and limitations”? How should it, therefore, be given and who should it be given by? In trying to circumvent the above-stated allure of getting caught in our own biased outlook, I advise a simple yet explicit approach.

It should be given by:

- You – the teacher: Inform the students what was good about their presentation and what can be improved.
- The students’ peers: What did *they* like about the presentation and *why*.
- The presenting students themselves: There should follow a moment, or even a period, of self-reflection before they report their feedback on their own presentation back to you.

When giving feedback, I urge my students to follow three principles. Form your feedback in a way that is:

- **Specific:** It should focus on *what* worked, *what* did not, and *what* can be improved for future reference.
- **Useful:** Feedback is helpful if it provides *a way to fix* what did not work and answers the question, "*How do I make it work/how can I improve?*"
- **Kind:** Have the students know you and their classmates are on their side. In other words – everybody wants to see their classmates succeed and deliver a fun and educational presentation.

3 A Truly Comprehensive Learning Practice (Tips and Ideas)

I would like to share some of my tips and ideas on how to expand the boundaries of presenting:

- **Exhibit the students' work:** Put up their posters on the walls of the classrooms and hallways. Use their work as a good example for future presenters and post it in your online classrooms.
- **Cut up your assessment sheets:** Hand the strips over to your students. This method will make the assessors exceedingly alert to specific aspects of their classmates' presentations – an experience they will surely remember when making and giving their own presentations.
- **Welcome the unexpected:** Students sometimes opt to bring an item with them into class to serve as a prop for the presentation. Some real examples include a boomerang, a shark egg, a Porsche's front bumper and tail light, a Gryffindor robe, and a magic wand from the Harry Potter franchise, and more.
- **Make yourself available for a preview of their work:** Require your students to ask specific questions or requests to send in their work for a preview. Put that responsibility on *them* but make yourself available and helpful.
- **Offer students exemplary work of what you are expecting them to strive for.**
- **Be willing to adapt your criteria:** Adapt your criteria according to your observations and newfound knowledge. I do not subscribe to the idea that the first version of the criteria is the best one and should be written in stone.

4 Conclusion

I am glad to find that presenting has yielded results and even become popular among my students. Nearly everybody looks forward to the presentations – some even to their own. Those innately more theatrical and extroverted students enjoy the opportunity to showcase their abilities. At the same time, every now and then, someone falls prey to stage fright, which, too, can be resolved in several ways. A little progress is much better than no progress. I wish to conclude with this thought: Whatever the type of student, nobody – and I sincerely believe that – has walked away from this experience a lesser student than they had walked into.

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LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CONSEQUENCE OF USING ENGLISH AS A TOOL OF SELF-EXPRESSION

Barbara Čatar

Abstract

My students use English to express themselves and to talk about their emotions and feelings because they find it easier to talk about personal and sensitive topics. By doing so, they subconsciously and unintentionally acquire and develop their language skills regularly. They learn as they discuss personal issues and express emotions. In this paper, I will briefly present how English has positively contributed to my students' personal growth and how encouraging their self-expression in English has improved their knowledge of the language.

Keywords: English, language acquisition, self-expression, safe environment

1 Introduction

My teaching includes working with students from seventh to ninth grade who are in their teenage years and are extremely sensitive and inquisitive. At the beginning of my teaching journey, I noticed that teenagers need different approaches in teaching and creating the school environment in a way where they would feel seen, heard, and accepted. My primary goal was to create an environment within which students could express themselves however they wanted and feel safe and encouraged. After a year of teaching, I was assigned my own class, a group of 12 individuals from various social and economic backgrounds who have experienced emotional trauma in their primary family unit. Consequently, we had to deal with behavioural issues daily, which was exhausting for the students and me. While trying to find efficient problem-solving ways, I realized that the English language plays a vital role because students were able to express more emotions and feelings in a foreign language than in their mother tongue. Consequently, we started discussing issues, emotions, feelings, taboos, or any other topics important to the students in English. Furthermore, students started rapidly improving their communication skills in English and acquiring new vocabulary. Their language proficiency improved, and even students with learning disabilities or less proficient students started communicating more fluently.

The purpose of my work is mainly to form an encouraging and understanding relationship with my students which serves as a foundation to help them self-express. Moreover, I want to understand them more, overcome the generation gap and enable them to co-create the educational process.

2 Creating a Safe Environment

Teenagers nowadays experience a completely different life in comparison to what my generation, for example, has experienced. They are exposed to an uncontrollable amount of online and social media information. They are extremely perceptive of every single bit of information they encounter. At this point in their lives, they do not yet possess the capability to comprehend the consequences of long-term exposure to the infinite flow of information. Moreover, they cannot filter the information and are easily influenced and manipulated. They get a distorted image of what life should look like, how relationships (romantic or social) work, how intimacy develops and functions, where and how they should set their personal boundaries, and mostly, how to express themselves in an efficient manner (Deroo & Ponzio, 2023).

One of my primary goals was to create an environment where my students could find a safe place to self-express, separate from their homes. During the class lessons, I deliberately started encouraging them to express their emotions and share their ideas, wants, and needs. Regardless of their level of proficiency, I kept encouraging them to talk in English and share their thoughts and feelings.

What I wanted to achieve in my classroom was a space where my students would be kind and respectful to each other in words and actions. I wanted them to be able to accept other opinions, lifestyles, and ideas without judgement and prejudice. This also included educating my students on how to practice mindfulness and awareness; how to be aware of the present moment, accept the past, and not let it affect the future. By doing so, I wanted to make them understand that we should make decisions in the present moment and that even though we might have experienced some traumatic events in the past, we have the ability to create the future we want (Maddamsetti, 2022).

3 The Path to Self-Expression

After creating a safe environment within my classroom and my lessons, I established a system of intentional encouragement and actions leading toward the normalization of self-expression during our class lessons. That means that I took organized and pre-meditated steps to help my students self-express. I started by educating myself first and then selectively conveying my knowledge to my students. Steps included: *intentional discussion of sensitive topics and taboos*, *practicing patience and kindness* through group work and pair work (being kind to one another even when we are going through tough times ourselves), *positive encouragement* between each other and from me (saying words like “I am proud of you”, “you are brave to share this with us”, “you are safe here, no one will judge you”, “we value your experience and/or opinion”, etc.), *holding space for each other* (when one is speaking, others listen with respect and with an open mind), *mutual understanding and acceptance* (“even though I do not sometimes understand you or your situation, I can accept it and I am able to have a positive attitude towards you”), *acknowledgement of emotions and feelings* (admitting that they feel something and that that something brings out different emotions), *sharing my personal experiences* (sharing examples from my personal life when I myself went through similar situations and experienced similar feelings) and lastly, *education in terms of terminology* (feelings, emotions, mental health, triggers, reactions, patterns, attachment styles, abuse, etc.).

After practicing these steps for a few months, students have adopted and internalized them.

4 Language Acquisition

One of the consequences of using the English language to self-express was improved communication in English among the students (Yough et al., 2022). In the beginning, I tried to include some translations of the more difficult words; however, as we progressed, I used only English. I noticed that students who had learning difficulties or were not as proficient as others had some trouble understanding the essence of our lessons; however, after a few months, they started picking up on the most frequent words and phrases. The biggest improvement was in their responses, most obviously in the response to the question: “How are you today?”. Responses ranged from “ok”, and “fine” at the beginning (one-worded answers) to “I am good”, and “I am sad /happy” (answers in a sentence) after a few months.

Other students showed improvement in communication, in particular in communication with each other outside the classroom. They were using English to talk to each other about their thoughts and feelings during recess or during extra-curricular activities. They also gradually started using the same vocabulary as we used during our lessons.

Language acquisition was unintentional and resulted from using English to address the topics we would have otherwise addressed in Slovene, our mother tongue. After a year, I noticed a general improvement in their knowledge of English and their grades were better as well (Tupas & Weninger, 2022).

5 Conclusion

After three years of intensively encouraging my students to self-express in English, we have a classroom where behavioural issues are a part of the past and where we deal with possible disagreements in a respectful and efficient manner. We have a safe, supportive environment, separate from home, where students can express themselves freely and develop their full potential. Encouraged self-expression led to improved relationships between the students and me as their class teacher. Some students have also transferred some of this knowledge into their homes, and parents say that they became more respectful at home. This shows that our work has far-reaching consequences, and students are using the knowledge and practice acquired during our lessons in their personal lives. English became a bridge between me and my students, and because we intentionally use English to discuss emotions and feelings, we have managed to form deeper and more personal relationships. Students began understanding themselves more and becoming aware of their behaviour and actions. They have acquired self-regulating mechanisms which enable them to recognize a specific emotion and the feelings behind it.

Since students are expressing their feelings more frequently in English than in their mother tongue and our primary language of communication has become English, they have improved their communication and speaking skills and have better grades.

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26

HELPING STUDENTS TO GET THE MOST FROM ONLINE CONTENT

Barry Condon

Abstract

This contribution will help educators to parse the lexis of online content and determine its suitability for L2 students. Using a selection of online tools, teachers will be better able to recommend and make use of the wealth of material that sites like YouTube and Netflix have to offer while avoiding content of lower educational value and relevance.

Keywords: L2 suitable online content, movies, TED talks, YT content, CEFR level appropriate

1 Introduction

Online content providers such as YouTube, Netflix and Amazon Prime have become popular platforms for language learners due to their accessibility and diverse range of content, offering a wealth of input opportunities. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, learners acquire language when they are exposed to language that is just beyond their current level of proficiency. Online content can provide such input, as learners are free to choose videos that are appropriate for their language level and over time, gradually increase the complexity of the input. When selecting content to use for pedagogical purposes and, indeed, recommending content for students to use for self-study, educators will have to strike a balance between selecting content that is both stimulating and level-appropriate. Whether the material is stimulating or not is perhaps a question of subjectivity or one that can be answered with input from students. Determining the appropriateness of content can be done objectively. The research that formed the basis for my presentation at this year's IATEFL conference was predicated on finding the answer to the following three questions:

1. What L2 content are my students watching online?
2. Is it level appropriate?
3. What *should* they be watching?

2 What L2 Content Are My Students Watching Online?

To answer the first question, I conducted a survey with 45 first-year university students (24 female and 21 male) across two classes whose level, based on their GTEC scores achieved prior to admission to the course, was likely to fall between A2 and B1 on the CEFR scale and whose most recent TOEIC score fell somewhere between 400 and 550. Each student was asked to check back through their YouTube viewing history and submit links to the most recent L2 content that they had chosen to watch. The links were accessed, and the content was categorized as detailed in table 1 below:

	Category	View share
1	Music (songs)	44%
2	General interest (film, music, sports, fashion, travel, etc.)	36%
3	Youtuber created content	10%
4	English as a second language	6%
5	Speeches (e.g. TED talks)	4%

Table 1. Results of the survey on L2 YouTube viewing habits

The results yielded few surprises. Many students used YouTube to listen to their favorite songs. General interest sub-categories aligned with topics that are commonly mined for use by teachers and materials designers. Comparatively, little attention was given to ESL-specific content and content that teachers frequently recommend, such as TED talks.

In a separate survey, students were asked about their viewing habits on media services to which they or their families subscribed, with the two most popular being Netflix and Amazon Prime. While not every student had access to or spent significant time on these platforms, the answers to the survey allowed me to produce a list of films and television programs that students were likely to choose to watch should they have both access and inclination.

3 Is it Level Appropriate?

Listening comprehension is a crucial skill for second language learners as it enables them to understand spoken language in various contexts. However, several factors can affect a second language learner's ability to comprehend spoken language. One of the most significant factors is the learner's proficiency level in the target language. Learners who have a limited vocabulary or lack knowledge of grammar rules may struggle to understand the nuances of spoken language.

Regarding lexical suitability, some recently developed web applications allowed for detailed analysis. Language Reactor is a free-to-use Google Chrome extension that allows language learners to watch content on YouTube and Netflix and have both L1 and L2 subtitles on display simultaneously. Studies have shown that L2 vocabulary acquisition is aided more by intralingual subtitles as opposed to interlingual (Zarei & Rashvand, 2011, Baranowska, 2020). Lower-level language learners are likely to find the gap between their comprehensible input level and the level of their chosen media to be too great to allow for unassisted intralingual subtitles. Having both available has been shown to be effective in bridging the gap (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021).

A convenient feature of this application is the ability to extract and export the list of subtitles for any content as a text file. The text may then be entered into an online analysis tool. Taking approximately 500-word samples from all of the YouTube content supplied by my student's viewing history and using one such analyzer yielded an average CEFR level of upper B2, which represented a higher than input level for my students.

Similarly, lexical analysis of each of the media detailed in Table 2 showed that students were, with some exceptions, choosing content with comprehensible input levels too far above their own level for optimum learning value.

Title	TV Show/Movie	Genre	CEFR (Lexis)
The Meg	Movie	Action	C1/B2
Top Gun	Movie	Action	B2
The Grey Man	Movie	Action	B2
Back to the Future	Movie	Sci-fi/Comedy	B2/B1
The Intern	Movie	Comedy	B1
The Sandman	TV Show	Fantasy	B2
Stranger Things	TV Show	Sci-fi	B2
Friends	TV Show	Comedy	B1
The Mind Explained	TV Show	Documentary	C1
Curious George	TV Show	Kids	C2*

Table 2. CEFR level of submitted films and TV programs.

4 What Should They Be Watching?

For my two classes, given their A2/B1 CEFR level, it would seem that YouTube has little to offer in terms of comprehensible input, as most English language content is created by native-level speakers for native-level speakers. One commonly recommended resource, TED Talks, was shown to be too lexically complex to be suitable: c.f. Fig 1:

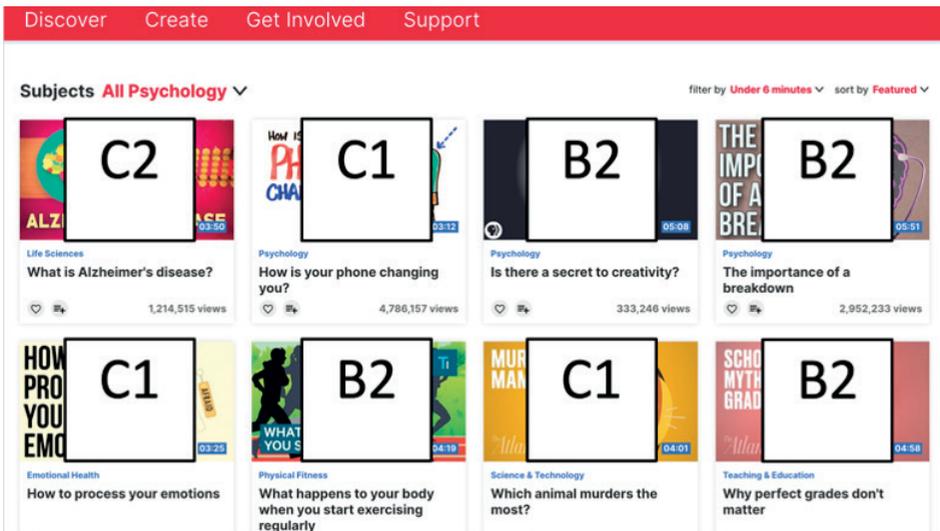


Fig 1. TED videos and their CEFR lexical levels

However, after testing different types of content, I was able to identify a small subset of content created by non-native speakers of English that was much closer to my students' level and was culturally familiar: Japanese English language YouTubers, Fig 2, who are likely to be at least upper intermediate (B2) in their proficiency. Several of the channels that I have since recommended to my students are created by young men and women who produce content that aligns with the descriptors as set out by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.



Fig 2. CEFR level of content produced by L2 YouTuber

Likewise, the content that students are likely to watch on subscription services represents too great a gap in comprehensible input to be useful for my students at their level. Analysis of food and travel documentaries yielded some positive results and are significantly closer in terms of comprehensible input level than other available content that students are likely to choose to watch, or that may be chosen by an educator as a stimulating teaching material.

5 Conclusions

Students benefit by being exposed to native-level content on popular streaming platforms like YouTube and Netflix. However, this content may be too challenging for low-level students who struggle to comprehend the language. As a result, educators should explore the effectiveness of content produced by non-native speakers as an alternative option. Non-native speakers tend to use simpler language and can provide more relatable content that is better suited to the needs of low-level students. Content that is limited in scope, for example, travel and food documentaries, are also likely to be a better fit than other popular film and television content.

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HOW TO GET A PROJECT OFF THE GROUND

Bojan Kašuba

Abstract

The article deals with concepts such as project-based learning, entrepreneurship and CLIL, and attempts to put them into the context of English teaching and learning. Basic definitions of the aforementioned concepts are provided. The main part of the article details how teachers can utilize project-based learning in their classrooms and offer students an engaging environment to develop not only language skills but also 21st century skills. While the example described has shown excellent results, it can also be modified to one's own needs.

Keywords: project-based learning, English teaching, entrepreneurship, a project

1 Introduction

In today's world, teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other subsets of language is not enough. The 21st century requires students to not only be proficient in English or other languages, but also possess competences that will enable them to succeed in life. This is where project-based learning comes into play. In this article, concepts such as project-based learning, content and entrepreneurship will be examined. The article will also provide guidelines on how to successfully plan and carry out the initial phases of project-based learning.

2 Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning has become very popular in recent years; however, the surge of popularity has sometimes caused mixed results. Therefore, this article will attempt to enumerate and describe what project-based learning is, how to prepare for it, and, finally, how to carry it out. Nik Peachey (n.d.) defines project-based learning as a student-centred form of learning that involves students spending sustained periods of study time exploring and attempting to solve real-life problems. He enumerates key elements that a project should contain. These are a challenging problem or question, public product, key knowledge and skills, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice, reflection, and critique and revision. Project-based learning must be carefully planned out as it can provide a considerable obstacle for students with a lower language level. Hence, it is sometimes advisable to use students' first language, especially in the brainstorming stages, because this will lead to better and more creative ideas as students will not be concerned with grammatically correct structures. Additionally, teachers must also take group dynamics into consideration. An ideal group is a group of students with different strengths and interests but who can work together as a unit that accepts each other's opinions. Each group member must be empowered to contribute to the best of their abilities.

3 Things to Consider

Before attempting to carry out a project in one's classroom, one must consider certain aspects that can greatly affect the project's result. As projects typically last longer than a week, it is important to plan them out accordingly. Teachers must take their curriculum and their school calendars into consideration. Some of the more important questions that need to be answered are when is the best time to start a project and what topics it should cover. In the early phases of planning, it is wise to have an end goal that students must accomplish, e.g., to create an educational video, a game, a booklet, etc. After the end goal has been set, try to set small tasks that must be completed. However, do not be too rigid, as this can limit students' creativity. Let students' inquiry and motivation be the driving force of the project. Another thing to consider is what competences one wishes to improve and whether students possess the competences needed to complete the project. A great resource for developing competences needed for the 21st century is given in *EntreComp into Action* (McCallum et al., 2018), where a set of 15 entrepreneurial competences are listed. They include creativity, valuing ideas, financial and economic literacy, planning and

management, and working with others. If one feels that students lack a certain competence, it is best to strengthen it first rather than find out later that students lack certain skills to complete specific tasks. At this stage, it is important to consider students' motivation and how to leverage it. While motivation will probably be very high at the start of the project, it will most likely be followed by a motivational low. Hence, it is important to split large projects into bite-sized tasks.

4 Planning and Starting a Project

In this section, the planning stage and the initial project stage will be described. Before beginning a project, one must decide on the topic of the project and the end goal of the project. As project-based learning focuses on student activity, it is important that students have a say in what the topic of the project will be. This will ensure higher levels of motivation. However, the teacher must have at least some say in the matter. Therefore, it is prudent to select a few topics which might interest students and one is knowledgeable about. For this example, students have to make an educational video about a specific topic. Three topics have been preselected, i.e., social media, sustainability and consumerism, as well as entrepreneurship and future jobs. It is a wide range of topics that are interconnected and can be used as such if necessary. There are different ways of planning and starting a project. One way is to write the topics on separate sheets of paper and add a few notes and questions to get the students thinking. See the example below:

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FUTURE JOBS



As society changes so do jobs. What used to be common and popular jobs, such as coal miners and shoemakers, are no longer in high demand. Jobs of the future will require different skills. How can we teach students to create value and invent new jobs?

SOCIAL MEDIA



The 21st century is ruled by social media. We can connect with people across the globe, exchange ideas with people of different backgrounds, religions, political affiliations, etc. But not everything about social media is perfect. What are the good, the bad and the ugly sides of social media?

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMERISM



The world is changing before our eyes. There is not enough food, water and energy to accommodate all the people of the world. We are poisoning our waters and air. How can we stop the draining of natural resources? Is there a way to decrease pollution and waste?

Figure 1: Preselected topics

Put the topics on different walls in the classroom and instruct students to decide on a topic they would like to work on. They must walk to the topic that appeals to them. Giving students more control creates higher levels of motivation in students as they get to have a say in what will be discussed in the classroom. When they have decided on a topic, create groups based on the topics the students have selected. In groups, students debate why they have selected the specific topic. After the students have discussed why they would like to work on a specific topic, they have to persuade other students to join their group, as the purpose is to only work on one topic. They have to create a speech trying to convince others that their topic is the most important one to be discussed. A member of the group must give a speech. The more engaging the speech, the more flamboyant the presentation, the more likely their group will succeed in convincing others. After they have prepared a speech and presented it to other students, it is time for another vote. Again, students choose the topic they would like to work on. It can be the same topic or, if a different group has persuaded them, they can choose a different topic. When this has been done, it is time to decide on the topic. The topic with the most votes wins and will be the project's primary focus. If there is a tie, the teacher usually decides on the topic. Yet, there can be a compromise if the topics overlap and the students wish to incorporate both in their projects.

5 Tips and Tricks of Executing a Project

One must pay close attention to the students' motivation as they will probably be very motivated in the initial stages of the project, yet their motivation will most likely wane in the course of the project. Therefore, it is important to split large projects into bite-sized tasks, which will seem more manageable to students. Students should have specific roles within groups and be responsible for specific tasks. Feedback to students needs to be continuous and not at the end of the project. This will inform them that they are on the right track and prevent them from getting lost along the way. Therefore, it is essential to highlight milestones and visualize progress after they reach a particular stage in the project. For instance, this can be done by cutting a paper sunflower into several parts and then putting a part of the sunflower on the whiteboard after a certain stage has been completed. Additionally, make sure students stay focused on the tasks. Provide them with a creative and safe space where they can work in peace. And lastly, improvise. Teachers are often faced with unpredictable events that must be dealt with quickly and efficiently. It is important to think quickly on one's feet. Therefore, do not be afraid to make a mistake. Do not be afraid to fail. One must embrace it, learn from it and move on.

6 Crazy 8

Brainstorming ideas is one of the fundamental activities in project-based learning. It is essential that the activity is carried out frequently as this leads to more innovative ideas, creative progression and imaginative results. One such brainstorming activity is called Crazy 8. Students need a sheet of paper, which is folded three times to get 8 squares. For our example, students wrote down eight ideas of what an educational video might look like. Normally, one needs to discard the first few ideas as they are run-of-the-mill ideas.

However, the next four to five usually entail a lot of creativity. Students have to think deeply to develop eight ideas, so the last ideas are usually out-of-the-box and can be used in the project. It is an exciting and valuable activity that can be used in the classroom for various tasks.

7 Conclusion

It is vital to provide a creative space where students not only learn English but also other topics and subjects. This is where project-based learning comes into place. It is a wonderful method which enables students to learn English, develop 21st century skills, be creative, have fun and collaborate with others. This article dealt with project-based learning and tried to provide guidelines on preparing and carrying out the initial phases of a project. An example of a starting phase of a project was detailed and enumerated some of the things to consider and use during a project. To conclude, while preparing and planning lessons takes some time, it is a worthwhile task that can create fun learning, creative studying and innovative products.

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ARE YOU MENTAL?

Breda Banovšek

Abstract

A common question I have been asking myself lately is 'Are we, teachers, mentally well?'. According to the World Health Organization. (n.d.), the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought a staggering 25% increase in anxiety and depression. A shocking number, yet a reality teachers face daily. I have been teaching for ten years and never before have I seen so many students seeking help through school counselling to cope with their mental issues, or have talked to so many students who have already inflicted self-harm before the age of 14. We are not left with many choices. We can either complain, quit our job, or do something about it. But how can we take care of our mental well-being if we run low on energy, patience, and optimism?

Keywords: mental health, depression, well-being, teaching

1 Introduction

Teaching has become a constant battle between maintaining one's sanity in the classroom and tackling the issue of students' mental health. It makes it difficult to care for our mental health when we put so much focus and energy into our students. Faculties give us a lot of theoretical knowledge on how to pursue our goals in the classroom successfully, however when it comes to the actual situation in the classroom with a group of teenagers who are trying to find their true selves, yet be a part of a social group, we are left to our own devices. It is commonly believed that you have to be born a teacher to make an impact on your students, not just by teaching them the assigned subjects, but to help them grow, be a positive role model and have them confide in you. This might make your job easier and give it a higher purpose; however, even teachers with the biggest heart and motivation will find themselves trapped on a one-way road where a single event, lesson or, believe it or not, a parent can easily destroy all their efforts.

We are not left with many choices. We can become dementors from the Harry Potter novels, i.e., the dark creatures that consume human happiness with their coldness, darkness, misery and despair, and channel our misery towards students, making them feel uncomfortable in class and eventually hating our subject, or we can find other ways to bring back joy to our teaching and focus on the positive impact we can have. One might think that this sounds rather like a utopia. My slogan for the past few months has been: "If you do not try, you will never know. Unless it is drugs. Do not try drugs". We are so quick when it comes to challenging our students and we usually justify our teaching methods by saying students should step out of their comfort zone to make progress. So why do we not practise what we preach?

Getting out of my comfort zone and a predictable routine is something that makes me feel alive and makes my job exciting, and it is not even that difficult. The basic rule is to fill your lessons and teaching methods with something that brings sparks to your eyes as this will also bring excitement to your students. However, not everything works for everyone. Every teacher has their own unique personality and teaching style; therefore,, much like in everyday life, you should not compare yourself to others.

Students can feel authenticity, and getting their trust is important to establish a good rapport. You can only do that if you feel confident about the subject you teach, have fun doing it and pay attention to your students' needs. As there is no manual on how to be a real educational rockstar, I will present some practical examples and ideas on how to become one. And the rest is up to you.

2 Exploring Your Students' Interests

How can you really get to know your students when you teach classes of 25 to 28 teenagers? It might seem like an impossible mission at first, but I am sure you will not need much time to notice all the TikTok trends and popular artists being represented among

your students. Instead of rolling your eyes at them and worrying about how traumatised you will leave the classroom, ask them about their latest viral videos and influencers.

Use a simple task when practising grammar and let your students fill in the missing parts in a sentence, for example, [*Someone*]is the most controversial person on the Internet because [*reason*], or *When I grow up, I want to be just like [someone]*.

For students who finish their test early, you can put a task at the end of the test and write *This is a safe space for you. You can doodle, draw or write whatever comes to your mind. Just let it all out.* This has proven very effective in my experience, as students write lyrics of their favourite songs, draw a comic or just complain about how difficult the test was. The latter will not give you any information about their interests; however, it will help them express their opinion and relieve their frustration. Believe me, a simple task like this can do wonders. If nothing else, it will make you laugh while grading tests when you are on the brink of giving up your job because yet another student did not read the instructions and put all the verbs in the Present Simple instead of the Past Simple Tense.

There is also a solution to numerous annoying trends on social media that find their way into our classrooms. Remember the *sheesh* era? Not a single lesson went by without at least someone saying *sheesh* for whatever reason, so one day I decided to put an end to it. How? Simply. Instead of greeting them with "Good morning, everyone!" I said "sheesh." And from that day on, not a single *sheesh* has been uttered in my classroom.

3 Including Your Students' Interests and Intertwining Them With Your Goals

Being a teacher of English gives you a plethora of possibilities to explore with your students, may it be learning about their favourite music bands, asking them to suggest their own topics that you can connect to grammar practice, or inviting them to share their world with you by letting them teach you about animes, video games, or their philosophy of life. Harmer discussed the importance of rapport and its realization by "learning students' names, being friendly and encouraging, being open-minded when things go wrong and responding in positive ways to students, including by means of facial expressions" (Hamilton, 2021).

As English is one of the most common foreign languages an average Slovenian student is exposed to, it can be used to discuss any topic in your syllabus. The topic of mental health has been on the rise ever since the keywords such as *pandemic*, *coronavirus* and *exponential growth* lost the support of online self-proclaimed experts in science and other currently trending global issues. The latter are now focusing their attention on becoming influencers to teenagers whose prefrontal cortex has not developed yet, making them incapable of exercising good judgement (Arain et al., 2013). This issue existed well before the pandemic; however, the *stay-at-home* propaganda encouraged people to spend extra time on their phones and computers and explore the world online. However, this is our current situation; and these are the teenagers we have to work with, inspire, teach and inform.

This brings me to one of the self-proclaimed influencers I have been hearing about the most in the last six months. His name is Andrew Tate. When you type his name in your favourite online browser, you can find many articles portraying him as a controversial, sexist person who makes money by recruiting young people to join his money-making scheme. To be honest, I stayed away from mentioning Andrew Tate for as long as possible, yet I realised that this would not make my students forget about him. Therefore, I challenged them. I found an article from 2022 titled *Inside the violent, misogynistic world of TikTok's new star* and turned it into a task. I deleted his name from the article and replaced it with only pronouns. The first task was for students to read the article. Even though his name was deleted, they knew immediately who the article was about. The students who were his fans got frustrated by the article, saying it was all a lie and that his words were taken out of context. I showed them the second task, which said *The Text Is About Andrew Tate. Now share your thoughts and write down why you think he's a good influencer.* I have never seen those students write so eagerly in English. They were motivated to present their point of view, and, at the same time, they practised their English writing skills. For the follow-up activity, I used some of their quotes for discussion. They were proud to be heard and even acknowledged that not all Tate's doings are positive and that one must always approach online content critically.

Another activity connected to mental health and social media was based on a speech by Simon Sinek titled *This is why you don't succeed*. Students listened to his speech and were then encouraged to think about their time on social media, behind screens, their values and real friendships. Many students complained about how many of their friends spend time on their phones while out together and how they unfollowed many social media influencers because they felt bad when they saw their perfect bodies and lives. After listening to them, I realised we do not give our students enough credit when valuing real-life friends. Most of them do not trust people online and rather turn to a friend in real life when they need advice.

Another simple way of exciting your students is using their favourite singers, artists or actors on a test. I can guarantee you that turning a boring sentence like *Mary _____ (make) dinner while John _____ (watch) Netflix* into *Eminem _____ (make) dinner while Ariana Grande _____ (watch) Netflix* will release some of the stress during tests by making students laugh.

4 Using Humour Anywhere, Anytime and With Anyone

What is life without humour? Or, more precisely, what is teaching without dad jokes and lame puns? We all have bad days, even teachers. Humour is one of the best ways to get your students relaxed and establish a good rapport with them. Sure, most of the time, they will find your jokes unbearable, but the fact is that they have to listen to them and laugh at them if they want to get a good grade. (The latter was a joke. Maybe.) It might help to get a few of them prepared in advance if you are not a natural-born comedian like me. For

example, when you deal with the topic of natural disasters, you will probably come across sentences such as *Earthquakes can cause rivers to change their course, damage buildings and dams ...* and you can stop and ask your students *What does a fish say when it hits a wall?* and after an awkward silence, you say *Damn!* Or when you explain that a tsunami is a series of huge waves, you can ask them *What did one ocean say to the other?* And again, after many confused looks and shrugs, you say *Nothing, it just waved!* You might not get a single laugh from your students, but it does not matter. What matters is that you enjoy your lesson and bring that positive attitude to your students.

One of the things that have become a necessary part of my teaching style is memes. When I started teaching, I used memes I found online and incorporated them in tests or worksheets; however, throughout the years I have become an expert at making my own memes. I use them when teaching grammar and vocabulary, when I want to start a discussion, or just motivate my students at the beginning of the lesson. I even express my feelings through memes and I have noticed that students tend to understand me and my job more when I tell them about my good and bad moments through memes. Sometimes they would even send me memes they made themselves. It is another great example of practising English with elements they actually stumble upon when they spend time online of their own accord.

5 Conclusion

I would like to conclude this article by stating that, as any other job, being a teacher has its ups and downs. Neither every day, nor every lesson is full of positivity, fun learning and achieved lesson goals. There are times when you spend hours and hours on a lesson plan which turns out to be a complete disaster in class. Things rarely go as we plan them, yet as long as we are able to see that as an opportunity to improvise, adapt and overcome, we will find enough energy to move past all the obstacles.

Surround yourself with positive coworkers, people who will give you energy and people who will listen to you rant. Focus on that one student who always laughs at your jokes, or the one who always approaches you and asks you how you are, or all your former students who still visit you after they had already finished primary school. Focus on all the thank you notes you get at the end of the school year and the proud moments you experience when a student who has been struggling finally gets a better grade. Remember – we as teachers should consider ourselves as the biggest influencers in our students' lives. Hence, in the words of *Uncle Ben*, a fictional character in Marvel comics, 'With great power comes great responsibility.' We should also not forget to give ourselves a pat on the shoulder every once in a while, and say *I am doing the best I can and it is enough.*

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ADDED VALUE – VIRTUAL INNOVATION AND SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR TEACHERS

Mateja Sukič Kuzma

Abstract

Valiant is an innovative initiative that aims to promote collaboration among teachers, student teachers, and experts through facilitated online collaboration around real-world educational issues using new technologies. The initiative involves a six-stage protocol that includes preparing and creating teaching materials, implementing those materials, and finalizing them with feedback from in-service teachers and education experts. The collaborative group of student teachers and in-service teachers worked together to create teaching materials for primary and secondary schools on the topic of environment. The teaching materials were implemented using a hybrid learning approach, and to finalize the material, feedback was collected. The final teaching material is available online for others to use. This collaborative learning experience proved to be a valuable one for all involved participants, highlighting the importance of collaboration and the effective use of technology in enhancing the teaching and learning experience.

Keywords: Valiant, collaboration in education, online learning, teaching materials, technology in education

1 Introduction

Valiant stands for Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers. It is an innovative European initiative aimed at promoting collaboration and bringing together teachers, student teachers, and experts in facilitated online collaboration around real-world educational issues by using the opportunities of new technologies. The aim of this presentation is to highlight the added value of virtual innovation and support networks for teachers for the development and enrichment of lessons.

2 Project Objectives

The project's first objective is to test the efficiency of virtual innovation and support networks as an approach to overcoming teachers' isolation and low motivation in rural areas and isolated contexts. The project aims to develop teachers' ability to function in online international networks and to provide teachers with access and opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and digital and intercultural competence development. The second objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of virtual exchange programs in providing student teachers with access to the realities of the teaching profession through regular interaction with in-service teachers. The project holds the view that incorporating virtual exchange programs into teacher training will provide the target groups with opportunities for innovation, collaboration, as well as digital and intercultural competence development. Those elements would otherwise be difficult to access in rural areas or in times of enforced isolation.

3 Preparation and Getting to Know Each Other

To achieve these objectives, the project has designed a six-stage protocol that includes preparing and creating teaching materials, implementing those materials, and finalizing them with feedback from in-service teachers and education experts.

The first stage of the program involved a seminar on introducing student teachers to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) for primary and secondary schools, while in-service teachers prepared a presentation of themselves, their work, and their school environment on a Padlet platform. This stage was crucial for preparing student teachers for the work ahead and providing in-service teachers with an opportunity to showcase their work.



Figure 1

Note. The Padlet platform representing who and where we are. (Lieres, 2023)

The second stage was a synchronous introductory meeting of student teachers, in-service teachers, and education experts. During this meeting, the topic and work were introduced, and student teachers and in-service teachers were divided into heterogeneous groups. They got the opportunity to get to know each other and prepare a plan for further collaboration and work.



Figure 2
Note. Recording of an online meeting. (Haake et al., n. d.)

4 Material Development

The third stage involved student teachers and in-service teachers teaming up to create teaching materials for primary and secondary schools in different countries. Together, we defined topics, student teachers searched for materials and resources, and then created drafts of the material. In-service teachers suggested improvements, and student teachers revised and improved the material accordingly.



Figure 3
Note. Materials prepared by student teachers. (Our Blue Planet, 2022)

During this collaborative stage, both student teachers and in-service teachers had the opportunity to work together on a commonly chosen topic, which was the Environment. In order to facilitate communication and collaboration, the WhatsApp platform was chosen as the primary means of communication.

After brainstorming, the student teachers suggested a station-based approach to the lesson. The first station focused on plants and their importance, covering topics such as the requirements for growing plants, the role of plants in the ecosystem, and the benefits of plants for humans. The second station was focused on the issue of water pollution and the problem of plastic waste. Finally, the third station focused on bees and their important role in the ecosystem, including the pollination process and how bees are vital for the survival of many plant species.

To support the lesson, materials were uploaded onto the Genially platform. This platform is widely used by schools for teaching interactive learning materials, as it provides a range of features such as interactive animations, multimedia presentations, and gamification elements. The use of the Genially platform allowed the collaborative group of student teachers and in-service teachers to create and share interactive materials with ease. Incorporating interactive learning materials enabled students to participate more actively and efficiently, which resulted in a more engaging and impactful learning experience.

5 Implementation

In the fourth stage, the teaching materials created during the previous stage were implemented. Hybrid teaching was employed, with student teachers conducting the lesson via a Zoom meeting and in-service teachers providing support in the classroom. After the lesson, in-service teachers provided feedback to student teachers and discussed the success of the implementation.



Figure 4
Note.
Photos taken during the online Zoom meeting.
Own work.

The successful implementation of the prepared materials in a hybrid learning environment was key for an effective lesson. Student teachers led the session via a Zoom meeting, while in-service teachers provided support and supervision in the classroom. Initially, the lesson encountered some technical difficulties; however, the educators were able to overcome these obstacles swiftly and efficiently.

To establish a rapport with the students, the student teachers started the lesson by introducing themselves and outlining the lesson objectives. This initial introduction helped to build trust and confidence, and students were eager to participate in the learning experience. Throughout the lesson, students followed the instructions of the student teachers and engaged in interactive exercises that were designed to reinforce the lesson content.

This collaborative learning experience proved to be a valuable one for all involved participants, the students, student teachers, and in-service teachers. The hybrid learning approach allowed for greater flexibility and accessibility, as it enabled students to engage better in the learning process. Moreover, the use of technology such as Zoom and interactive exercises helped to promote active learning of digital skills. This experience highlighted the importance of collaboration and the effective use of technology in enhancing the teaching and learning experience.

6 Revision and Feedback

In the fifth stage, student teachers completed the preparation of their teaching material and created a brief video presentation of their material and its practical implementation.

The final stage involved a synchronous meeting of student teachers, in-service teachers, and education experts. During this meeting, all participants provided constructive feedback on the developed teaching material and discussed the implementation of the material. The insights and suggestions offered during this meeting played a crucial role in finalizing the teaching material. Once the feedback session was concluded, the final teaching material was uploaded to the Moodle platform, where it is available for others to use.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Valiant project has proven to be an innovative and effective approach to enhancing the teaching and learning experience through virtual innovation and support networks for teachers. By bringing together student teachers, in-service teachers, and education experts from different countries, this initiative has created an effective framework for cross-cultural learning, sharing of best practices, and innovation in education. The developed teaching materials are available online, providing a valuable resource for other educators to use and build upon. Valiant has provided a model for enhancing the teaching and learning experience, which can be applied in other educational settings.

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NO NEED TO STAND STILL WHEN YOU DRILL

Mateja Trebec

Abstract

Drills are an important part of language learning. They are effective when learning new vocabulary or language structures. They are particularly useful at the early stages of learning a language. However, they can sometimes be repetitive and a bit boring. If we include movement, then they become more interesting for the students who are then much more willing to participate. Nowadays, when we talk about kids spending too much time sitting, it is important that we enable them as much movement as we can.

Keywords: drills, movement, activities

1 Introduction

Drilling tasks can be somewhat boring or repetitive for advanced students. In this contribution, I will present four activities teachers can use for practicing grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary chunks. They can be used with students of various ages and levels. Note that these activities should not take too long since language should be primarily focused on communication.

2 When Are Drills Effective?

Students learn much better when they are active participants in the process of gaining knowledge. They are active not only when they talk or seem to be attentive but mostly when they move. Many studies suggest that physical activity may strengthen students' ability to pay attention.

Drilling practice is controlled and focused on accuracy. When a certain activity is designed to expect accuracy (e.g., grammar, pronunciation), then drills are a useful way to achieve this. According to Harmer (1991, p. 142), we need to make a clear difference between 'non-communicative' and 'communicative' activities "whereas the former are generally intended to ensure correctness." In such a safe environment, when students know what is expected, many students who are not risk-takers feel confident. Many students also feel the need to be corrected or to drill structures before using them in a new context. According to Kerr "the primary value of drill techniques lies in the opportunity they provide to draw students' attention to elements of the language. They also offer a non-threatening chance for students to get their tongues – literally - round the sounds and rhythms of a strange foreign language, and to hear themselves saying something. It may not be real communication, but not everybody wants to communicate all the time." (Kerr, n.d.)

3 Activity 1: HA-ZU-KA

I first came across this game when I attended a seminar on NTC learning (a program of activities designed to promote the development of motor and cognitive skills in preschool and school-aged children). It is a fast-paced game that helps students focus and drill the aspects of language being learnt.

3.1 How to Play?

Have your students stand in a circle with their feet firmly planted. A student (S1) points their hands to another student and says HA in a ninja voice. The student that is pointed at (S2) raises his hands above his head and says ZU. The students standing right and left to S2 put their hands together and pretend their hands are a sword. They swing their hands toward the S2's stomach but do not touch it. They say KA. S2 continues the game by saying HA, S4 continues with ZU, S5 and S6 say KA. They continue until they say the words as smoothly as possible. The student who makes a mistake leaves the game.

You can use the game for drilling irregular and regular verbs, comparatives and superlatives, and spelling, just to name a few. Instead of the words in the original game (HA, ZU, KA), use others. See the chart with some examples below.

	HA	ZU	KA
irregular verbs	eat	ate	eaten
regular verbs	play	played	played
adjectives	easy	easier	the easiest
adjectives used in a sentence	My house is nice.	My house is nicer.	My house is the nicest.
tenses	I play tennis.	I played tennis.	I have played tennis.

3.2 Variants of the Game

The game can be used for vocabulary drills as well. For example, when you cover a topic on fruit and wish to drill the vocabulary learnt, use this activity with a slight change. Since the two students do not necessarily have the same answer in mind, only one of them says the final word. Here is an example: S1 says APPLE, S2 says PEAR, S3 (the one on S2's left) says ORANGE. This is especially useful with younger students because you can focus on pronunciation as well.

topic	HA	ZU	KA
fruit	apple	pear	orange
animals	cat	dog	mouse
adjectives	happy	silly	interesting

You can practice noun plurals:

HA	ZU	KA
miš (L1)	mouse (singular)	mice (plural)
mouse	mice	miš (L1)

4 Activity 2: CHAIN

This activity can be used as an end-of-lesson activity, warm-up, or as a short break.

4.1 How to Play?

Have your students stand in a circle. Start by saying any word in English (appropriate to students' level and knowledge). A student to your left continues. Students repeat the previous words and add their own.

a) Choose one topic only, for example, animals:

S1: a cat

S2: a cat, a mouse

S3: a cat, a mouse, a fish

b) Students continue adding a word that begins in the letter that the previous word ends in:

S1: a **cat**

S2: a **tiger**

S3: a **river**

Students can do one lap or more, depending on the number of students in a group. You can form smaller groups within a class to get your students to speak.

5 Activity 3: RUN & WRITE

Since students sit most of the time, it is important to allow them to move as much as possible. Movement improves cognitive abilities, such as learning, thinking, memory and focus. That is why I often use this method to replace traditional paper drills. Students are far more motivated and engaged in the activities.

5.1 How to Play?

Cut out a traditional worksheet with examples of a gap fill (see an example in the box below) or write examples on smaller pieces of paper. Write examples on post-its and stick them onto a window, a board, or a wall. On your mark, students run to the wall, window, or board, take a paper and return to their spot. In their notebook, they write down the examples and the solutions. They can use their books as a reference. When finished, they return the paper and take another one. You can set a time limit before the game begins or stop whenever you see fit. Students return to their seats and you can check the tasks. The student with the most sentences done correctly is the winner. I sometimes reward them with a candy or they can choose a *Just Dance* video as a break.

GAP FILL

Présent continu - affirmative

Fill in the blanks using the present continuous tense.

1. The bird _____ (fly) in the sky.
2. The baby _____ (cry) because he is hungry.
3. The cat _____ (pur) on the bed.
4. The children _____ (play) in the park.
5. The dog _____ (bark) at the mailman.
6. The fish _____ (swim) in the pond.
7. The horse _____ (gallop) in the field.
8. The kids _____ (laugh) at the funny joke.
9. The leaves _____ (fall) from the tree.
10. The monkey _____ (swing) from the branch.
11. The rabbit _____ (hop) in the garden.



Figure 1: own source

This activity can cover various topics and grammatical structures. You can use pictures instead of words for students to retrieve vocabulary, get creative, and even write a story.

This activity is great when you want your students to practice writing and focus on accuracy. Students are motivated to write down as many examples as possible and stay focused because the activity is short and intense.

6 Activity 4: PASS THE BOX

This activity does not require lots of space but it does involve some movement.

6.1 How to Play?

Have your students sit or stand in a circle. Play some catchy music, not too fast or too slow. Students pass a small box in a clockwise direction while the music is being played. When you stop the music, the student that is holding the box at that moment opens the box, takes out a piece of paper and performs the assignment (forms a sentence, names a picture, compares two items, mimes the action, etc.). You can use similar tasks as in the activities above.

ADAPTED VERSION

The bird _____
(fly) in the
sky.

The baby
_____ (cry)
because he
is hungry.

The wind
_____ (blow)
through the
trees.

The
children
_____ in
the park.

The monkey
_____ (swing)
from the
branch.

The fish
_____ (swim)
in the pond.

The leaves
_____ (fall)
from the
trees.

The cat
_____ (pur)
on the
bed.

The rabbit
_____ (hop)
in the
garden.

Figure 2: own source

Here are some other examples:

vocabulary revision	grammar
a picture of a toy (food, item of clothing, etc.) Students use the word in a sentence: <i>I like playing with jo-jos.</i>	compare a mouse / an elephant Students form sentences: <i>A mouse is smaller than an elephant.</i> <i>A mouse is braver than an elephant.</i> <i>An elephant is bigger than a mouse.</i>

7 Conclusion

Why is being active during drills so important? Drilling is generally not the most fun part of teaching or learning English. However, it is a very important part of the learning process. The activities above make drilling more enjoyable and encourage students to participate. One of the biggest benefits of active learning is student engagement. The outcomes of such activities can be positive; students can get motivated, learning might become more manageable and the knowledge they retrieve might improve.

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YOU CAN ICT IT

Mateja Žgur

Abstract

This article offers a quick guide to the following online tools: Plickers, Padlet, and Canva. With the help of these ICT tools, students can participate in short quizzes, prepare interesting presentations, express their opinions easily, and do many other tasks. They can work in pairs, smaller groups, or individually. What is more, they can record short videos, too. Meanwhile, they learn how to use internet sources carefully, how to create a hyperlink, and much more. Such ICT learning methods are very inviting for young generations who get used to them very quickly.

Keywords: Canva, online tools, learning methods, motivation, Padlet, Plickers

1 Introduction

Sometimes it is quite disturbing to see how today's younger generations lose themselves in their mobile phones, tablets, and other devices. However, the use of ICT is not always a waste of time. It is important to teach our students how to use ICT devices effectively. These can serve as a good warm-up activity, or they can help boost our students' motivation at any time during the learning process. Furthermore, online tools offer a different learning experience and enable additional visual and audio stimuli that are not possible with most traditional learning methods.

2 Online Quizzes With Plickers

Several online quizzes can be done by using only a tablet or a smartphone. However, not all classrooms and not all pupils are equipped with their own ICT devices. That is why it is sometimes very useful to have ICT tools that can be used without the need to have individual tablets or smartphones. An example of such an ICT tool is Plickers. The free version of this online tool enables the formation of short quizzes that can include texts, images, or videos. The teacher prepares the quiz in the online tool and connects it with the app on the smartphone. The questions are then shown to the students on a big screen. Each question has up to four possible answers, and only one is the correct one.

The students are given special matching cards, each having a unique image or code. Besides the code, the cards contain four separate letters: A, B, C, and D. These represent the possible answers. Students first read the question, then they choose the correct answer and show it with their individual card. If they think the right answer is answer A, they should lift their card with the letter "A" on it. The same goes for all the other answers/letters. At that point, the teacher scans the answers using the app on the smartphone. Once the answers are scanned, the teacher can present the correct answer and show the distribution of the students' answers and the statistics.

Plickers can be used as a fun and short activity even with the youngest pupils. It is only necessary for them to know the first four letters of the English alphabet. Instead of a text and written questions, you can use images, videos, or sounds. Plickers can serve as a great warm-up activity. I sometimes use it just before the end of the lesson, when some students are already a bit tired, and others may lack concentration, and such a short quiz always gives them the right boost in motivation so that we conclude the lesson in a good mood.

Once you get used to Plickers, you do not need a lot of time to make a new set of questions, and every quiz can be quickly adapted or just slightly changed for another occasion. Such quizzes offer a playful and easy insight into the students' answers and hence their knowledge or understanding of a certain topic. Furthermore, they also show you the statistics, which can sometimes be quite handy. On the other hand, they are rather superficial and usually do not allow for a deeper insight into the students' understanding, especially with the free version that only allows you to use five questions in a set.

3 Online Projects With Padlet

There are many great tools for creating online projects, and Padlet is one of them. It is widely used for different communication and learning purposes, depending on the type of format you choose, be it wall, stream, grid, shelf, or canvas. Padlet offers many different possibilities, and one activity that I found very interesting is the one that I used with my grade 9 pupils.

Our topic was English-speaking countries. We first revised the vocabulary connected to presenting a country (capital, area, population, currency, climate, landscape, etc.), and then the students were divided into pairs. Every pair chose an English-speaking country. Then I showed them the Padlet template that I had already prepared in advance. I chose the “map” format, which makes it possible to travel the world online and post your text at a specific location. Given the example of Australia, I showed my students what I expected them to write about, what topics they had to choose from, and how they could add any images or short, interesting videos. Furthermore, they were asked to choose three of the given topics and write about them in a more detailed way. I also taught them how to connect their individual post to their main article, and, in the end, everything was neatly organised. Last but not least, I told my students that this online project is a way to research the chosen English-speaking country, using mostly reading and writing skills, but in the end, they would have to present their project orally to their schoolmates in class.

Then we moved to our ICT room, where they could have their own computers, and they started working on their little projects with great enthusiasm. They did not need many further instructions – only here and there a little help or additional technical instruction was needed. I was especially pleased that even the weakest students liked the activity a lot and did not have a feeling they were learning or writing in English, which they normally do not really enjoy doing. The preparation of the Padlet-map-presentation of the chosen English-speaking countries took us two lessons, and some students had to finish their projects at home, where they also prepared for the oral presentation. All in all, this Padlet English-speaking-countries activity proved to be very motivating and challenging for all students. The final oral presentations offered a great insight into other students’ projects so that everyone could listen and learn about different English-speaking countries. With the help of the images that the students had attached to their presentations, these were definitely much more interesting than classical notes in a notebook would be. However, such activities cannot be done too often because while preparing them, students spend a lot of time behind the screens; it is, therefore, important that these online projects are only done occasionally and that they are well thought-through.

4 Videos With Canva

Canva is the third and last online tool I would like to present in this article. It is becoming more and more popular and widespread because it is quite simple to use, and it also offers numerous attractive templates. What I have found very useful and refreshing are short

videos that can be recorded in Canva. These can be added either to your presentation or video template.

First, you need to click “videos,” then “record yourself,” and get started. It is very practical because you can do it with one laptop only. While recording, the “actors” can see themselves on the screen. Once you are done, just click “save and exit the studio,” and the video is there. Before or after adding the video to a certain page of your presentation or video, you can adapt the background and add any additional images, audio, etc.

So far, I have used Canva videos on several occasions: in eTwinning and Erasmus projects, for Christmas wishes, to prepare an invitation video for a charity funfair for our parents, and also to promote green habits among our pupils. Sometimes we record the whole class together, and sometimes in pairs, little groups, or with individual students. The youngest participating students were 8 years old, and they learnt how to enter the Canva recording studio, how to start the recording, and how to exit the studio in no time. Each time we used Canva videos, the pupils enjoyed the recording sessions, and the audience liked to watch the videos. Therefore, they serve as a great motivation tool. Even the shiest and quietest pupils joined the activity once they saw how easy and entertaining it was and when they learnt that they could always delete an unsatisfying video and record a better one.

All in all, Canva videos are a fun and easy way to prepare very exciting videos. They raise the students’ motivation. The videos are also a great opportunity for every student not only to see what they look like but, even more importantly, to hear what their English sounds like. When watching their recordings and listening to what they say in the video, students get very attentive to every single detail, and they notice even minor mistakes in pronunciation. Hence, I believe that recording videos during English lessons is a great opportunity to improve the students’ pronunciation as well as to raise their awareness of the importance of the right speech pace and diction. Furthermore, it gives the teacher the opportunity to teach the students about the power of non-verbal communication as well. When watching themselves, students notice the lack of eye contact, how disturbing it can be if you speak with hands in your pockets, or that words uttered when you are already turning around will hardly reach the recipient.

5 Pros and Cons of Online Tools

There are several advantages of using online tools in the classroom. One of them is certainly to raise the students’ motivation as well as to use different and challenging learning tools. What is more, online tools enable additional options for students and teachers, such as video production and pronunciation analysis. They also offer an easier insight into the progress of every individual pupil as well as the whole class. Pupils can also improve their digital literacy and learn to use ICT devices for educational purposes. According to Licht et al. (2020, p. 69) and their analysis of eTwinning projects, all of which are online based, these enable teachers “to go beyond traditional methods and pedagogies”

and have “a tendency to consider students as stakeholders rather than recipients of teaching practices.”

However, there are certain disadvantages of using ICT equipment at school. In general, children spend too much time behind screens and should rather be more physically active. What is more, “online teaching should not substitute face-to-face teaching, and it also cannot give our pupils real-life experiences” (Fee, 2009, p. 48). Fee also emphasized that online tools can provide pupils with virtual models, but these can never equal real experiences.

Another problematic issue is online safety. UK Department for Education (2023) published guidelines for teaching online safety in schools that address many problematic issues, including “how to use technology safely, responsibly, respectfully and securely,” and this is a part of their computing curriculum, mandatory for all local-community-maintained schools in the UK. In Slovenia, however, computing is not a part of obligatory school subjects in primary schools yet, and topics like online safety are addressed in a less structured way during class meetings or occasionally with specialized teachers. However, even during English lessons, one should not forget about online safety.

As a teacher, you also have to follow the rules regarding collecting personal information. Children under 13 are not allowed to use any of the online tools mentioned in this article without adult supervision. Student Data Policy of Plickers (2021, Chapter 6) clearly states that “personal information collected from children under 13 may only be used for educational purposes and their parents can ask for access to their child’s personal information to review and/or have deleted”. In a similar way, the Terms of Use (2021) do not allow children under the age of 13 years old to use or access Canva Service unless they are directly supervised by an adult – a parent, a guardian, or a teacher. In the Terms of Service (2021, Use of The Services, lines 9–11) for Padlet, one can read that the school or the teacher “must notify the parents/guardians of the information to be collected and obtain parental/guardian consent before collecting and sharing with the Service the personal information of children under the age of 13”.

6 Conclusion

When used reasonably, online tools can spice up any lesson or activity. Plickers online quizzes and Canva videos can be prepared for and used with younger pupils as well and with one laptop and/or a smartphone only. For Padlet, you should have more ICT equipment – individual smartphones or, even better, individual laptops, especially if you want to include more text. Students enjoy participating in different online activities. However, one should not exaggerate with them. Not only because then the charm of the “extraordinary” would disappear but also because we should not exceed the healthy limit of students’ screen time.

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ABOUT A BOY – REACHING OUT

Milan Mandeljc

Abstract

In the following paper, I intend to look into selected intertextual aspects of *About a Boy* by the British novelist Nick Hornby, which has been chosen as the next in line for the Slovene National Grammar School Examination in English. Firstly, specifics and trends of the 1990s in the United Kingdom will be addressed in order to contextualise the abundant cultural backdrop against which Marcus, a 12-year-old boy and Will, a 36-year-old man living off his father's royalties, appear so different. It is their perception and consumption of chosen (or imposed) pop references that define their role in society as well as their behaviour and mentality. Marcus' inability to bridge the gap creates a need only an informed consumer such as Will can fill, despite not being his father. In a detraditionalized culture, however, social roles are defined by needs and functions, rather than pre-established norms. The novel's conflicts therefore reveal the detraditionalization of social constructs and focus on the protagonists' and the timely reader's relation to mainstream pop culture, that is, by extension, their social norm.

Keywords: Nick Hornby, *About a Boy*, the 1990s, mainstream pop culture, detraditionalization

1 Introduction

Unlike previous Matura study books like *Lord of the Flies* by Golding (1954), *Animal Farm* by Orwell (1954) or *Catcher in the Rye* by Salinger (1951), *About a Boy* has little to no study accessible materials, as most reviewers tackle the 1998 best seller as a *light read*. What they seem to be forgetting, however, is that “Hornby deals with what are essentially quite large and emotional issues with a light touch, and manages to express ideas without weighing the novel down” (Selwyn, 2013, p. 7). While it is true that the novel is not (yet) a literary classic and part of the literary cannon, and thus poorly supported with research, it is often its lightness that carries value for its readers, particularly if the readers in question are secondary school students. One of the reasons for the book being added to the assortment of its perhaps more eminent predecessors is its intense mirroring of the timely culture that perhaps moved into the direction of pop culture, but that could hardly be at the expense of the novel’s literary value. In fact, the book forces the reader to critically evaluate the 90’s pop culture through the lenses of several different characters, creating a holistic reflection of the time in which it was created.

2 1990’s in The United Kingdom: Time and Setting of Cultural Shifts and Detraditionalization

Firstly, a reason for the serious lack of research conducted on some of UK’s 1990’s reads (in particular those with pop or “mainstream” cultural references) may be that the Decade’s controversy poses a serious problem in establishing its narratives. After a series of workshops, **hosted by Dr David Geiringer from London’s Queen Mary University and Dr Helen McCarthy from the University of Cambridge, under the title ‘Rethinking Britain in the 1990s: Towards a new research agenda’ and reported about by Christopher Day from the University of Westminster, Day establishes that the “hunt for a coherent narrative instead served to illustrate the centrality of contradictions and uncertainty in shaping this decade.”** Therefore, it is necessary to study the *specifics* of the book’s time and setting and their role in establishing the characters’ social standings and interests rather than the general role in the post-war development or political instability at the time.” (Day, 2021, p. 2)

In a sense, pop culture has always fascinated and defined authors. In an interview with the author Nick Hornby, parallels are drawn between him, Dickens and Prince:

Hornby writes about Dickens’s and Prince’s voracious appetites for pop culture. The former claimed to have gone to the theatre every night for three years in his early twenties. As a child, Prince obsessively transcribed the lyrics of any pop song that took his fancy. Such constant fuelling provided “permanent inspiration,” says Hornby. // He knows what he’s talking about. This is the man who gave the protagonist of his smash-hit 1995 debut novel, *High Fidelity*, the catchphrase “It’s not what you’re like, it’s what you like.” (Goldsbrough, 2022, p. 7)

This shows not only the author’s obsession with cultural hubbub (which is seen as an imperative at the time and is reflected in Will Freeman, the adult protagonist) but also an

underlying quality in the author's writing: characters' interests are not merely labels but rather mirrors of their psyche and nature. Hornby is often heard saying that his knowing his music, culture and sports has been his personal obsession and that it is by knowing people's interests one can tell more about them and their personality. In fact, for the author, this has become a lens for introducing the characters and giving readers an insight into their inner layers. In *About a Boy*, characters are still types; however, not in the sense of belonging to social strata, but rather being types because of their cultural decision or upbringing. This explains an instant deluge of pop references from the earliest pages of the book which define Marcus and Will:

He [Marcus] had been to see two films with his mum, *Home Alone 2*, which wasn't as good as *Home Alone 1*, and *Honey*; *I Blew Up the Kid*, which wasn't as good as *Honey*, *I Shrunk the Kids* (Hornby, p. 3)

//and why it was more important to read books than to play on the Gameboy his dad had given him. (Hornby, p. 14)

He [Will] owned five hip-hop albums (five points), he had taken Ecstasy (five points) //he had never used a favoured condom (five points), he has sold his Bruce Springsteen albums (five points) //The bad news was he hadn't ever had sex with someone whose photo had appeared on the style page of a newspaper or magazine (minus two). //You couldn't get cooler than sub-zero! (Hornby, pp. 5-6)

Right now, he [Will] was listening to Nirvana and Snoop Doggy Dog// There was almost too much to do. You didn't have to have a life of your own anymore, you could just peek over the fence at other people's lives, as lived in newspapers and EastEnders and exquisitely sad jazz or tough rap songs. (Hornby, pp. 6-7)

In the novel, the reader is faced with three main characters: a feminist mother who is outside the mainstream by choice, an outcast boy whose age and expected behaviour fail to fit his interests and create a clash that ties back to his mother and her interests, and a man, who wants to be part of the culture and in this way beyond the mainstream. Namely, he hardly fits a near forty-year-old man who should be faced with life's seriousness and with a career vision. His pop references and the language used create a humorous, yet at the same time just as dysfunctional- image of a man who belongs to the so-called "lad-culture" of the time (the author himself is often seen as a "1990s lad-lit writer" as Ingle describes him). Lad-culture joins men based on their consumption of anti-feminist magazines, over-sexualised films, music promoting masculinity and so on.

By and large, the protagonists' cultural placement on a fictional ladder, indivisible from their viewpoint, functions as a literary device for creating three dysfunctional characters: a culturally ignorant teenager outcast, a disillusioned "lad" and a mother who is encumbered by her basic motherly instincts and her failure as a wife/woman. In overgeneralised terms, cultural (p)references serve as psychological profiling.

Particular attention should be given to the last quote, which shows how popular pop series and music of the time created a shift from following a traditional family life of the time with a great deal of intimacy and keeping to oneself to mimicking an idolised image of either a family, a group of friends or even an individual, where hard work gives way to enjoyment and outwardly directed personal consumption choices (Yankelovich, 1998).

3 Cultural Consumption as Character Foundation

In sociological terms, this corresponds well to some of the narratives established by Skinner, May and Rollock in their article *Self-Identity and Its Discontents: Sociology in the 1990s* in which they lay out one of the key aspects that help with the understanding of pop references and trends in Hornby's novel: people of the 1990 express who they are through *consumption choices* and they build intimate relationships by advertising themselves sifting others' advertisements.

In other words, consumption choices and interests create a sift that regroups and even intimately pairs people based on their outward needs and cultural belonging rather than carefully considered inner needs, long-term projecting or even family relations. This, however, creates two new types of conflict in a novel:

- a) the conflict of finding one's own interests and keeping them stable with constant change in the market,
- b) the conflict between one's own (or induced) interests (by extension – character) and the surrounding mass defined by mainstream pop culture.

Both Marcus and Will struggle because of their choices; Marcus is defined by his mother's over-protective taste and is, as a result, not in tune with his age and teenage perception of the world. His mom's obsession with Joni Mitchell and other female singers who often sing of sadness, female emancipation and disappointment become his walls behind which he grows older in his attitude to the world but not in his inner ability to understand the actual situation around him.

Marcus knew he was weird and he knew that part of the reason he was weird was because his mom was weird. (Hornby, p. 13)

//and because he was different, he felt uncomfortable, and because he felt uncomfortable, he could feel himself floating away from everyone and everything, kids, teachers, lessons. (Hornby, p. 14)

The second conflict outgrows into what appears to be the central conflict in the novel: Marcus' cultural ineptness makes him crumble under peer pressure which in turn causes his need to be outside his social circle. He starts wishing he was Macaulay Culkin (Hornby, p. 12), a celebrity teenager at the time who was home-schooled but retains immense popularity among his peers and beyond that. In the same way, Marcus wants Will to take him and his mother to Planet Hollywood (Hornby, p. 79) because that would give him

value in his own perception of the world. In other words, just as his cultural choices show how different he is from his peers, such references shed light on his primal need to belong and to be an equal to his peers.

In another interview, Hornby explains that “a lot about this is belonging to the mainstream and Marcus is desperate to belong to the mainstream, he is desperate to be able to go to school, and say he went to Planet Hollywood because he doesn’t have that many ways in which he can relate to his classmates” (Gross, 1998). Similarly, his short pairing with Ellie, a rebellious Nirvana fan and his first crush, is full of Nirvana and Kurt Cobain references that, in a humorous way, portray how character differences may be done away with for a short time, if consumption choices are the same or at least similar. However, the problem that such choices reveal is that such choices and relationships are superficial; choices made must reflect their chooser’s true inner self, otherwise their true selves stay incongruous with the people around them, which is where the novel hits a critical note about the decade in which it was written.

4 Kurt Cobain’s Suicide Note and Other Cultural Mentions and Their Significance for the Reader

It is relatively obvious that the title of the novel, as well as the time of the book are strictly connected to Nirvana and its late lead singer. Nirvana’s song title *About a Girl* was altered accordingly, although, as Hornby admits in his interview with Gross, he might have in fact taken it from Patty Smith’s tribute and used the reference respectively. The novel takes place before and after Cobain’s suicide on 8th April 1994; however, more than the actual knowledge of Nirvana songs and the indie movement they had following them, it should be noted that Nirvana is chosen more as a sample reference with their timely proverbial social significance that the mainstream (just like Will) just had to recognize. Nonetheless, there is the very important concept of suicide and the suicidal note, a topic that seems to make an overly light appearance in the novel.

After Fiona, Marcus’ mother, unsuccessfully overdoses on her medication, he finds her suicide note, which is unsurprisingly similar to Kurt Cobain’s, which was greatly publicized at the time. Co-positioned sections from both suicide notes (Fiona’s are in italics) show a clear cultural reference that the reader at the time of the book’s publication (1998) would probably have recognized:

I haven’t felt the excitement of listening to as well as creating music along with reading and writing for too many years now. I feel guilty beyond words about these things.

A big part of me knows that I’m doing a wrong, selfish thing. Most of me in fact. The trouble is it’s not the part that controls me anymore. I feel flat and there doesn’t seem anything to look forward to.

For example, when we’re backstage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins, it doesn’t affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who

seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy

I reckon things will be better for you than they were before.

I don't have the passion anymore, and so remember, it's better to burn out than to fade away.

I don't want to stop writing this, but I can't think of any reason to keep it going.

Peace, love, empathy. Kurt Cobain /Love you, Mum

This indirect but clear reference, as well as all others which are mentioned and demand research from today's younger readers, could hardly be in need of more popularity among the readership at the time. In fact, it seems that just like the characters' choices define their character, it is these same references that the readers of the time had created some of their own relationship to. Therefore, cultural pop references may also be seen as a way of profiling the readers and establishing their attitude towards the characters, as well as their positioning in relation to the mainstream. In fact, *About a Boy* is not only read as a collection of cultural references of time but almost as a social satire aimed at divesting people of their superficial interests and reminding them of true moral values. Thus, the book's cultural references are a guideline for the reader to read into the psychology of the novel, and the book does not fail to finish in this exact stream of thought by Marcus saying, "I bloody hate Joni Mitchel." and Will knowing the boy would be alright.

5 Conclusion

The 1990s' complexity of narratives and shift from traditionalization allowed the emergence of pop trends and establishments that merged into what can be seen as mainstream culture, which has a huge influence on younger generations. In literature and other cultural spheres, new topics emerge that deal with polyculturalism, gender, disorders, drug abuse and divorced lives. However, the complexity of these topics, which may find a vent in pop and grunge music, look for a more elegant way in books for adolescents. In *About a Boy*, cultural references become psychological and behavioural markers, as well as social markers of characters on the "mainstream" scale. The knowledge of the broader cultural context, such as the suicide of Nirvana's lead singer, allowed the reader at the time to read into said references as poetic devices as well as create a personal attitude towards them.

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LEARNING IN SLEEP

Nina Križanec Rodica

Abstract

Learning while asleep, particularly in the alpha state, might sound easy at first, but it also comes with some intriguing uncertainties. This article explores its history and breaks down the theory of different brain waves and their traits. It focuses on the sleep stages that are conducive to learning and when exactly this learning takes place. The article also suggests what kinds of topics could be learned using this method. The basics of the method itself are discussed, including how to retain the knowledge and create the best possible environment for absorbing it.

Throughout the discussion, a real-life example is provided to illustrate the points. It is worth noting that this learning method is considered safe, raising hopes for its potential benefits.

Keywords: alpha state, a learning method, brain waves

1 Introduction

Learning in the alpha state is a learning method that is useful for certain types of knowledge. There are some characteristics that are important to know before using the method to maximize the learning process.

2 Historical Facts

According to Beyer (1992), Hans Berger was the pioneer behind the development of the EEG, or electroencephalogram, a tool that tracks the brain's electrical activity. Back in 1920, the EEG was far from the sophisticated instrument we have today. It could merely differentiate between two main types of electrical brain activity. The first type was labeled as "beta," associated with wakefulness, activity, and open-eyed states. The second, known as the "alpha" state, emerged when a person closed their eyes and began to unwind. As the EEG technology advanced further, researchers uncovered a spectrum of other brain activities beyond these initial distinctions.

3 States of Consciousness

Below is the information organized in a table format, detailing states of consciousness, corresponding brain patterns, and related areas of experience. This compilation draws from the authors Beyer (1992) and Saraswati (2002).

State of consciousness	Brain pattern	Area of experience
Being awake	BETA (13 to 20 cycles per second)	sensory awareness, external knowledge
Yoga Nidra	ALPHA (8 to 12 cycles per second)	deep relaxation, vision state, lucid dreaming
REM: rapid eye movement	13 to 35 cycles per second	dreaming
Sleeping with dreams	THETA (4 to 7 cycles per second)	release of emotions, growth hormones, repressed fear
Deep sleep	DELTA (0 to 4 cycles per second)	awakening instincts

Table 1: States of consciousness, corresponding brain patterns, and related areas of experience

According to Beyer (1992), the phases beta, alpha, and REM are the stages during which the brain is awake, and these represent mental phases. The remaining two stages are physical.

The REM phase (Rapid Eye Movement) occurs approximately every 90 minutes of sleep, with the initial phase being shorter than the final one. The number of REM phases experienced in a night—either 4 or 5—depends on the duration of sleep. Importantly, the REM phase is the period when learning takes place.

4 Knowledge to Learn in Alpha State and the Method

Individuals can learn a variety of content, such as poems, foreign words, facts, and book information. All that is required is a recording device, with the option to conveniently download it onto our smartphones. We can choose to record ourselves or have someone else do it on our behalf. Subsequently, we can transfer the recorded material to a tablet and set it to play on an endless loop, ensuring uninterrupted repetition throughout the night.

When acquiring a foreign language, the accent of the person who recorded the content tends to transfer to our pronunciation. Similarly, when it comes to poems, our recitation might closely resemble the original recording. Ideally, the recording should be initiated after we have already fallen asleep, and it is important to maintain a minimal volume to prevent potential disturbances. Despite the low volume, the nighttime environment enables us to hear the playback effectively. According to Beyer (1992), there are about 10 percent of people who will wake up anyway, and this practice is not appropriate for them.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati (2002) has been living alongside his guru, and his responsibility was to attend the Sanskrit school during the nighttime hours. The boys in the school were acquiring knowledge from the Vedic scriptures. When Saraswati himself was a young boy, he would occasionally fall asleep around three in the morning. Upon waking up at approximately six, he would return to his ashram.

At a subsequent juncture, an event took place in his ashram. The aforementioned boys participated, reciting the Vedic scriptures. Saraswati had a peculiar sense of familiarity—he felt as if he had encountered these texts before, even though he was certain he had never read them. One of the boys enlightened him, explaining that his body had absorbed the recitations during his sleep. This revelation motivated Saraswati to embark on further exploration in this domain.

The essence here is that to internalize knowledge, we must also engage with it in a beta state. This constitutes conventional learning as we recognize it—reading, rehearsing, and the like. However, retention occurs at an accelerated pace, about three times faster, owing to the presence of knowledge within our subconscious realm.

5 My Example

In numerous schools across Slovenia, eighth-grade students are required to learn France Prešeren's poem *The Water Man* by heart. This Slovene poem comprises 14 stanzas and is notably intricate. For one particular student, who possessed strong technical abilities but held a minimal interest in poetry, this task evolved into a formidable challenge.

In an effort to tackle this endeavor, I personally read and recorded the poem. Over the course of a month, he devoted himself to listening to the recording during his sleep, ded-

icating his waking hours to mastering one stanza after another. Complications arose, as he fell ill during this period, potentially extending the timeline due to his ailment. Eventually, the oral examination was conducted at the school. Regrettably, during his initial attempt, he experienced a mental block and struggled to recollect much of the poem—experiencing what could be described as a memory lapse. Following a brief interim, he was granted a second opportunity, and on this occasion, he achieved a score of 4.

Furthermore, students can use learning in sleep to refine their language accents. By recording native speakers or mimicking pronunciation models, they can enhance their intonation and fluency during sleep, when the mind is receptive to subtle nuances of speech. For language learners, recording vocabulary, phrases, and dialogues in the target language and playing them during sleep could boost retention and familiarity. This passive exposure may promote a natural grasp of the language's rhythm and sound patterns.

Learning in sleep can aid in mastering complex math formulas. Students can create audio recordings explaining equations and problem-solving methods. Listening to these recordings during sleep could reinforce their understanding and application of mathematical concepts.

While these approaches hold potential, their effectiveness varies for every individual. Experimenting with these techniques can help students gauge their impact on learning outcomes.

6 Conclusion

Learning in the alpha state is a learning method that likely requires further testing using EEG or other devices. I believe it holds value because research has shown that we absorb information more effectively when in a relaxed state. Given the substantial amount of knowledge we need to acquire, this could serve as a more efficient and effortless approach to learning.

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5 NO/LOW PREP ACTIVITIES FOR A FUN ESL CLASSROOM

Nina Rainer Klančnik

Abstract

Show me a teacher who does not spend their days searching for new, fresh ideas that would be fun and useful for their students. Show me a teacher who does not think the activities they carry out in their classes should be engaging and in tune with the interests of today's youth in order for them to work. This is what we do. We research, compose, imagine, start over, correct, design ... try it out. Sometimes it works. When it does not, it feels like all your extra work has been in vain. The aim of this paper is to equip fellow teachers with a set of tried-out low-preparation activities for their ESL class - not only to cut their work in half but also to put their English class on everyone's lips. At least from time to time.

Keywords: creativity, fun, engaging, no/low preparation, adaptable

1 Introduction

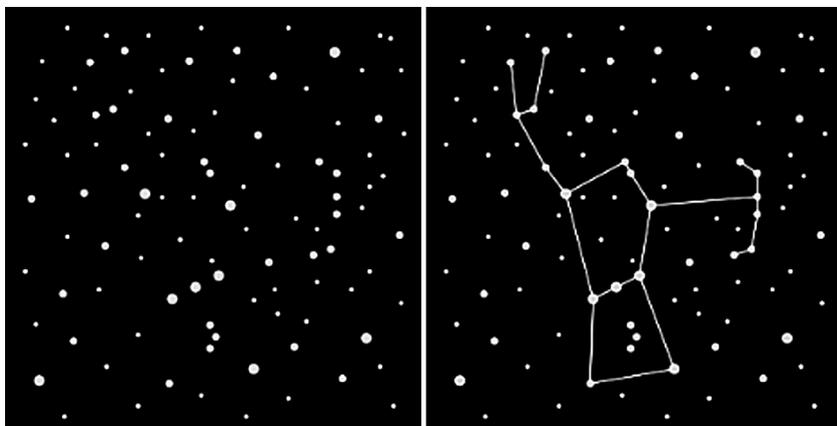
This is not an article. It is not an exposé. It is a collection of five tried-out no- or low-preparation creative activities for teachers to use in their ESL classes. All activities can be adapted and have been carried out with students from ages 13 to 18. They are designed so that a teacher needs almost no preparation; however, they all require an internet connection and an overhead projector. All activities encourage creativity spurred on by the topics of popular culture and cultural differences; some will yield a piece of creative writing done by students as an end result, while others will simply get the class moving and talking. The activities have proven themselves to be very engaging for students, and teachers are sure to find ways in which to build on the tasks to make them relevant for their own classes.

2 2kindsOfpeople

Materials: computer, overhead projector, internet.

This activity can be done either as a warmer, a getting-to-know-you activity, or an opportunity to get your students moving in a lesson block where otherwise there is lots of sitting around. Depending on your needs, make sure to adjust the time and scope of the images presented.

Tell students you have once met a Portuguese artist called João Rocha, who told you there are only two kinds of people in the world. Ask students what they think of that. This is meant as a lead-in; however, if a longer, more complex discussion evolves, you may decide to let it unfold. At the end of it, go to [2kindsofpeople Tumblr website](#). Using an overhead projector, show students the first pair of images and ask them to decide what kind of person they are. For example, when they look at the night sky, do they always see the stars as random specks of light, or do they immediately see patterns forming? (See image below.)



(Source 1)

Then ask students to stand up and go to the front of the class. Tell them you will show them more pairs of images and that they should go and stand either on the left side of the classroom or the right side, depending on their choice. After each pair of images, ask a different student to describe the images (what type of people they represent) and what their choice tells us about themselves. Continue as long as the activity is engaging for students and/or you have time for it.

3 Song Title Creative Writing

Materials: computer, overhead projector, speakers, internet, pen and paper.

Using an overhead projector, show students a list of the top 50 rock songs of all time. You may, of course, choose another music genre or a different number of song titles. Explain any unknown vocabulary. Then, put students in pairs or small groups and give them one of the following tasks (depending on their level of English and/or the occasion).

Write a:

- Poem
- Christmas card for ...
- Birthday card for ...
- A short story
- A motivational letter for a job/exchange program/etc.

Include at least _____ song titles from the list.

Make sure the sentences (song titles + your own words) are grammatically correct.

After approximately 20 minutes (or more, depending on how much time you can spend on this activity, the students' knowledge level, and their usual work pace), read what they have written and vote for the best poem/card/story/letter/etc. Listen and/or watch music videos of the songs included in the writing of the winning pair or group. You can also set this task as a home project and do a feedback session at school.

4 InExtremis

Materials: computer, overhead projector, internet, pen & paper, photos.

Show students one of the pictures by the Italian artist Sandro and ask them what they think. They will probably laugh or be shocked, for what the artist does is stage different strange falls. (See example below.)

Ask students what they think happened just before the fall. Why has this person fallen in this manner?



(Source 2)

Then, choose one option:

- give each student a different photo (in this case, you will have to print out a selection of photos, one per student), or
- use one photo for all students (no printing needed, show the picture using an overhead projector).

Tell students to write down a story of the fall. Read some examples. If you choose the first option, you can also get the class to guess the picture after each story.

This is an unedited example of a story one of my ex-8th graders wrote for the photo above:

"This is Paul. He is an artist and an actor. He was preparing for a theatre show in his apartment. He lived in a bad neighborhood. In this area kids liked to play pranks on other people. At 2 P.M. he was on his way to the theatre. In the play he was playing a woman. After the play he went home. On his way home he saw a photo booth. He was feeling so great that he decided to take some pictures. But Paul did not know that he was in for a surprise. He didn't know that the kids placed some fireworks in the booth. He went in ready to take some beautiful photos. He sat down and pushed the button. He took some pictures. When the pictures came out of the machine, he went to grab them like any normal person would. That's when the fireworks started exploding everywhere. He got so scared that he grabbed the photos, but pulled out the whole tape not just his photos. Then the whole machine went crazy and he fell off the chair and out of the booth. He fell right on his face." (M. T. S.)

5 PIC-LITS

Materials: computer, overhead projector, speakers, internet, smartphones/computers.

*There are many lesson plans available on the PIC-LITS website.

Piclits.com is an e-learning website that uses photography and keywords to improve literacy skills. Create a free account (or sign in using your Google account) – you can use the site without it, but you will not be able to save your work. Tell your students to do the same.

Option One: Drag'n'drop

Click on "Create a PIC-LIT". Select a photo (each has its own personalized word bank, organized by word type), then choose words to best describe it and drag them onto the picture. When you choose a word, drag it onto the picture and position it anywhere you want. Each word has a drop-down menu that gives you all the options for the word (tenses, capital, possessive, plural). To remove a word from your PIC-LIT, drag it back into the word bank. When you are finished, click on Options and save your work.

Option Two: Freestyle

Click on the "Go Freestyle" button on the right side of the photo of the day above the photo carousel. This option does not generate a word bank for the photos but lets you

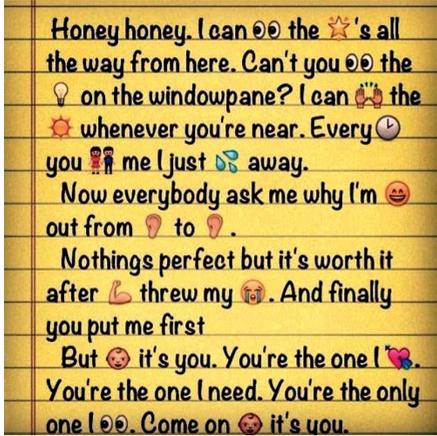
type your own text onto them. You can move words and text around until you are satisfied with your work. Again, when you are finished, click on Options and save your work.

You can instruct your students to write a caption, a simple or complex sentence, a paragraph, a poem, a letter, a question, or a word association. It can be as challenging as you want it to be. Make sure students save and share their work. Read some examples.

6 Emoji Writing

Materials: computer, overhead projector, speakers, internet, smartphones/computers.

Ask students to what extent they are using emojis when writing messages, posts, etc., on their smartphones and computers. Then, using an overhead projector, show students the Emoji love song (see image below) and ask them to try and decode it. Students should work in pairs or small groups and write down the text using words instead of emojis. Read some examples to see which words they used. Compare and discuss.



Emoji love song ("Love On Top," Beyoncé)

Now do the same with the Emoji Fresh Prince of Bel Air Theme Song (see images below). This one is longer and a bit more complicated. After the comparison and discussion, play the original TV series theme song and ask students to "correct" the words where they chose a word different from the one in the song. Play the song twice, then check the students' answers.

Emoji Fresh Prince of Bel Air Theme Song



(Source 4)

Finally, ask pairs or small groups of students to write (whether on a computer, smartphone, or piece of paper) a poem, short story, letter, etc. using a combination of words and emojis or only emojis. Students then switch their writings with another pair or small group and try to decode them. Choose some examples to read out loud.

7 Conclusion

I have found that, in general, students respond well to the activities that seem like they were not actually made for school. Strange, hilarious pictures, emojis, getting out of their chairs for a bit ... whyever not? Such activities surprise students, pull them out of their academic boxes and make their creativity fly high. If they really get absorbed in a task, their language skills will be put to the test, pushed to the limit and beyond, and they will create things they never would have thought possible.

And the fact that these activities need (almost) no preparation? Show me a teacher who does not think this is awesome!

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SELF-REGULATION DEVELOPMENT IN EFL CLASSROOM – PATH TO SUCCESS

Tanja Fajmut

Abstract

Studies show that incorporating self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies into L2 teaching encourages the development of autonomous learners. The article first attempts to highlight the significance of SRL in language teaching by exploring its impact on language achievement. Then it introduces some activities teachers can use to teach their students how to develop self-regulatory practices. The presented activities range from the ones suitable for primary school learners to ones that are appropriate for secondary school students as well. Since quite a lot of students have poorer reading skills nowadays, we also discuss SRL strategies that help students cope with this problem. The presented self-regulatory tools empower learners to become proactive, and it is the proactive learner who learns best.

Keywords: self-regulated learning, L2 teaching, reading skills

1 Introduction

The students we teach today will one day become active members of local and global communities; therefore, they will have to possess the skills to connect, adapt, and succeed in a dynamic and fast-changing world. English teachers do not only teach English; they also educate children, teenagers and young adults to become lifelong learners in order to flourish in the 21st century. A crucial component in this process is self-regulated learning. In short, it is when students take control of their own learning and development. Since the skills connected to self-regulated learning reach way beyond the classroom, learners can use these skills and knowledge in positive ways to shape both their personal and professional lives (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021).

2 The Importance of Developing Self-Regulation Skills

Many teachers struggle with the question of why some L2 learners are more successful than others – is it because they have the natural ability to acquire foreign languages, is it because they employ successful learning strategies, or is it both? Naturally, teachers want to help those who are less successful. When researchers examined the factors that influence learning, they suggested that teachers can, through strategy training, improve the performance of the students who are struggling by giving them means by which students can take control of their learning process and become more self-directed and effective learners (Torres, 2013). This process is called self-regulated learning (SRL).

SRL happens when students take control of their own learning and development, which shifts the **perspective of agency** from the teacher **to the student**. It is the student that holds control over learning, not the teacher. SRL strategies are, by and large, deliberately initiated and implemented by the student. That means that students direct and monitor their own learning. Students identify how they learn best and take responsibility for their learning progress, and they do that when they understand the processes of how learning happens. The following quote nicely summarizes the main idea behind the concept of self-regulated learning: “... *it is the learners’ job to work on the language and the teacher’s job to work on the learner.*” (Caleb Gattegno in Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021).

The important aspect of the policy of self-regulated learning is the **growth mindset**, which means teachers and (with or because of them) students believe they **can improve** and become better at language learning. They are motivated and constantly strive for improvement in learning the language.

3 How Does Self-Regulated Learning Happen?

According to Zimmerman (2000), one can divide SRL into three phases:

1. forethought and planning: In this phase, students analyse the learning task, set specific goals toward completing it, and plan their learning.
2. performance monitoring: Here, they employ strategies to make progress on the learning task and monitor the effectiveness of those strategies as well as their

motivation for continuing progress toward the task's goals. They modify the learning strategies if they are not useful or continue using them if they prove to be helpful.

3. reflections on performance: Students evaluate their performance with respect to the effectiveness of the strategies they chose. They also manage their emotions about the outcomes of the learning experience. These self-reflections then influence their future planning and goals, initiating the cycle to begin again.

In order to take all these steps, students have to display the following skills:

- a) setting specific proximal *goals* for oneself,
- b) adopting powerful *strategies* for attaining the goals,
- c) *monitoring* one's performance selectively for signs of progress,
- d) *restructuring* one's physical and social context to make it compatible with one's goals,
- e) managing one's *time use* efficiently,
- f) *self-evaluating* one's methods,
- g) *attributing* causation to results,
- h) *adapting* future methods.

Not many students are able to develop these skills without explicit modelling and instruction, but everyone can learn them. It is our job as teachers to provide students with opportunities to develop and practice these skills in EFL classrooms.

4 Activities that Help Develop SRL Skills

The following activities that promote self-regulated learning are divided according to the phases of the SRL cycle (planning, performance and reflection). They are also labelled according to their applicability in either primary schools (PRIM), secondary schools (SEC), or both. Most of these activities are taken from Weinstein and Algeri (2018).

In the first phase (PLANNING), the first two activities teach students how to set appropriate, measurable goals.

The first activity is setting S-M-A-R-T goals (Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant – Time-bound) (PRIM and SEC): students think about how to set goals that can be measured. The teacher begins with an example and then offers a series of goals that cannot be measured, e.g., *I will do better in English. / I will get organised. / I will work faster.* Students must rephrase the goals to make them measurable.

The second activity is Individual goal setting (PRIM and SEC): students then set specific, individual goals for the subject. They start with naming their strengths and needs (covering academic skills, cognitive skills, and personal skills) and then brainstorm for 3-5 goals (keeping them SMART), prioritizing them, and making the final list of three goals (including how these will be measured).

Another activity is the so-called Happiness portfolio (PRIM) which encourages learners to think about things they associate with happiness in language learning. This can boost their motivation, help them focus, and encourage them to recognize the positives in their language-learning lives.

Teachers can also ask students to write down a detailed action plan (SEC): what they expect to be able to learn and do for each day of the week (including rest days). This helps plan their learning process and clearly sets short-range goals.

In the second phase (PERFORMANCE MONITORING), which covers processes such as attention control, flexible use of learning strategies, self-monitoring, and appropriate help-seeking, teachers can make use of many activities. They can start by asking learners to list the learning strategies that they use, which makes students aware of all possible learning strategies at their disposal (e.g., imagery, flashcards, having a parent quiz them, saying words out loud, etc.). Students can then expand their list with other possible strategies suggested by other students or the teacher (PRIM and SEC).

The next activity is the so-called strategy selection (PRIM and SEC): students pick one goal from the Individual goal setting activity (described above), then think of all learning strategies they know and decide which three will help them achieve that goal (see the chart below). They can even write a weekly plan of strategy use (which strategy they will use on each day of the week).

Strategy	How will it help me?	When will I use it?

The next activity is called *I Haven't YET* (PRIM&SEC). Students think of their goals for the subject (or the learning unit) and write down the goals they have not achieved yet, followed by the steps they need to take to achieve them in the future. This activity serves as a visual motivator once they have chosen their strategies. Students can keep these papers in their assignment binders or hang them up on the wall for inspiration.

Student Activity: *I Haven't YET*

Name: _____

I haven't _____ YET...

But if I _____, I will be able to!

Students develop metacognition by asking themselves questions that make them think about their learning process, such as the following (SEC):

1. "Do I understand better when I read or when I see a picture or diagram?
Will combining pictures or visuals with words help?"
(Drawing pictures of word problems, visualisation or mind movies).
2. "Do I fully understand the topic? How can I be sure?"
(Wh-questions to encourage deeper analysis).
3. "How can I apply what I already know to help me learn this subject more easily?"
(Making connections to the previously learned information (elaboration);
activating prior knowledge; diagramming similarities and differences (analogical reasoning)).
4. "Do I learn better when I work with someone else?
How can I learn best when I study with my classmates?"
(Peer teaching, study groups, convincing a sceptic).
5. "Do I often cram and then sometimes forget on the test?"
(Spaced repetition, mix up content to improve learning and retention).
6. "After I think I have finished studying, how will I be sure that I really know it?"
(restating/stopping and summarizing, re-reading and re-writing notes; use of images).
7. "What do I do when I get 'stuck'?"
(Reading a problem to an adult; restating/stopping and summarizing).
8. "How will I keep track of what I do not understand so I can get help later?"
(Saving questions for teachers).
9. "How will I plan ahead for long-term projects or bigger assignments to make sure I am not scrambling at the end?"
(Daily reflection, lists to check work).
10. "Before I get started, do I have everything I need to be successful?
How can I avoid realizing I forgot something at the last minute?"
(Homework routine, developing a system).

Since one of the very important skills is managing emotions, the next activity, called "If, then" (PRIM), trains learners to manage negative emotions, encouraging them to develop an 'If, then' plan. This means thinking about what they can do if they feel an emotion, such as anger, sadness, or disappointment, and how they can manage that emotion. Learners can be supported in recognizing and naming emotions, learning to reflect on the functions of these emotions, and considering strategies to regulate their emotional responses. For example: 'If I feel angry with my classmate, then I can take three deep breaths, count to ten, and think of my pet dog.'

The following activity, called *Think Aloud* (PRIM and SEC) is one where the teacher serves as a model of how to monitor the process of learning by thinking aloud, e.g., while explaining a certain grammar topic, the teacher asks questions such as “Is this making sense? What is the main idea here?” Students can also monitor their learning progress by writing or recording their reactions to a text to indicate their understanding of the main idea, questions, and opinions.

The next one is the so-called ‘*Correcting the Teacher*’ (PRIM and SEC), an activity for slightly older children. The teacher writes sentences about the topics that are being covered in class on the board and invites the students to find the mistakes that the teacher has deliberately made.

For the third phase of SRL, where students evaluate their learning process and its outcomes, teachers can use activities such as *I can ...* statements (PRIM and SEC). These are usually already incorporated in coursebooks at the end of each unit. With these, students check which skills they have acquired at the end of the unit/lesson. Another option is the so-called *Exit Ticket* (PRIM) – a task where students reflect on and write down 3 things they learned in the lesson, 2 things they want to learn more about, and one question they still have. A similar one, yet more suitable for older students, is a ‘*one-minute essay*’ in response to one or more questions that the teacher asks at the end of class, e.g., *What have you learned today? What helped you learn? What was the most useful part of today’s class? What is something that you could or should put into practice? What did you find most challenging in today’s lesson? Was there anything that made learning difficult? What can you do about it?*

The next activity, *Assignment Wrappers* (SEC), makes learners appraise the effectiveness of the strategies they applied during the learning process. The teacher provides students with a “wrapper” or checklist of ideas to think about **before** an assignment; therefore, students are most likely to use the best strategy for the specific assignment. **After** students complete the assignment, they are asked to reflect on whether they used the strategies and whether they were helpful.

Students benefit from knowing what they have done well and how they can improve. The activity *2 Stars and a Wish* (another version is called *2 Medals and a Mission*; PRIM) rewards the students for what they did well and gives them feedback on what they can do to improve their performance. I recommend using the handout from the OUP Assessment for Learning Toolkit (see references).

5 SRL Strategies for Poorer Reading Skills

Self-regulated strategies can improve the encoding of knowledge and skills in memory, especially in reading comprehension and writing, as many studies have confirmed that self-regulation facilitates reading ability in particular (Housand & Reis, 2008; Maftoon & Tasnimi, 2014). Such examples are tasks that force students to observe the reading process;

for example, students tick off strategies from a list that help them memorize new words (e.g., writing them down, using mental imagery, using flashcards, learning them from the context, etc.) or think of strategies they employ when they come across a word they do not understand (strategies like guessing, surfing the net, asking a teacher or a friend, consulting a dictionary, etc.).

Developing reading skills takes time, and because students (especially younger ones) usually do not like to read, as it seems an arduous and boring task to them, this makes it even more difficult for the teacher to motivate them to read often. According to SRL principles, teachers can do the following to raise students' motivation for reading (and consequently improve their reading skills): students choose the book, the purpose for reading is made clear, teachers set up a classroom library, which is organised and easily accessible (students are allowed to browse and select books on their own), students can use reading logs (tracing their progress: minutes, pages, books completed) and *bookmarkers* for unfamiliar words. They can also write *wish lists* for books to read in the future. It always helps if teachers connect the content of the book and its ideas to students' prior knowledge and make them recognize and discuss genre and character traits, summarize and identify the author's purpose and the main idea of the book/text.

6 Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that skills connected to self-regulated learning reach way beyond the classroom; namely, by taking control of their own learning and development, students develop self-control, flexibility, creativity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and much more. When students are equipped with such self-regulatory tools, they can be proactive in taking charge of their learning process in order to achieve their desired results of L2 proficiency within the classroom and beyond. Self-regulation is, therefore, a critical component necessary for creating empowered learners, as it is an empowered learner who is a proactive learner, and it is the proactive language learner who learns best (Macaro, 2001). It is true that incorporating such practices into EFL classrooms takes time, effort and commitment; however, since these practices teach students not just how to learn English but how to become successful learners in general, they are definitely worth it.

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TOLERANCE IN SCHOOLS

Tanja Primožič

Abstract

Nowadays tolerance plays an important role in schools in promoting social equality. Besides showing students how to interact with others, tolerance also teaches them how to learn from people who are different from them. Teachers can also promote tolerance, and our role is to lead by example. We can start with subtle changes in verbal and non-verbal communication and make a great difference in order to introduce the ability to accept diversity. The article focuses on several different activities where students learn how to become more tolerant. The activities create a base for an inclusive classroom.

Keywords: tolerance, diversity, ability, willingness, unfairness

1 What is tolerance?

Tolerance is the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with. The concept goes beyond religious, traditional and racial differences. It is about accepting people with gender differences and disabilities too. (*Leskošek, 2005*)

2 How to Integrate Tolerance Into Lessons?

2.1 Seek Diversity in Your Own Life

We can preach the value of diversity, but if we do not surround ourselves with people different from us, ideas counter to ours, and experiences out of our comfort zones, we are not modelling that for our students. One way to seek to be more inclusive is to intentionally follow new sources and websites whose political affiliations are different from yours. Moreover, teachers should make sure to read a variety of books by authors with varied backgrounds. (*Flavin, 2018*)

2.2 Enhance the Curriculum

Teachers can ensure that assignments and lessons encourage students to celebrate their identities and learn about those of their classmates. Even something as subtle as reading children's stories written by diverse authors can offer the impact of new perspectives to your young students. Teachers should expose their students to diverse textbooks with minority protagonists and bilingual books.

Images make a big impression, especially on younger students. Teachers can promote tolerance and inclusivity by featuring pictures of children from different cultures on their posters and in the books they choose for the classroom. In addition, it is crucial to consider different aspects of diversity, like diversity in race, culture, gender, and ability (*Flavin, 2018*).

2.3 Be Quick to Listen

Nothing is quite as powerful as hearing other people's stories. Many biases begin with assumptions. No matter how much experience one has, letting people tell their stories and listening to them can show your students that everyone deserves respect. It is important to spend plenty of time with people from different communities and constantly try to expand their horizons. Listening to students and their families is a huge part of the learning process. Teachers can build a community of diversity by making their classrooms student-centered, in which each voice and emerging opinion is heard and respected.

2.4 Commit to Your Own Ongoing Education

There is always more to discover about people and the ways in which we are diverse. Teachers should develop more skills and empathy, appreciation and listen without judgement. Once we are aware and know about different cultures, then we can develop the right

attitude and skills to manage cross-cultural relationships. Throughout the year, teachers can participate in diversity and inclusion workshops and cultural events. *(Flavin, 2018)*

3 Multicultural Activities With Students

3.1 Schools Around the World

Children are interested in learning more about kids their own age, including what schools look like in other countries. Teachers can set up a school interest center in a portion of their classroom. Then they can add photos, books, videos, and other activities that feature students at school in another culture. Teachers can encourage students to discuss schools in other countries by asking students if they know how children in other countries get to schools and if they know what students eat for their lunch in a different country. Teachers can rotate cultures throughout the year, so students are exposed to many different school experiences from around the globe. By focusing on school, children can automatically relate to the experiences of children around the world. Letting the children experience schools around the world through pretend play is a great way to tackle this important topic of diversity and tolerance at a developmentally appropriate level. *(Brooks, 2017)*

3.2 Diversity Dinner Party

Food is at the center of community in many cultures, so it is a great way to introduce young children to cultural traditions that are different from their own. Teachers can ask students' families if there are any favourite traditional dishes they would like to share with the class. Introducing healthy dishes from a variety of countries that may be different from what children have experienced at fast-food restaurants is one way to explain diversity to students. With this activity, students may at first be afraid of new experiences, and that includes food too. Thus, one of the best ways to introduce an unfamiliar culture is to sample the cuisine. This activity provides a safe way for students to try new foods from other cultures while also giving families a chance to share their personal food culture. *(Brooks, 2017)*

3.3 Hello, Friend!

Greeting one another each morning is already an established part of the preschool routine. Teachers can make it a fun learning opportunity by introducing words and phrases in other languages at circle time and encouraging students to practice by greeting their friends with their new vocabulary words. Furthermore, for older students, teachers can use bilingual books to provide another opportunity to introduce students to new languages. This activity offers first steps in understanding cultural differences and students can recognize that not everyone speaks the same language. Students begin to understand the many different ways people of the world communicate. Moreover, a language is a bridge to understanding other cultures and not a barrier. *(Brooks, 2017)*

3.4 We All Celebrate

Students love a good party. Teaching them about cultural and religious celebrations around the world is a great way to get the students excited about diversity. Teachers can easily add multicultural classroom celebrations throughout the year by choosing one event to celebrate each month. Teachers can use books and online resources to teach students about the importance of each celebration and incorporate relevant music and artwork into the learning experience.

A culture's celebrations can reveal a lot about its deeply held values and traditions. Children will look forward to their monthly party while gaining a deeper understanding of how people around the world celebrate with family and friends. (Brooks, 2017)

4 Conclusion

Teaching tolerance is not as hard as it may seem, and it is crucial for the students to be more open to different cultures. Talking about tolerance and respect with students helps them learn more about other cultures. Teachers should lead by example and give students the opportunity to broaden their horizons when it comes to diversity. Students can learn firsthand that everyone has something to contribute and experience differences and similarities. Therefore, it is important to create learning environments where students can become more tolerant.

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SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES: FROM LESSON PLANS TO LESSON SHAPES

Uwe Pohl

Abstract

Planning lessons in a systematic, structured way which is seen as a basic competence of all teachers. However, with experience, teachers learn to organise their ideas for a lesson much more flexibly. Perhaps it is time to question the sequential, itemised lesson plan formats most teachers have been trained to work with but soon leave behind. This article problematises the issue of lesson planning, particularly trying to help EFL teachers at the beginning of their career. It explores thinking about lessons as shapes and suggests other ideas that are more in keeping with the unpredictability of lesson events.

Keywords: lesson planning, lesson shapes, novice teachers, reflection-in-action

1 Introduction

This article is the outcome of several workshops with EFL practitioners, the latest of which took place at the 2023 IATEFL Slovenia Conference. It is meant as an invitation to rethink lesson planning and has been written particularly with trainees and novice teachers in mind. It is situated within the ongoing debate on whether language lessons should be designed “to achieve pre-selected aims or ... be managed in such a way that the outcomes emerge out of the immediate needs and interests of the learners” (Thornbury, 2023, p. 11). I will first reconsider the purpose and practice of using formal lesson plans and why they are problematic. Then some practical ideas and formats will be suggested that involve a shift of perspective in planning and allow for greater flexibility when implementing one’s plans. In the process, I will draw on the experiences and views of my own teacher trainees as well as the ideas of other EFL practitioners regarding alternatives to conventional lesson planning.

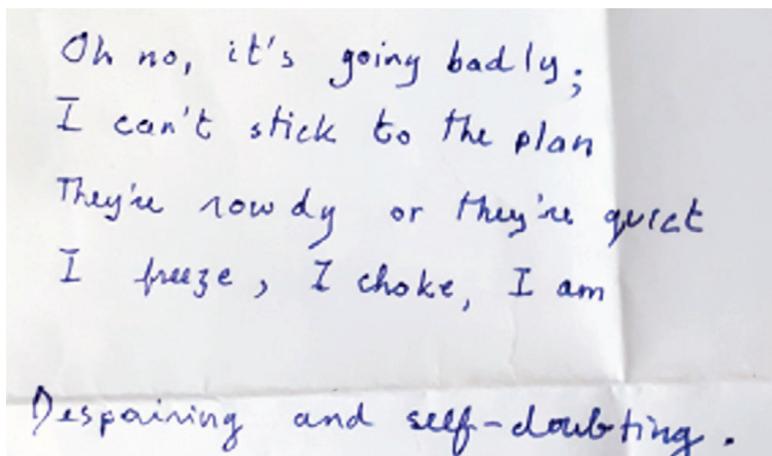
2 What is Wrong With a Detailed Lesson Plan?

Trainee teachers are taught that conscious, structured lesson planning is fundamental to their success in the classroom. This rests on the assumption that such “planning” is essentially a thinking skill. It is imagining the lesson before it happens and involves prediction, anticipation, sequencing, organizing and simplifying” (Scrivener, 2005, p. 109). In the process, trainees are often expected to produce a table like this:

Stage	Procedure (What the teacher will do)	Tasks (What the students will do)	Interaction	Aims	Time
1	Draw a picture on the board of a landscape (forest, villages, river, hills, etc.). Elicit vocabulary.	Name items on picture. Note and practise items that are new. Pronounce lexis with correct stress.	T & Sts	Learners will understand and be able to use lexis necessary for the story in Stage 3.	6 mins
2	Use cut-out paper character (and sticky tape to attach to board) to elicit details of a story of a walk through the landscape, especially including prepositional phrases	Tell and remember story of the walk. Practise saying prepositional phrases.	T & Sts	Learners will learn and practise prepositional phrases.	12 mins

Fig. 1 Scrivener, p. 122

There may be some merit to drawing up a detailed lesson plan. However, I have always wondered about the mismatch between a step-by-step lesson plan and the reality of an unfolding lesson event. It is perhaps telling that one of the poems submitted to the recent Slovenia conference poetry competition also alluded to this dilemma:



As Maley & Underhill (2012) put it, unpredictability is not something to be controlled but to be expected because it is "the default position in the teaching/learning context" (p.5). Knowing this, few experienced teachers see lesson plans as convergent structures. For example, when asked how they would finish the prompt "A lesson plan is like ...", the teachers participating in this conference workshop chose metaphors like the following: "a puzzle, a garden, a blueprint, a place full of beautiful bugs or the road less taken". In other words, they too, accept and embrace the open-endedness and uncertainty of any classroom encounter and know that "there is no right way to plan a lesson" (Aylett, 2015, p. 52).

Sadly, many beginning teachers are told otherwise, even though they feel the incongruence between formal planning and the dynamic of a lesson early enough. Frequently, their frustration is expressed as a feeling of being artificially constrained, even straight-jacketed. This is because they feel obliged to focus on the lesson plan rather than the students and are unable to respond to the classroom situation as it evolves. In the words of one of my trainee teachers:

"I didn't know how to compose dynamic classes, where the tasks are diverse and there is smoothness and flow between each section of the lesson. In the beginning, I planned everything for every second of the class. But when it came to the actual class, if an exercise wasn't working – I couldn't adapt it to the actual situation, so the whole lesson felt off and forced."

To be fair, some standard training materials do mention alternatives to formal lesson plans. However, suggestions like taking *the jungle path* (no preparation at all) are hardly helpful. More importantly, a powerful image that training in formal lesson planning tends to leave many trainees with is that of following a kind of road (map) for getting to some aim or objective:

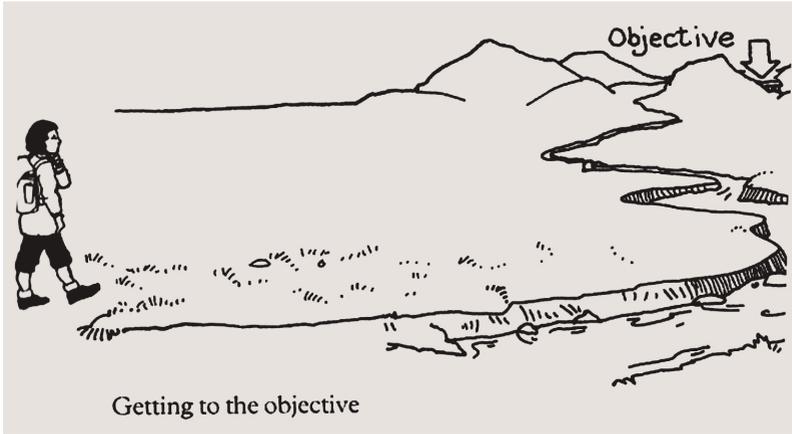


Fig. 2 Scrivener, p. 122

For at least two reasons, this is problematic. First, metaphors are concepts we live by; that is, our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, p. 1). Once they have taken root, such conceptions are not just pervasive but also hard to change or get rid of.

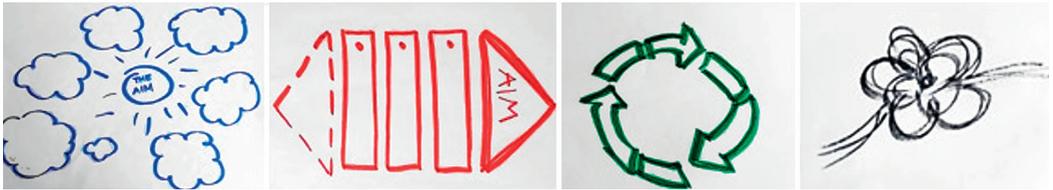
Second, an important dimension is left out of the picture, one that is central to making any plan or design *work* in real time, that is, the actual teaching situation. Another trainee of mine alludes to this dimension when he says: “As time went by, I started to focus on the learners: on their pace, mood and questions and after a while I could swap, change or skip exercise immediately during the lesson.” This is actually a very apt description of teacher *presence*, i.e., “a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step.” (Raider-Roth & Rogers, 2006, p. 266)

The ‘best next step’ in a lesson suggests an approximation of what has been planned rather than an implementation. It is the result of what Schön (1983, p. 76) called reflection-in-action or “a reflective conversation with the situation”. For some teachers, this usually comes with practice and experience. However, to help especially novice teachers in the process of acquiring such presence, we need a different way of planning and a reconceptualisation of our planning tools.

3 What Are Our Alternatives? From Lesson Plans to Lesson Shapes

The main shortcoming of conventional lesson planning formats seems to be that they represent a *linear* conception of lessons and lesson plans. Instead, as pointed out by Foord (2014, p. 4), we would need a *global* approach that, rather than implying a steady movement in the pursuit of lesson aims, emboldens teachers to “work around them.” In practice, such ‘working around’ would mean envisaging a flexible arrangement of classroom activities while not losing sight of more strategic communicative aims. As pointed out by Weiyang & Weicheng (2017), a global quality of thinking, concentration on learning process design and a wide range of methodological repertoire tend to be the hallmarks of expert teachers. However, problematising this issue and sensitising student teachers to different lesson visualisations clearly has a place in the lesson planning modules of initial teacher education programmes.

With this in mind, some participants in the Slovenia Conference workshop discussed and visualised ideas for how this approach to lesson planning might be translated into a lesson *shape* that could serve as the basis for designing alternative planning tools. Here are some of the shapes that were suggested:

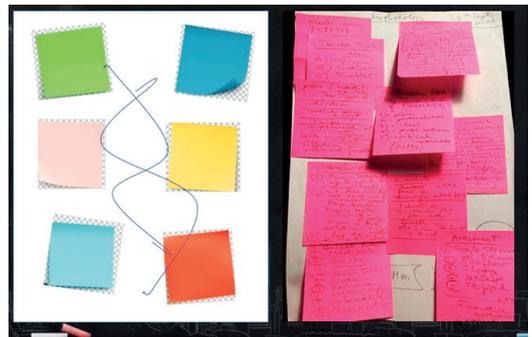


It would take more time and thinking to develop these ideas into practicable instruments, yet some key features of lesson plans that start with lesson *shapes* are already noticeable:

- a flexible, non-hierarchical arrangement of individual lesson components;
- all elements of the lesson are held together by a principle or main focus;
- multiple directions of a lesson movement are considered.

4 Tips From the Chalkface: What Experienced Teachers Recommend

I find it heartening that these initial ideas are quite similar to actual lesson plan formats seasoned EFL practitioners already use. For example, the *post-its* based structure shown below is one that Price Bea, one of my colleagues, has shared with me:



At our conference workshop, another group of participants also chose to formulate some practical Dos for novice teachers that would make their lesson planning less restrictive. I have added their suggestions to my growing collection of similar “tips from the chalkface”:

- Less will be more: do not overload the plan or over-plan.
- Make the most important bits of your lesson plan extra visible: highlight and make keywords BIGGER.
- Have a plan B (i.e., mark activities options) and include extra tasks.
- Use time *estimates*, e.g., 5-8 min, to allow for slippage.
- No matter how far you get in your plan, have an idea ready for how to make the class feel complete or rounded.
- Plan in reflection periods or moments when you can pause and decide how to move on.
- Feel free to ignore or adapt – plans are just *guidelines*.
- Create a very short version, skeleton of the lesson plan.
- Experiment with minimal information in the form of post-its or wrist memos.
- Just make sure you have got the main (conceptual) idea of the lesson in your mind – then “burn” the lesson plan.
- Practise at home (in front of a mirror).

As can be seen, some of these recommendations require only minimal modifications to conventional lesson plans, while others encourage bolder changes in content or format. All of them, though, shift our perspective towards an emphasis on the lesson-in-the-making.

5 Conclusion

I would like to finish this article with an analogy. In an interview, Cate Blanchett was recently asked how she managed to transform the enormous amount of learning and preparation she had to do for her role of a master conductress in the film *Tár* into her outstanding performance. This is what she said in response (Unpeeled, 2023):

“Your biggest, bravest moment as an actor is to let your homework bleach away and watch it go down the drain and give over control to whatever happens in the present. And that’s when the magic really happens.”

What Blanchett describes here as a practitioner of art seemingly lies at the heart of preparing any kind of successful performance, including that of *teacher* practitioners. I believe that the shift in thinking about lesson planning that has been outlined here would go some way towards helping teachers do their own magic in the classroom.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA LITERACY: FROM SMOKE SIGNALS TO “INFODEMICS”

Vesna Gros

Abstract

This paper takes the reader from an overview of history of communication to what a minute on the internet means nowadays. It also defines media literacy and offers insight into digital intelligence frameworks, colour emotion guides and the power of images. The second part includes reminders about how to recognize fake news using critical thinking skills. The final part presents the possibilities of creative expression by using transmedia and concludes with food for thought on how media, alongside artificial intelligence, is pushing the limits of what has until recently been deemed impossible.

Keywords: communication, media literacy, fake news, transmedia

1 Introduction

Throughout history, mankind has developed various ways of sharing messages in order to connect, cooperate and communicate with each other. Communication is just as important to us today as it was in prehistoric times. If media illiterate, one is left behind in many respects, from downright banal ones to personally and professionally important ones. The need to communicate has not changed much, but the way we do certainly has. The technological progress in communication is divided into different periods, finally leaving us with the question: 'What's next?' That is why this paper is structured to first offer some historical background on ways of communication before delving into the topics of media literacy and fake news. Since the paper is aimed at teachers of learners of all ages, it also covers ways of making the most of current-day information overload while using it to prompt creative expression and critical thinking.

2 A History of Communication

From a historical point of view, communication started with the primitive use of smoke signals. Then, in the 5th century, the post was first delivered via carrier birds. A whole millennium later, the invention of printing in the 15th century was an important milestone. The wired era was followed with the telegraph and the first telephone. In 1964, Xerox invented the fax machine, which could transmit documents page by page to any fax machine in the world, and with that, we slowly entered the wireless age. The first mobile phones and e-mails were used before I was born. I got my first mobile phone as a teenager in the 1990s - it was a green bulky thing with an antenna, which could not even be used to send text messages. When I say this to my primary school students, they look at me slightly flabbergasted and when I mention the first ICT courses and the DOS system, they get completely lost. Sometimes I explain to them how long it took for the computer to start, how we connected to the internet and waited even an hour to download but a single song.

With the start of the current millennium, a big breakthrough happened with video calls, the move to the cloud, servers, online storage, e-banking, 700 million iPhones sold by 2007, and the rise of social networks. Humans have proven that there are no limits when it comes to advancing the methods with which we communicate. Personally and professionally, we are constantly embracing new interactive technologies in order to move forward – to simplify our lives in a more convenient and intelligent way. Today's innovative communication platforms, such as text, voice, video and end-to-end cloud services, easily enable this goal of efficient and effective contact. As our connectivity needs evolve and technology continues to expand, we can only humbly look back through the history of communication as we know it.

The progress of communication is highly exponential. A minute on the internet today is something completely different from what internet users were used to only a few years ago. According to statista.com (2023), there are 231.4 million emails sent, \$90.2 million cryptocurrency purchased, 5.9 million searches conducted on Google, 2.4 million snaps shared on Snapchat, about 28.000 subscribers watching Netflix and 500 hours of content

uploaded on YouTube in only a single minute. Industry is not what it used to be either – steam power and assembly lines were replaced by automation, computers and electronics long ago. Nowadays, cyber systems, networks and the Internet are taking over. If one does not follow the progress, they can easily be left behind – even if they are merely blue-collar workers. Therefore, I believe it is very important to foster media and ICT skills from an early age and this is where the school should and has to step in.

3 Media Literacy

Media and information literacy is one of the key competences for facilitating learners' digital competence. This means that students should be able to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in different formats on different platforms and react to them accordingly. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate learning activities, assignments and assessments, which require learners to recognize the need for information and consequently be able to search for data online. Therefore, they need to be equipped with search strategies and the ability to critically assess the quality and reliability of the information they find. Furthermore, students are supposed to be able to organize, store and use the information they retrieve, taking into consideration ownership rights and citation rules (Redecker, 2017, p. 78).

There are four core types of media literacy: visual, information, digital and emotional literacy. Visual literacy is basically the functional literacy of decoding and understanding the information presented in timetables, infographics, statistic reports, etc. On the other hand, students are also expected to be able to analyse and synthesise information by creating their own charts, graphic organizers and infographics. Canva and Easelly are just two of many free online tools that can be used in class for that purpose.

Information literacy means that we are able to recognize the need for information, that we know how to find information, critically assess the sources and the reliability of the found information, and then use and spread it or react to it. In connection with that, I will devote a special section to dealing with fake news in the continuation of this article.

According to the European Commission's Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (EU, 2019), digital literacy means the ICT competence in its most traditional sense. On the one hand, it is all-encompassing, defined as "confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society; /.../ a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes." On the other hand, it is the downright basics of dealing with ICT equipment in the technical sense, and since teachers often observe how the so-called digital native students cannot seem to properly start or shut down a computer (for instance, they forget to turn on the computer screen and claim the computer does not work), we can again see how important it is.

Lastly, I would like to touch upon emotional intelligence in connection with media literacy. It is important to recognize emotional reactions to images and information, to detect

possible hidden intentions, to understand or be aware of how information can affect people’s emotions and moods. Colours also play an important role here. Yellow, for instance, is associated with optimism and warmth, red is bold, whereas blue often signifies intelligence and trustworthiness (Cao, 2015). You can notice how well thought through colours are if you just take a quick look at the design of the app icons on your phone.

Nowadays, media literacy reaches beyond the four subcategories mentioned above. Digital identity, use, safety, emotional intelligence, communication, literacy, digital rights, intellectual property, data processing and analysis, content creation, creativity, etc., make media literacy sound almost all-encompassing. A few decades ago, teachers and parents expressed concerns about the violent content on TV, an unhealthy lifestyle, and the deterioration of eyesight. Today, we talk to students and children about the impact of social networks and fake news, but also about creative expression, critical thinking and lifelong learning.

4 Fake News

The spread of ubiquitous fake news has brought an even greater need to teach media literacy and talk to students about how to approach the content they meet online. Namely, freedom of press does not prescribe media to be high quality and/or accurate and kind. In addition to that, freedom of speech is often used as an excuse to publish or post practically anything. Therefore, it is, in fact, very challenging to decide what is and what is not real and relevant news.

I admit, I myself am sometimes unsure about where and which news I should absorb. There are many types of inaccurate news (disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, flawed and biased news, etc.) that are not the same as fake news. “Becoming media literate is work.

6 WAYS TO EVALUATE INFORMATION					
E	S	C	A	P	E
EVIDENCE	SOURCE	CONTEXT	AUDIENCE	PURPOSE	EXECUTION
<p>DO THE FACTS HOLD UP?</p> <p>Look for information you can verify.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Names Numbers Places Documents 	<p>WHO MADE THIS, AND CAN I TRUST THEM?</p> <p>Trace who has touched the story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authors Publishers Funders Aggregators Social media users 	<p>WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?</p> <p>Consider if this is the whole story and weigh other forces surrounding it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current events Cultural trends Political goals Financial pressures 	<p>WHO IS THE INTENDED AUDIENCE?</p> <p>Look for attempts to appeal to specific groups or types of people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image choices Presentation techniques Language Content 	<p>WHY WAS THIS MADE?</p> <p>Look for clues to the motivation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The publisher’s mission Persuasive language or images Moneymaking tactics Stated or unstated agendas Calls to action 	<p>HOW IS THIS INFORMATION PRESENTED?</p> <p>Consider how the way it’s made affects the impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Style Grammar Tone Image choices Placement and layout

There’s no way around that.” (Kassinger and Kenneth, 2018) Students are often not even aware of the fact that they are targeted and bombarded by fake news. Teachers can use the following concise chart as an introduction to the topic or hang it in a visible place in the classroom as guidelines for avoiding fake news. (Kassinger, 2018, p. 236)

There are also many online fact-checking sites that fight and debunk fake news (for instance, Snopes, Poynter, Politifact, Tineye), but little does this help if teenagers follow the world news on TikTok and form their views and opinions of the world based on what celebrities and influencers say or post. Another problem with following current affairs on social networks is that their algorithms automatically filter the content each individual sees based on their previous searches, likes and clicks, which results in information bubbles and a higher probability that one will encounter fake, sensational, or negative news if they have previously been exposed to them. Teaching and embracing media literacy can not only help break this vicious cycle but also avoid the ultimate danger of deeming all news as fake.

5 Transmedia and Creative Expression

To finish on a more positive note, I would like to stress that the different media forms teachers and students have at their disposal today also enable new ways of creative expression. Transmedia is just one of the emerging art forms where different media intertwine. For example, content is presented in a different way or placed in a new frame of mind; Michelangelo's painting from the Sistine Chapel becomes a manga image; digital reality merges with actual physicality in the Pokemon GO game, etc.

Advocates of CLIL can take advantage of using transmedia in class. An art teacher might find an online creation of Jackson Pollock images an engaging student activity (jackson-pollock.org), or a music teacher might have fun recording new original musical pieces with students while learning about different male and female singing voices with the Blob Opera experiment, which was brought to life by Google Arts and Culture, alongside many other interactive projects with the aim of preserving the world's art and making it accessible online.

Soon generative artificial intelligence will be able to produce original, creative and artistic content. Robot Sofia, which was granted citizenship in Saudi Arabia in 2017, was taught how to draw and is now making sketches while travelling to different conferences and attending events at the UN. ChatGPT, the first open-source artificial intelligence, can produce new original theatre plays or movie scripts with scenarios of any kind in a matter of seconds. Some fear that this will make human knowledge and original ideas superfluous. I disagree – I believe and hope it will only help us get better and take human creativity to a new level. My advice to teachers and everyone else is to keep calm and research media and digital literacy alongside the latest available technology.

6 Conclusion

Using media and digital literacy and embracing different media is a wonderful tool for fostering critical thinking, analysing and looking at objects and events from different perspectives whilst being critical and self-critical. Topics we cover and conversations we as teachers have with our students are huge contributors to lifelong learning. We should all bear in mind that the content in itself is not knowledge. With the overload of data, the

cost of content has fallen to zero, while the worth of knowledge will keep increasing. I believe that one of the key ingredients of knowledge today is media literacy. Therefore, teachers have a responsibility to keep pace with what is happening in the field of media and digital literacy in order to raise future generations properly, especially with the current “infodemics” and the lack of ethics and regulation in artificial intelligence use.

Schools in Slovenia are working on this, and it is slowly producing results. The Ministry of Education has included ICT and media literacy skills in the renewed curricula of all school subjects. Now, teachers have to embrace technology and vice versa – allow it to embrace them. Some things, like generative artificial intelligence, might seem daunting; however, there is no use hiding it from students because they will get acquainted with it and start using it sooner or later. A teacher’s responsibility is to get them ready and help them become responsible and media-literate users of modern-day technology.

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BE BRAVE: BRING POETRY TO LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

Victor Kennedy

Abstract

In *Modern Poetry in English*, a first-year second-cycle course at the Faculty of Arts, Maribor, students read poems aloud in class, and they write poems modelled on “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” by Wallace Stevens, and “anyone lived in a pretty how town” by e.e. cummings. Learning by doing instils motivation and confidence, and by writing poetry, students acquire an intimate understanding about the ways poetry works. Bertrand Russell wrote in 1922, “Education should have two objects: first, to give definite knowledge—reading and writing, languages and mathematics, and so on; secondly, to create those mental habits which will enable people to acquire knowledge and form sound judgments for themselves. The first of these we may call information, the second intelligence.” By reading poems aloud, students come to appreciate the sound and feel of the works; it helps them get into the mind of the characters, and the authors, and it brings the poetry alive; by writing poems, sharing them by reading aloud, and critiquing each other’s work, students gain a better ability to form sound judgements by themselves than merely by reading critics.

Keywords: creative writing; poetry; instilling motivation

1 Introduction

In *Modern Poetry in English*, we begin studying poetry the traditional way, by analysing examples taken from the poetic canon using concepts such as figurative language, prosody, theme, style, and theoretical tools such as reader response theory, New Criticism, deconstruction, psychological, feminist, gender and cultural studies analysis. Patrick Dias criticizes the limitation of the study of poetry to these approaches, however, in an excellent analysis entitled “How and Why Does Poetry Matter? And What Do We Do About That?” (2010):

Instead of following a path from basic information (difficult words, references, background information) to the key issues the poem addresses, readers need to be communing with the poem as a whole, sounding and hearing the words, attentive to the feelings they stir in us, the images that take us unawares. (p. 23)

Dias emphasizes that “Reading and responding to a poem is a creative act” (p. 24).

How can we help our students to understand reading as a creative act? We learn best by doing; students at the University of Maribor write poetry, discuss their work with each other, and publish their works in the student-run creative writing journal *Crumbs*. “Doing” involves more than just writing poetry, however; poetry is meant to be read aloud, performed, and in many cases, sung. Writing poetry should not be a solitary activity; it comes alive when it is shared. We read our poetry aloud to our classmates, and we perform poems written by other authors in character, following the clues on the printed page, much like stage directions in drama, to hear and reproduce the voices of the characters who are speaking. We read poetry to understand how other poets see the world, and we want our poetry to help us share the way we see the world with others.

2 Learning by Doing

In a 1999 study, Roger Shank, Tamara Berman, and Kimberli Macpherson describe their research on learning by doing based on what they term Goal-Based Scenarios (GBS) (1999, p. 165). Their guiding principle is that “Experts must have experience in their areas of expertise” (p. 168); by “experience,” they mean “hands-on experience.” One of the important elements of this concept is that this kind of experience provides learners with motivation: “It is important... to create a motivating and sensible context in which the learner will practice the target skills... This is where traditional forms of teaching fail. Commonly, learners do not understand the relevance of what they learn, and the lessons do not apply to an intrinsically motivating goal” (p. 169).

Jann Ingmire describes the benefits of a similar study in science education at the University of Chicago: “Students who physically experience scientific concepts understand them more deeply and score better on science tests, according to a new UChicago-led study” (2015); Peter Ruell describes similar findings in a study conducted at Harvard University: “For decades, there has been evidence that classroom techniques designed to get students

to participate in the learning process produces better educational outcomes at virtually all levels” (2019); the Harvard study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, concludes that, “though students felt as if they learned more through traditional lectures, they actually learned more when taking part in classrooms that employed so-called active-learning strategies” (2019).

Daniel Xerri argues that reading poetry aloud helps to bring it to life for students, in contrast to the analytical reduction to a set of rules and procedures commonly used in schools that often stifles their interest and motivation (2015, pp. 51-52). He goes on to assert that “creative poetry writing should be considered an essential aspect of students’ poetry education” (p. 72). The teaching strategies of learning by doing can, and should, be applied to teaching literature in an English as a Foreign Language class in university and, by extension, primary and secondary schools.

3 Reading Aloud

Many studies have demonstrated the value of reading literature aloud in class, citing improvements in learners’ comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills at the primary (Oueini, Bahous and Nabhani, 2008) and secondary school levels (Dreher, 2003).

In *Modern Poetry in English*, two of the poems we read aloud in class are American poet and professor Kathryn Howd Machan’s “Hazel Tells Laverne” and Scottish poet Edwin Morgan’s “The Loch Ness Monster’s Song.” In the first, students try to reproduce the accent and inflection of the speaker to imagine themselves in the persona of a working-class American cleaning woman:

Hazel Tells Laverne

last night
im cleanin out my
howard johnsons ladies room
when all of a sudden
up pops this frog
musta come from the sewer
swimmin aroun an tryin ta
climb up the sida the bowl
so i goes ta flushm down
but sohhelpmegod he starts talkin
bout a golden ball
an how i can be a princess
me a princess
well my mouth drops
all the way to the floor
an he says

kiss me just kiss me
once on the nose
well i screams
ya little green pervert
an i hitsm with my mop
an has ta flush
the toilet down three times
me
a princess

Students do not need to be particularly brave to read this poem aloud; they can all imagine the humorous scenario of being surprised when a talking frog pops up in the toilet. However, acting out the indignation in Hazel's voice as she complains to LaVerne really brings the scene to life, and it takes a bit of prompting and practice before they can truly "let themselves go" and scream "ya little green pervert"!

In "The Loch Ness Monster's Song," reading the poem gives students the chance to inhabit a very different kind of narrative voice:

Sssnnnwhuffffll?
Hnwhuffl hhnwfl hnfl hfl?
Gdroblboblhobngbl gbl gl g g g g lbgf.
Drublhaflablhafubhahgabhaflhafi fl fl – gm grawwww grf grawf awfgm graw gm.
Hovoplodok – doplodovok – plovodokot-doplodokosh?
Splgraw fok fok splgrafhatchgabrlgabrl fok splfok!
Zgra kra gka fok!
Grof grawff gahf?
Gombl mbl bl –
blm plm,
blm plm,
blm plm,
blp.

Most students are reluctant to read this poem aloud at first, but after the instructor reads the first few lines, they realize that a) there is no way to do it wrong, and b) roaring like a monster in class can be fun.¹

Reading any genre of literature aloud helps students to understand and experience the world from another's perspective; it also helps them to develop their own voices when they want to communicate their own thoughts and feelings to others.

¹ It helps, but is not absolutely necessary, if the instructor can do an authentic Scottish accent.

4 Writing from a Model

Homework assignments in the course do include the traditional analysis of canonical poems, but a very important exercise is to write their own poems. Creative writing is easier when a structure is provided, so in addition to writing short poems like haikus, students write parodies in the style of famous examples, such as Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (1923):

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

One of the most critically-acclaimed Modernist poems, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” dispenses with most of the traditional structural trappings of the poetry of

previous generations, most notably rhyme and regular meter, focusing instead on figurative language, including imagery, symbolism, and metaphor. This focuses the reader’s attention on its theme and content.

Students were assigned the task of writing an original poem entitled “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a ____ (fill in the blank),” using Stevens’s poem as a model.² The choice of theme was left to the students; the poem required them to look at a topic of their choice from several perspectives, using comparisons, contrasts, and analogies. One student wrote about books:

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Book

I

Wake up brain!
It’s time for a nutritious breakfast.
But not before the real breakfast.

II

Only words can describe how I truly feel.
Only words, huh?
Hm.

III

Corona in China, corona in Europe, corona in the White House,
corona in my neighbor’s backyard, corona in my sudden snee- Achoo!
Gosh! I just hate reading about it.
I hope it doesn’t make it to the history books.

IV

Remember, remember the 5th of November?
Curses!
I should have written it down.

V

I have an idea.
Quickly!
Write it down, before you forget it.

VI

A man dies,
But his mind lives forever.
That is if he writes it down, of course.

² In the era of ChatGPT, instructors will need to find ways to ensure that the students are writing their homework assignments themselves.

VII

My lemonade stand hasn't gotten me anywhere.
And the stock market isn't doing well either.
Maybe I should write a book.

VIII

A book about memes perhaps.
Oh wait!
It already exists.

IX

"I know that I know nothing" said a wise man once.
"Then ya better start reading, old man"
I replied pretentiously.

X

Dear Shakespeare,
Your message has truly inspired me.
Unfortunately, you can't receive mine.
P. S. Maybe someone else will in the future.

XII

Every time and place leave behind their mementos.
Even today history is being written
In 13 perspectives.

XII

And I always thought to myself:
"Is God all-knowing because he owns a library of all of the books in the world?"

XIII

At least my mind falls into the quietness of the night
After I turn a few pa-
Zzzzzzzz-

(Denis Režonja)

Denis's poem ranges from the general to the particular, from personal experience to stories in the news, with allusions to history, literature and philosophy. This is a polished, accomplished, intelligent poem, well worth reading and contemplating.

5 Conclusion

William Wordsworth, one of the greatest poets in the English language, wrote in one of his best-known poems, "My Heart Leaps Up," one of the most-often quoted lines in English: "The Child is father of the Man." The poem exhorts its readers to try to maintain the creativity, curiosity, and confidence of childhood into adulthood. This is not easy, with all

the challenges and setbacks we face in everyday life, but one way we, as teachers, can help our students do it is by giving them opportunities to master difficult tasks, such as writing poetry. Many students have told me, “Oh, I cannot do that!” Some time in their educational journey they have been led to believe that only the great poets can do it, so there is no point in even trying. By actually doing it, however, and with positive feedback from their classmates and teachers, they will come to know that they can.

Many studies show that learning by doing has definite advantages over learning by rote memorization of texts and rules. Learning by memorization may well be a time- and energy-efficient way of passing exams, and learning by dissection into components such as rhyme, meter, and figurative language may be a good way to pass term essays, but learning by doing provides a much deeper and more lasting way of mastering a subject, with the added benefits of building confidence, perhaps even a love of the subject, in students.³ These are qualities that will give future students not just teachers, but the best teachers.

6 Venues Where Students Can Publish Their Poems and Other Creative Writing:

Časopis Wordsworth. <https://sites.google.com/view/words-worthslang/>
(online writing journal published by students at the University of Rijeka, Croatia)

Crumbs Student Magazine. <https://online.fliphtml5.com/coeuw/ecej/#p=1>
(online writing journal published by students at the University of Maribor, Slovenia)

Literary Cocktail Magazine. <https://www.literarycocktailmagazine.com/>

Lothlorien Poetry Journal. <https://lothlorienpoetryjournal.blogspot.com/>

Syncopation Literary Journal. <https://syncopationliteraryjournal.wordpress.com/>
(online writing journal published at Humber College, Toronto, Canada)

Tint Journal. <https://www.tintjournal.com/> (online creative writing journal for speakers of English as a second language published by students at the University of Graz, Austria)

Trouvaille Review. <https://www.trouvaillereview.org/>

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³ Many students at, and graduates from, the Department of English and American Studies department of the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor have published short stories, novels, poems, and books of poetry.

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