ENGLISH TEACHING professional



Issue 100
September
2015

The Leading Practical Magazine For English Language Teachers Worldwide

What do teachers need to know about language?
Scott Thornbury

It's all in the game
Ken Wilson

What are teachers *really* for?
Jeremy Harmer

In the students' hands
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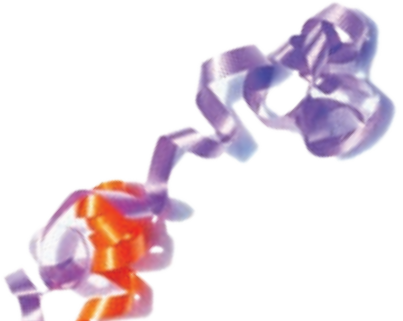
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Editorial

Welcome to the 100th issue of ET*p*! You will see from the cover photo that the design of the magazine has changed a little over the years (you can read what Christine Cox, our talented designer, says about ET*p* on page 7). What you probably can't see under all those streamers is that one of our featured articles in Issue 1 was by Jeremy Harmer – and here he is again in Issue 100.

I would like to say an enormous thank you to all the people who have contributed (and continue to contribute) articles to ET*p*. As we never tire of saying, this is your magazine, and you make it what it is.

In addition to Jeremy, in this issue we welcome back a host of teachers and writers who have supported us so generously throughout our history, including Scott Thornbury, Ken Wilson, Jamie Keddie, Alan Maley, Tessa Woodward, Louis Rogers, Chris Roland, Nicky Hockly and Russell Stannard.

As well as these stalwarts, we feature some new faces: Iain McInally, who vividly describes his experience of teaching English in an Italian jail, and Gary Hewgley, who uses gaming strategies to enhance teacher training.

As we celebrate this 100th issue, we also look forward to the next 100. I hope that you will continue to enjoy reading ET*p* and that you will feel motivated to contribute *your* ideas to future issues.



Helena Gomm
Editor

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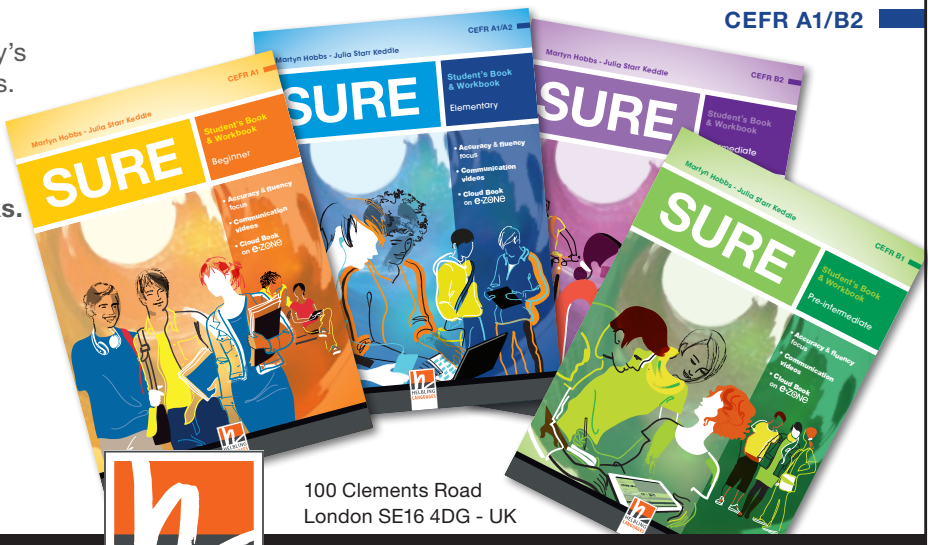
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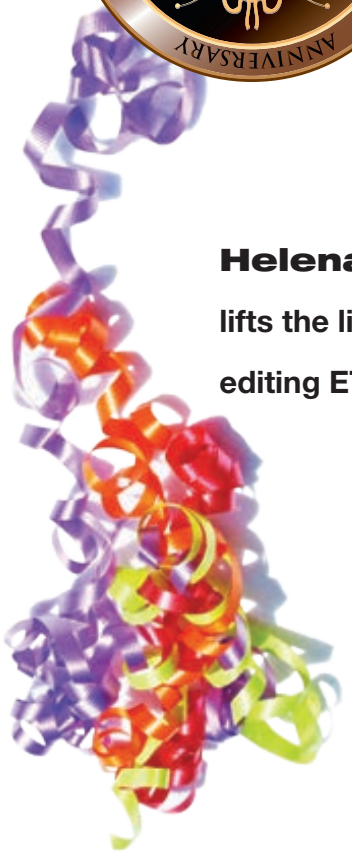
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Looking back, looking forward …





Helena Gomm lifts the lid on editing ETp.

As the hundredth issue of ET*p* is something of a milestone, I hope readers will forgive me for taking the main feature for myself this time, in order to share with you some of my feelings on reaching this point in the magazine's history.

The process

Editing ET*p* has many rewards, which I will describe below, but first let's take a look at the process.

The content of each issue of the magazine consists of a combination of both material that I have commissioned and unsolicited articles, which arrive on an almost daily basis from all over the world. Every unsolicited article that is submitted to us is given a number and added to a chart. This enables me to keep track of what decision has been made on each one, the number of the issue in which the successful ones were published, which articles have already been accepted but are still waiting for publication, which have still to be assessed, etc. I have just added number 1,729 to this list – an article on improvisation and storytelling by David Heathfield.

Each article that arrives is read and considered carefully. That's an awful lot of reading! I calculated this morning that of the articles that have already been assessed, 64% have been published, which I believe is quite a high percentage within the editorial world, and this is in line with my feeling that everyone who writes to us has something to say – and usually something that is worth saying. The way in which that 'something' is expressed may need a little work, but I see that as an important part of my job. No one is turned away because of the standard of their English or because their article doesn't match a prescribed formula or template.

The rewards

Editing this magazine has many pleasures, and one of these is getting messages from a vast community of teachers, working everywhere from a Mongolian yurt to a high-tech purpose-built classroom with an interactive whiteboard on every wall. This makes me feel part of an enormous family of like-minded professionals. Of course, the members of a family don't always agree on absolutely everything, but the ELT community has room for a wide variety of individual opinions on almost every topic, and editing ET*p* gives me an overriding sense that we are, if nothing else, all aiming at the same goal.

An incredible wealth of ideas passes across my desk, and I can't count the number of times I have thought to myself *'I wish I'd known that when I was teaching!'* or *'I wish I could try that out in*

the classroom'. Fortunately, a local language school is sometimes short of staff in the summer months and gives me the opportunity to experiment with some of the things I learn from the magazine. Our editorial consultant, Mike Burghall, who teaches in a prestigious music school in Madrid, also frequently tries out ideas which are submitted to ET*p*, and he reports back on how successful they were. I am painfully well aware that I would have been a much better teacher during my active teaching career if I had read a magazine like this.

One of the greatest satisfactions of editing ET*p* is discovering the pleasure that other people get from seeing their work in print. It gives me a real thrill to get emails from contributors saying how much they liked the way their article turned out, that their bosses were impressed by their article, that they have been given promotion or a bonus because of being published, etc. It is also very encouraging to receive emails from people who have enjoyed reading one of our articles and want to report that they tried out an idea in their own classroom and found that it worked. On the whole, I have to say that I prefer emails that begin: *Thank you, Madam, for imparting a sputnik to the world of English language teaching* to those that begin: *You heartless *X*@*, how could you have published that piece on ...* but we all have to take the rough with the smooth!

Editing ET*p* has introduced me to a wide range of 'interesting' people: a South American nun who sends me lines of poetry and follows these up with increasingly demanding emails enquiring why I haven't published them; several contributors who clearly put their articles through some form of translation software so that even quotations from well-known ELT pundits come out as gobbledygook; someone who thinks that the first ten and a half (the photocopier cut off the rest) items from his ministry's guidelines on teaching English constitute an article ...

ET*p* articles also inspired me to become a *student* again in order to try out some of the learning strategies and techniques that contributors write about. I decided that the subject had to be something entirely new, something that I had never done before. I already had quite a bit of experience of learning other languages, so I chose the piano. Seven years later, I am still playing.



The concerns

One of the difficulties of editing ET*p* is a direct result of its success. The number of contributions submitted to us is increasing, so the task of reading and choosing articles grows bigger every year. Priority always has to be given to getting the next issue ready for the printers, so sometimes there isn't much time left for answering emails and processing unsolicited articles. This means that some people have to wait rather a long time to hear whether we have accepted an article or not, and then again to see it actually in print. I am genuinely sorry about this because I hate to keep people waiting, but it is, sadly, inevitable. Thankfully, most people are incredibly patient, but some are not so. I deeply regret having lost some good articles this way – entirely my own fault for not responding more quickly.

One reason that submissions are increasing is, of course, the result of the tremendous pressure to publish currently being exerted by universities and other educational authorities. For many people, publication can mean the difference between retaining a job or being made redundant, receiving a promotion or staying at the same level, getting a salary increase or not.

I once received an article from someone who said that her tutor had made it a condition of passing a teacher training course that every candidate should get an article published in a teaching magazine. Whether this was actually true, or merely a ploy to apply pressure on ET*p* to accept the article, I never discovered. It seemed unlikely that it would be the case, as most training courses would be finished long before an article had completed the assessment process and been allocated a slot in a magazine, but the prospect that I might be about to receive an article from every trainee on this particular course and others in the future filled me with some trepidation, especially as the expectation seemed to be that I would give detailed feedback and guidance to each writer!

The pitfalls

Another unfortunate bi-product of the pressure to publish has been a marked increase in plagiarism. Readers may have noticed that in Issue 98 we had to print a retraction of an article published in Issue 72. The fact that this example of plagiarism was spotted nearly five years after its publication should be a warning to all potential plagiarists that your sins will eventually find you out! This particular article got through my net, but there are many others that, fortunately, do not. A few weeks ago, a would-be contributor tried to pass off Chapter 10 of *Teaching Reading Skills*

Looking back, looking forward …



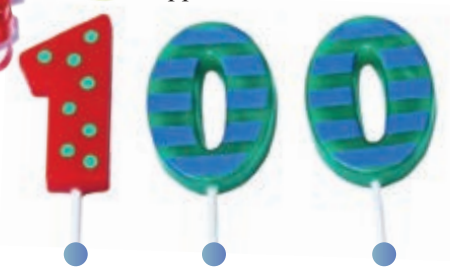
in a Foreign Language by Christine Nuttall as an article which she herself had written for ET*p*. I immediately pointed out that intellectual theft was a very serious offence and that the person concerned was risking her own reputation by attempting to get someone else's work published under her own name. I also alerted several other editors in our field to what had happened (yes, we do talk to each other and compare notes). Later that day, she submitted the same 'article' to another magazine. As a result, nothing submitted by her in future will be accepted by ET*p* and she may well find it difficult to get published elsewhere. Plagiarism really isn't worth it!

Pressure to publish brings problems aside from plagiarism. In the last few years, a host of online companies have been offering publication of people's work – at a price. Many potential authors whose work has been rejected by mainstream publishers seem to have turned to these outfits as a solution. The main issue is one of quality.

A couple of years ago, I was sent a book for review in ET*p*. It was an account of the presentations that the author had attended at an ELT conference, and he was desperate for it to be reviewed because his university had made it clear that he would only be able to retain his job if he could prove that he had published a reputable book. The content of the book was interesting, but it was quite obvious that he had been cheated by the company involved. They had taken his money with the promise that they would edit and publish the material, yet no editorial work had been done at all: the author was Polish and no attempt had been made to correct the mistakes in his English or to edit the text so that it made sense; the back cover alone had five spelling mistakes and the front cover picture was not only inappropriate, but was an image that had been used over and over again for many different books on other subjects.

The upheavals

Several of the major ELT publishers in the UK seem to be going through a process of upheaval, largely occasioned by the drive for digital publishing. When I first started editing ET*p*, most teaching material was found in books. Now the larger publishers are pouring all their money into digital products, and there is much less book publication taking place. However, it has become increasingly apparent that more



emphasis is being placed on the delivery of the material than the content, and staff with ELT expertise are all too often being replaced by those who merely possess IT skills. There has to be something going wrong when someone with the glorious job title of 'Content owner' gives the reason that she is unable to answer a question as 'I'm afraid I don't know anything about content'! I am not saying there is anything wrong with exploring new avenues for delivering material to teachers, but there is a reason why reputable publishers employ good content editors with teaching experience and knowledge of the markets, and cutting them out of the process tends to lead to sub-standard materials. Editors do more than merely check the spelling and punctuation, and there are far too many worksheets that are simply uploaded to the internet with exercises that don't work, texts that are full of mistakes and instructions that make no sense. It is my hope that teachers will be the force that will reverse this process by rejecting style over substance and insisting that content is king.

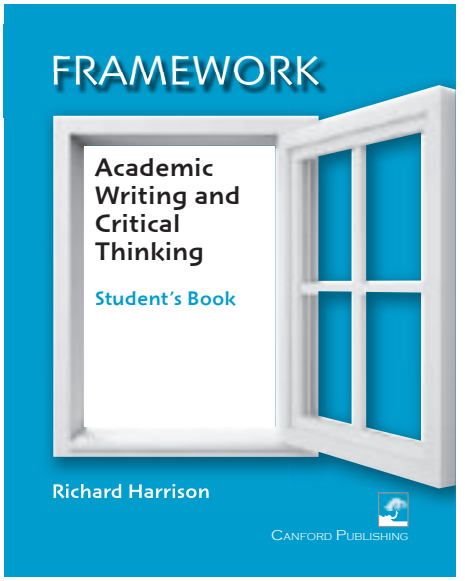
The future

When ET*p* was taken over by Pavilion Publishing in 2010, the company put a lot of effort and investment into creating a new and improved website for the magazine, with a searchable archive of all the articles published in the past, blogs, videos and a bookshop. This has been a great move forward for us and I am delighted that the Pavilion staff, particularly Fiona Richmond, Rob Mair, Andrew Chilvers and Rachel Langdon, have been so supportive. I was also especially pleased when the decision was made to re-establish our annual one-day conference, ET*p* Live! We have now had two of these, both held in Brighton in June, with superb speakers and lots of enthusiastic delegates.

Pavilion have also moved into ELT publishing and are currently soliciting new proposals from prospective authors. *ETpedia*, a compendium of ideas for teachers by John Hughes, a frequent contributor to the magazine, was published earlier this year and has been very well received. More titles are in the pipeline.

Of course, getting ET*p* to its 100th issue hasn't been '100 Issues of Solitude'. There are a lot of people who have made and continue to make ET*p* what it is. Two of them are profiled on page 7. It may seem invidious to single out only two people, but it is a plain fact that they have both been on board since the very first issue (I am a relative newcomer), and ET*p* simply wouldn't be possible without them. They are the designer, Christine Cox, whose talent is only equalled by her patience, and the editorial consultant, Mike Burghall, who is almost always right.

So, it only remains for me to give a big thank-you to all the people who have nursed ET*p* from its very first issue to the present day, and to hope that the magazine will continue to thrive and to reach its 200th issue. Perhaps by then I will have achieved a rather bizarre ambition: to get onto the London underground and see someone on the seat opposite reading a copy of ET*p*.



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Everything is connected



Mike Burghall joins the dots, to help complete the picture.

Christine Cox colours in the spaces between the dots.



What to write? Where to begin? As with most stories, the best way is to start at the beginning …

1996. October. Issue 1 …

We launched ET*p* at a congress in Granada – I live in Spain. Nic Ridley, the big brain behind the magazine, came over from England. The response from teachers was terrific, as if they had all been waiting for it. A lot of teachers eagerly participated in a Multiple Intelligences questionnaire from that first issue.

As the Chinese say: *'Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.'*

Of course, that wasn't really the beginning at all. It had begun years earlier – as an idea.

I was a founding director. Christine Cox was already there as designer. Helena stepped elegantly in later. It is as if she has always been there, with her extraordinary editing skills, but it would be unfair not to mention earlier editors Isobel Fletcher and Susan Norman.

Since then, ET*p* has changed hands a number of times (some for the better, some less so). My current role is editorial consultant.

I also run the English department at a music school in Madrid. The professor of viola is Diemut Poppen. Jeremy Harmer, a keen viola player whom I met years ago, and whom Helena has edited in book form, may well have some of her recordings in his library.

I also edit a series of resource books for teachers with Delta Publishing for Nick Boisseau, another person who was involved in ET*p* at the beginning. One of the first books was the pioneering *Teaching Unplugged* by Scott Thornbury and Luke Meddings. Chris designs the books, too. I often don't have to finish my sentence, and she has already incorporated my suggestion – if she thinks it is any way decent.

Times change ... but some things don't. Since Socrates and Aristotle, we have been told about the importance of education! And teaching and learning are inextricably interconnected.

As the Japanese say: *'To teach is to learn.'*

I have got 20 years older and am still learning. And, most importantly, I have collected two heart-stoppingly wonderful grandchildren on the way.

English Teaching *professional* is younger (and better) than ever.

Allow me to finish my tale, quoting that other great maestro, Winnie the Pooh – so modest (*'a bear of very little brain'*) yet so wise: *'It's not much of a tail, but I'm sort of attached to it.'*

2015. September. Issue 100 …

1996. October. Issue 1 …

As with all new projects, the story starts long before that magic Issue 1 date. My story began with a phone call and an urgent request to come up with some ideas for a publication for ELT professionals that didn't look like a journal. OK …

After many an hour of trying this and that, off I trotted to a meeting to show the team my efforts (always nerve-wracking) with a portfolio full of print-outs, folded and stuck together with double-sided tape, spray mount and all the trappings of something looking decidedly home-made.

Ah, those early days! How far we have come in the last 20 or so years – thanks to the digital revolution.

Back then, manuscripts would arrive in the post on a floppy disk (remember those?). I can't remember the model of Mac I had in those days, but it was one where, if the disk got stuck, you would prise it out with a paper clip (Apple even kindly supplied the hole!).

Page layouts were laid out and printed out. Fed via the fax machine to Mike in Madrid – taking hours to go through. The fax machine was in the kitchen (where else?) and, when not in use, Blossie the cat would use it as a sun bed. These faxed print-outs would then go in the post to Helena.

All photos arrived as hard copy. As did all the adverts. All had to be sized and marked up, then packaged up for the printers (Baskerville Press), along with the Quark Xpress files copied onto many a floppy disk. Baskerville were good to ET*p*. We once supplied a photo for scanning. 'It doesn't look right,' they said. So off someone went to the local library to check. And it was true: the photo had been printed the wrong way round!

From start to finish, the whole process would take weeks. Now, however …

Manuscripts are emailed. Photos are digital. Any queries are googled and answered in 0.256 seconds. PDFs serve as proofs. Final files for print are uploaded into the ether. Whoosh … an issue is born.

Technology may have changed, but the constant has always been the lovely ET*p* contributors. I have read their words, stared at their photos in Photoshop (often deleting some strange object in the background), so to me they feel like old friends. As are Helena (in Hampshire), Mike (in Spain) and Me (in Essex) – who rarely meet. We three and ET*p* are good friends. And I like that.

2015. September. Issue 100 …

Happy anniversary, ET*p*!

What do teachers need to know about language?

Scott Thornbury

questions the what, why and how of language knowledge and transmission.

First, try this quiz.

1 What is the past participle of *underlie*?
a) underlied
b) underlaid
c) underlain

2 What is a relative clause attached to?
a) a main clause
b) a noun phrase
c) a relative pronoun

3 What part of speech is *barking* in *I heard a dog barking*?
a) gerund
b) participle
c) adjective

4 What is the first consonant sound in *jam*?
a) a plosive
b) a fricative
c) an affricate

5 What is the maximum number of auxiliary verbs you can put before the main verb?
a) 2
b) 3
c) 4

6 Which of these is an example of 'preposition stranding'?
a) Who were you talking to?
b) For how long have you lived here?
c) Keep off of the grass.

Answers

1 *underlain* (although the British National Corpus has a handful of occurrences of *underlaid*)

2 a noun phrase, as in *the spy who loved me*

3 a participle, because it is more verb-like than noun-like

4 an affricate, ie a sound that begins as a plosive and then is released like a fricative

5 4, as in *their phones must have been being tapped*, although the occurrence of so many auxiliaries together is extremely rare

6 *Who were you talking to?* ie where the preposition is 'stranded' away from its object (*who*)

What do teachers need to know about language?

Knowledge about language

If you didn't score very well in this test, should you give up your teaching job?

Not really, although if the test didn't at least pique your curiosity, then maybe you should consider a career in banking or catering!

It does seem self-evident, though, that language teachers should know a lot about their subject – language – just as we would expect doctors to know a lot about medicine, and rocket scientists to know a lot about rocket science. Assuming that this is the case (and I will play devil's advocate shortly), the question confronting teacher educators – whose job it is somehow to inculcate this knowledge – is: knowledge about *what*, exactly? And, *how much*? And, for *what purposes*?

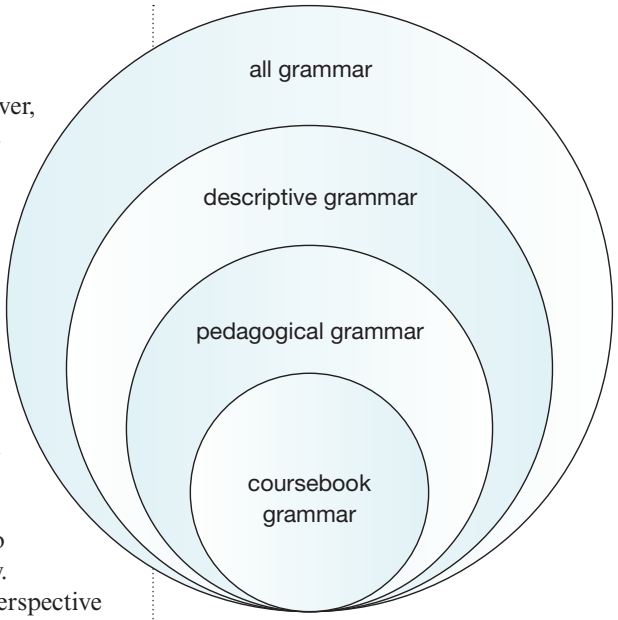
Let's consider the *what*. It's generally agreed that language consists of a number of interdependent systems which, conceived as an inverted pyramid, with the more global systems at the top, might look like the diagram below.

Knowledge about grammar

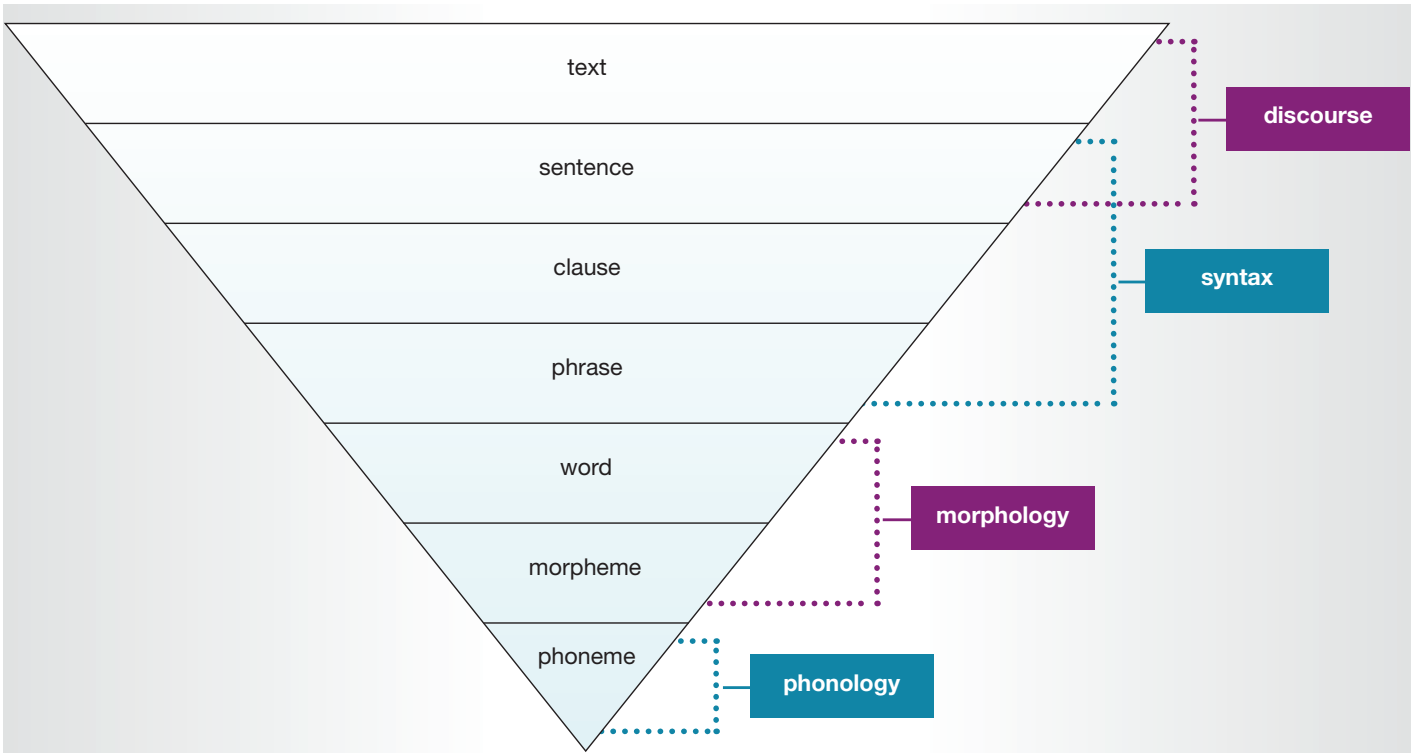
For teaching purposes, however, knowledge about language is traditionally construed as knowledge about *grammar*. The 'language analysis' strand of most pre-service teacher training courses tends to deal primarily with grammar, with some phonology thrown in, and even the grammar syllabus is almost exclusively concerned with features of verb morphology (the so-called tenses) with little reference to syntax, let alone phraseology.

This somewhat narrow perspective on language is, of course, consistent with the notion that pedagogical grammar – the grammar for teaching – is a subset of descriptive grammar. But even the grammar that has been described by grammarians represents only a portion of what occurs in actual language use – just as a map of the night sky is only the visible fragment of a vastly bigger system. Moreover, language is changing, morphing, shifting, fragmenting and merging, even as we speak. No single 'grammar' is capable of capturing this dynamism and complexity.

We could represent these different grammars in the form of embedded circles.



Notice that I've included 'coursebook grammar' as a subset of pedagogical grammar, due to the somewhat narrow focus that general English coursebooks adopt. Compare, for example, the grammar syllabus of your average intermediate coursebook with the index of a pedagogical grammar, such as Michael Swan's *Practical English Usage*. Arguably, then, teachers whose knowledge is coextensive only with coursebook grammar (ie the smallest circle) may not be up to the task of dealing with all the kinds of language issues that arise in the course of teaching.



Which brings us to the question of *How much? The Grammar Book* by Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman purports to cover *'the information that ESL/EFL teachers need in order to address the learning challenges of their students'*, but runs to over 900 pages and weighs in at just under two kilograms. And that's just the grammar. There are (admittedly, not quite as heavy) books on phonology, lexis and discourse. Is there any way your jobbing teacher could ever really get to *know* all this stuff?

The terminology alone is daunting: *anaphor*, *binomial*, *clefts*, *ditransitive*, *ellipsis*, *fricative* … and so it goes on. And then there are the rules, and the exceptions, and the exceptions to the exceptions. An upper-intermediate coursebook, taken at random, lists eight uses of the present perfect and a dozen 'rules' for the definite article.

Moreover, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman argue, language knowledge should not be limited to the rules, but should embrace the *reasons* for the rules. Most rules (and their exceptions) are not arbitrary: there is a good reason underlying them. The student who asks *'Why do we say "The mailbox is **on** the corner" but "I'll meet you **at** the corner?"'* may not be satisfied with the answer *'Well, that's just the way we say it'*. What's more, many so-called exceptions can be explained by reference to the reasons why one choice is preferred to another, or why one choice occurs more frequently than another. Try the test opposite.

What are the reasons that underpin the following rules?

1. State verbs are not normally used in the progressive form (eg *She is liking it; I was believing him*).
2. Regular verbs ending in /p/, /θ/, /k/, /s/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ pronounce the past tense suffix as /t/, as in *ripped*, while those ending in /b/, /ð/, /g/, /z/ and /dʒ/ pronounce it as /d/, as in *robbed*.
3. If the object of a phrasal verb is a pronoun, it normally comes between the verb and its particle, eg *take it off*, not *take off it*.
4. The 'long passive' places the agent in a prepositional phrase beginning with *by*, eg *8½ was directed by Federico Fellini*.
5. *No*-negation (*there are no bananas*) is more common than *not*-negation (*there aren't any bananas*) in writing than in speech.
6. *Yes–No* questions tend to have a rising intonation, whereas *wh*-questions normally have a falling intonation.

Answers

1. Since progressive aspect adds to the verb the sense that the action is dynamic and evolving, and since our likes and dislikes, and our beliefs and knowledge, are normally thought of as fixed (you either like something or you don't), they are less often used with progressive forms.
2. This is simply due to voicing: unvoiced consonants are followed by the unvoiced suffix /t/; those that are voiced (as well as vowels) are followed by the voiced suffix /d/.
3. For reasons of emphasis, new information is usually placed at the end of an utterance. Pronouns often refer back to something already mentioned: they encode given information, hence they are not 'comfortable' in the end position.
4. Again, for reasons of 'end focus', the long passive allows us to put new information at the end of the sentence – assuming *8½* has already been mentioned.
5. This may be due to historical reasons: *no*-negation is older than *not*-negation, and older forms tend to persist longer in writing than they do in speech.
6. A rising intonation expresses uncertainty about *polarity*: that is to say, when we don't know whether the answer is *yes* or *no*, we go up. If we know the answer is *yes* (ie we are certain about the polarity), but we don't know the details, we go down. So, in asking the question *Where are you from?* I know you are from *somewhere* (ie positive polarity) so I use a 'certain' falling intonation. In asking *Are you from Springfield?* I don't know whether the answer is *yes* or *no*, so I use an 'uncertain' rising intonation.

The purposes of language knowledge

So, what *purposes* does language knowledge serve? As suggested above, the ability to answer your students' questions can seriously increase your credibility – and the *inability* to answer them might seriously undermine it! But you'll never be able to answer all of the questions that get thrown at you, so it's worth developing some 'hedging' strategies, such as throwing the question back on the learners, or promising an answer in the next lesson. Many experienced teachers who have adopted such strategies have survived quite well, and without serious loss of face. Indeed, their students may have become more resourceful and less teacher-dependent in the process.

Of course, knowledge of language does come in handy when designing syllabuses, planning lessons and making sense of coursebook material. Combined with a knowledge of the students' first language (more on that later), it can help anticipate problems at the planning stage. And it can help in dealing with learners' errors as they occur 'in flight'. The student who says 'I am living here since six months' might appreciate an explanation that contrasts the way this idea is expressed in English as compared to, say, in her native French. On the other hand, there are many errors that resist this type of explanation, and/or may best be dealt with by explicit correction alone: 'No. *I've been living* here *for* six months'.

In fact, do you *really* need language knowledge for actual teaching? Arguably not. After all, generations of teachers using the Direct Method or an audiolingual approach never made explicit reference to the grammar at all. It was actively discouraged. Why? Because a long tradition of teaching learners *about* the language, ie about its rules and regularities, had produced questionable results. Why not model second language acquisition on first language acquisition instead? That is to say, why not try to replicate the processes by which we learnt our mother tongue – without grammar explanation, without rules, without metalanguage – when learning a second language?

Moreover, language is *not* a subject

What do teachers need to know about language?

in the same way as, say, rocket science is. It's a skill, and, like most skills, might best be acquired through practice rather than through detailed explanation. In fact, detailed explanation may be counterproductive: research into skills acquisition suggests that the longer and more detailed the explanation, the slower the uptake in terms of learning. And the temptation to 'show off' language knowledge, at the expense of providing opportunities to practise it, seems hardly consistent with the goals of a communicative approach. As Tony Wright has pointed out: *'One great danger of acquiring specialist knowledge is the possible desire to show learners that you have this knowledge.'*

Transmitting knowledge of language

More to the point, there is a body of opinion that argues that the kinds of rules found in grammar books have little or no 'psychological reality' for learners. As Bill VanPatten notes: *'What the teacher offers as a "rule" is not what winds up in the learner's mind/brain.'* A case in point is the account that Dick Schmidt recorded in his language learning journal of a lesson in Brazilian Portuguese:

'The class started off with a discussion of the imperfect vs. perfect, with [the teacher] eliciting rules from the class. She ended up with more than a dozen rules on the board –which I am never going to remember when I need them. I'm just going to think of it as background and foreground and hope that I can get a feel for the rest of it.'

Such evidence might be dismissed as the confessions of a bad language learner, but, at the time, Schmidt was a foremost scholar in the field of psycholinguistics. If *he* couldn't handle all those rules, what chance of doing so have our (less academically-minded) students!

Of course, a lot will depend on the context you're teaching in. If, for example, you're teaching very young learners, the use of metalanguage – ie the language *about* language – is unlikely to make a lot of sense. Teaching beginners, too, is probably more a matter of facilitating the acquisition of a critical mass of vocabulary and formulaic language than of transmitting 'facts' about the language.

The goals of the learners will also play an important role in determining how much explicit reference is made to the language systems: those whose aim is to pass exams where they will be tested on this knowledge obviously need to be familiar with it. Nor can we dismiss the learners' own expectations or predispositions when it comes to language learning. Those who come from an educational tradition that prioritises declarative knowledge (ie knowing *that*) over procedural knowledge (ie knowing *how*) will feel short-changed if their teacher appears not to possess, or, at least, not to value, language knowledge.

But equally important, if not more so, is *language awareness*: that is to say, awareness of the way that, over time and space, and from one person to another, language varies and changes, and the way that language, especially a second language, develops in individual learners – their *interlanguage*. Coupled with that, a key component of a language teacher's knowledge base is knowledge of the learner's *first* language. It is quite extraordinary, given the influence that it has on second language learning, that generations of teachers have been discouraged from using, referring to and even knowing much about their students' mother tongues.

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What teachers need to know about language, then, is probably more than coursebook grammar, but a lot less than formal linguistics. As Leo van Lier puts it:

'While appreciating the need for "training in linguistics", I … argue that the knowledge teachers need is not that of theoretical linguistics, prescriptive grammar and formal accuracy, but a knowledge that starts from everything they already know about language, that connects this knowledge to all that their students already know about language, and then builds bridges to deeper understandings of the uses and processes of language in personal, social, academic, and professional contexts.'

In the end, whether or not you make explicit reference to rules and terminology in your teaching, language is what you deal with, and language is inherently interesting. In fact, language teaching brings together two of the qualities that most uniquely define us as humans: language and cultural transmission, ie teaching. If we cease to be fascinated by either, we risk turning our *vocation* into just another routine *occupation*. ETp

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It's all in the game

Ken Wilson gains inspiration from a comedy show.

Like most people who work in ELT, I have attended many courses, talks and workshops which have left a lasting impression on me and affected my own teaching and writing. However, the one event which has probably had the most effect on the way I work took place in 1990. It was a visit to The Comedy Store, a comedy club in central London which features the Comedy Store Players: a group of brilliantly talented improvisers, comedians and comedy actors. The format is an improvised series of sketches, songs and games. There is no script, no set and, at the beginning of the evening, the performers have no idea what is going to happen, beyond a series of game formats which will require the audience to provide them with ideas to inspire what they do.

In one Comedy Store activity, the audience is asked to call out the name of a superhero, a household object and a location. So, for example, the audience might suggest Spiderman, a screwdriver and Mexico City. The six performers then have to improvise a story using these ingredients. One of them acts as the director, pointing rapidly at the others in turn. When the director points at an actor, that person has to continue the sentence the previous one started; sometimes they even have to continue from halfway through a *word*. To make it all more dramatic and exciting, the audience are encouraged to shout *DIE!* if anyone stumbles over their words. That person is then out of the game.

I found the whole event fascinating, and left full of admiration for their work. Then I went back a second time and, although I was still amazed at their imagination and quick-thinking, I also realised that the solid framework of the games made them adaptable for a language-learning context.

Using games to help migrants

Before I talk about the use of these games in an English lesson, let me digress a little to establish more of the historical perspective.

My fascination with the work of the Comedy Store Players led me to do some research on the origins of this way of working. Suffice it to say that the trail led back to one of my heroes, Viola Spolin, who devised the 'Theater Games' system of actor training. However, long before she had anything to do with theatre, she had trained in the 1920s to be a settlement worker: someone whose job was to help new immigrants integrate into American society. All of which provides another link with ELT.

Spolin attended the Recreational Training School (RTS) in Chicago, where she was trained by Neva Boyd in the art of group games, drama and play theory, with specific reference to dealing with young people from areas of social deprivation.

Boyd's innovative teaching strongly influenced Spolin, as did the use of traditional game structures to influence social behaviour in inner-city and immigrant children. Spolin put her training to work as a drama supervisor for the Chicago branch of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This organisation was created in 1935 on the orders of President Franklin D Roosevelt to help the millions of people affected by the Great Depression.

Of course, Spolin wasn't working with actors or fee-paying students but with newly-arrived citizens who had language communication difficulties and a whole lot of other social problems. As often happens, the new arrivals found themselves living in ghetto areas, with all the social unrest that this can entail. Spolin soon discovered that traditional methods of teaching and training were of no use to her in these deprived urban surroundings. Faced with a room full of suspicious new Americans with language difficulties, plus other ghetto inhabitants that the social services had placed in the class because they had no idea what else to do with them, Spolin had to work out some kind of training that could cross the cultural and ethnic barriers and enable her both to communicate with these people herself, and to help them communicate with each other.

She did this by allowing them to play. Building upon what she had learnt from Neva Boyd, Spolin developed a series of games to help the students with 'creative self-expression'. 'The games emerged out of necessity,' she said. 'I didn't sit at home and dream them up. When I had a problem, I made up a game. When another problem came up, I just made up a new game.'

Games and the theatre

Eventually, Spolin decided to go back to her other love, theatre. The techniques she had devised while working at the WPA became the basis of her Theater Games system, which transforms complicated theatre conventions and techniques into simple game formats. In 1946, she founded the Young Actors' Company in Hollywood, and she started training children and young people in performance skills using this system. In 1963, she published *Improvisation for the Theater*, a book which has become a classic reference text for teachers of acting in the US, as well as for educators in other fields. It contains more than 200 games and improvisation exercises which enable the playing to emerge naturally and spontaneously. There are games to dispel the actor's tension, games to 'cleanse' the actor of subjective preconceptions of the meaning of words, games that explore relationships, games of concentration – all areas that actors in training have to deal with. The exercises are, as one reviewer wrote, 'designed to fool people into being spontaneous'.

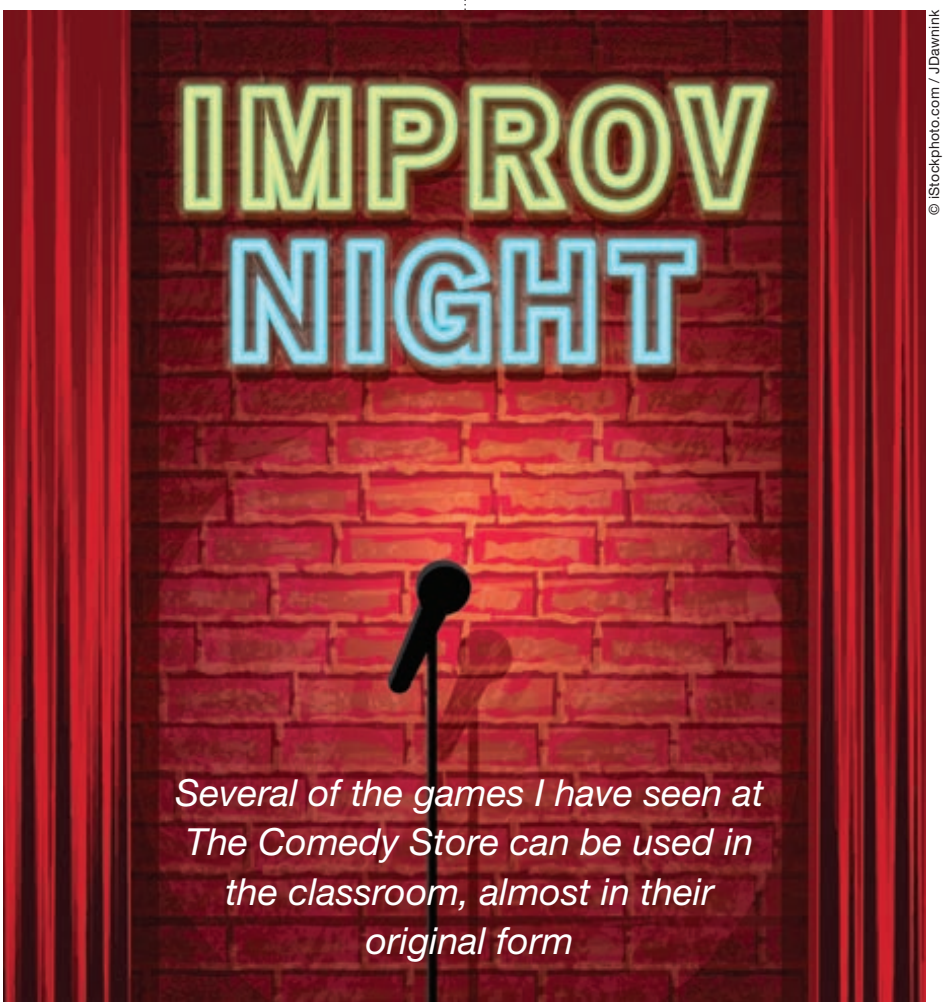
Games and the classroom

As I mentioned above, several of the games I have seen at The Comedy Store can be used in the classroom, almost in their original form. What follows here are two slightly adapted examples, together with three more improvisation games that don't originate in The Comedy Store, but which I have found to be equally effective and fun in the classroom, and which appear in my book *Drama and Improvisation*.

1 Superhero, household object and location

Procedure

- Choose a team of three, four or five students, and ask them to sit in a line at the front of the classroom. Select another student to be the 'director'.
- Ask the rest of the class to call out the name of a superhero, a household object and a location. Choose one suggestion for each (or allow the director to choose).
- Instruct the director to choose one member of the team to start a story which includes all three items.
- The director can change the storyteller at any time by pointing at another member of the team. This might be because the current speaker can't think of anything else to say (in which case, the director should quickly point at someone else). Equally, the director can decide to move on even if someone is in full flow.
- As soon as the next person is chosen, they have to take over from the previous speaker and continue the same story.



Several of the games I have seen at The Comedy Store can be used in the classroom, almost in their original form

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It's all in the game

Note:
It is important that there should be no pressure on any student to say more than they want. The director should be quick to move on if it is clear that someone has run out of things to say. The story can be as long or as short as you think best.

Follow-up
The rest of the class can be asked to make notes on what they hear and to write the story for homework. The students who performed the story are excused homework!

2 Experts

Procedure

- Choose three students and ask them to sit next to each other at the front of the room, facing the class.
- Tell them that they are 'experts'. However, they don't yet know what they are experts in. Invite the rest of the class to choose the experts' area of expertise.
- Let's say that the class chooses 'dinosaurs'. The class then ask questions about dinosaurs to the experts. The experts have to answer, but only say one word of the answer each. For example:

  Question: What was the biggest dinosaur that ever lived?

  Answer:
  Expert 1: *I* …
  Expert 2: … *think* …
  Expert 3: … *that* …
  Expert 1: … *the* …
  Expert 2: … *biggest* …
  etc
- Emphasise that the experts should *make up* any information that they don't know. Whatever they say should be said with conviction, even if it is made up.
- Have only three questions per group of experts, then send those students back to their seats. Choose a new group of experts and a new area of expertise.

Note:
Don't wait for long answers. You can thank the experts and stop the answers as soon as they get a laugh from the rest of the class.

3 Be someone else

Procedure

- Invite a student to come to the front of the class. Say that you are going to ask this person four questions, and that you want them answered truthfully.
- Ask the following simple questions:

  What's your name?
  (Agnieszka.)

  What nationality are you?
  (Polish.)

  Where do you live?
  (Lublin.)

  What do you do?
  (I'm a student.)
- Now tell 'Agnieszka' that you want her to be someone else. Ask the same four questions, but tell her to change the answers to all of them. Don't give her any time to prepare for this. And tell her that you don't want her to be a famous or real person:

  What's your name?
  (Monica.)

  What nationality are you?
  (Irish.)

  Where do you live?
  (Dublin.)

  What do you do?
  (I'm a nurse.)
- Now get the rest of the class to ask 'Monica' about her life. Tell them to be careful and not to ask questions which are too personal. At this point, you can sit down and be part of the class.
- There is no rule about how long this questioning should go on – some students think of amazing questions and answers. However, when the questioning starts to slow down, ask 'Monica' to invite another student to the front of the class and continue the procedure. 'Monica' becomes the teacher. She asks the four questions, twice, then she sits down and the questioning begins again.

4 Actions and locations

Procedure

- For this activity you will need two cardboard boxes, and the students will need two small pieces of paper each.
- Ask the students to write a *location* in the form of a prepositional phrase on one of their pieces of paper. Write *on the table* on the board as an example. Encourage them to use different prepositions that they know: *in*, *under*, *near*, *opposite*, *behind*, *next to*, etc.
- Ask the class to fold their papers and put them in the first cardboard box, marked 'L' (Locations).
- Tell them that they should write an *action* on the other piece of paper. The action needs to be in the present continuous tense, but try not to use explanatory grammatical language when you ask them to do this. Write an example on the board, eg *I'm eating a biscuit*. Indicate that the examples should be in the first person, and there should be a verb and an object. Ask the class to fold these papers and put them in the second cardboard box, marked 'A' (Actions).
- Invite two students (Student A and Student B) to the front of the class, and get them to stand on either side of the table with the two boxes between them. You can give them each an old mobile phone or ask them to mime holding one. Ask them to begin a normal phone conversation: *Hi, how are you?* etc. Tell them that, eventually, Student A must ask *Where are you?* On hearing this question, Student B takes a piece of paper from the 'Locations' box and reads what it says, eg *on the beach*. Student A immediately asks *And what are you doing?* Student B then takes a piece of paper from the 'Actions' box and reads what it says, eg *I'm painting a wall.*
- Encourage Student A to ask for more details, or at least to ask *Why are you painting a wall on the beach?* This is where they have to improvise!
- Student B now asks Student A the same two questions. Student A takes a piece of paper from each box and reads the contents. The two students then give the mobile phones to two other students, who repeat the activity.

5 Fishbowl

Procedure

- For this activity, you will need a cardboard box or similar container – a bowl would be nice, given the name of the activity. The students each need a pen and three small pieces of paper.

- Tell the students that they are going to write three separate conversation items on the pieces of paper. Ask them to write clearly, as other people may have to read what they write.
- Ask them to begin by writing a STATEMENT on the first one. Tell them that you want conversational items, eg *I saw a good TV programme yesterday*, not something you might hear in a speech, eg *The main agricultural product of this country is corn.*
- Ask them to write a QUESTION on the second piece of paper. They may ask if the statement and question should be related, and you can tell them that it doesn't matter whether they are or not.
- Ask them to write an EXCLAMATION on the third piece of paper. If they don't understand what you mean, give an example, such as *Oh no!* but tell them not to use the example you give; they must think of another one.
- Ask them to fold up the three pieces of paper and put them all in the same box. Put the box on a chair or table at the front of the class, and put a chair on either side of it.
- Ask for two volunteers to sit in the chairs. Tell them they are going to have a conversation. First of all, the rest of the class have to provide a context for this conversation, so ask them the following three questions to provide information about the two volunteers:

  Who are these people?

  Where are they?

  What are they talking about?
- The class should come up with a situation that is clear to everyone, eg

  They are neighbours.

  They are standing in the street.

  They are talking about another neighbour.
- Ask the two students to begin a conversation in these roles. Tell the rest of the class that if the conversation begins to slow down, they can shout *Fish!* If this happens, one of the students takes a piece of paper from the box and reads what it says. The two students must then find a way of incorporating this new line into their conversation. Thereafter, the two students take turns to take a piece of paper from the box when the rest of the class shout *Fish!*
- A good rule is that they should be allowed three lines from the box each. If their conversation becomes absolutely hilarious, allow them to continue. Eventually, thank the pair and ask them to go back to their seats. Ask for two more volunteers. Ask the rest of the class to provide new characters, location and conversation topic for them.

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The level of creativity in these activities seems immense, but doing them is actually quite simple. Very often, the students just have to say the first thing that comes into their heads. But the feeling of achievement is tremendous.

Activities like these have other unexpected benefits. Getting students to listen to each other in class is often quite difficult – but not when you are playing games like these. When students embark on these flights of creativity, the rest of the class watch and listen with enormous concentration, as people do when they are watching their favourite comedian or a comic actor in a movie. And the activities are funny, which leads to laughter. And laughter is, as we say in English, a great *aide-memoire*. ETp

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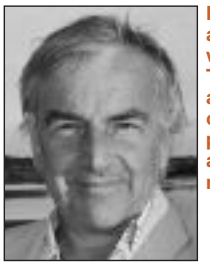
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What are teachers *really* for?

Jeremy Harmer discusses current perceptions of the role and value of the teacher.

Something that has puzzled people for hundreds of years is that humans are often remarkably good at acquiring languages even when a teacher is not present to help or instruct them. After all, as children, we do it with our first (or home) languages, and many people, later in their lives, seem to pick up languages when they go to live in communities where that language is spoken, though it is certainly true that children who move from one country to another appear, sometimes, to acquire the language of their new environment rather more quickly than their parents do. At the same time, educators are conscious of the unpalatable truth that many children are significantly unsuccessful at language learning in government schools where teachers fight their hardest to try to facilitate student success.

As far as school is concerned, a lot depends, of course, on the conditions in which the learning is taking place. Many people argue that class size has a lot to do with success (ie with smaller groups being preferable to large ones) though the evidence for this is not entirely convincing. There are issues of student background and motivation, too; and educators have always wanted to know why some students seem to develop a 'love' of the foreign language, while others do not.

But the real question in all of this is what exactly, if any, is the role of the teacher, wherever the students are learning and whoever they are (what they bring to the class). This is something that has always preoccupied me, and which I had to address yet again when I was writing the fifth edition of my book on teaching methodology, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. As the comments above suggest, the answer is not that simple. In the first place, we have to work out whether our

Something that has puzzled people for hundreds of years is that humans are remarkably good at acquiring languages even when a teacher is not present

job as teachers is to transmit information or whether, in some way, it is our responsibility to encourage our students to find their own learning resources. Are we, to use currently fashionable jargon, 'scaffolders' or 'builders'? Are we what Barry Popik terms the 'sage on the stage' or the 'guide on the side'?

Arguments

Many teachers are fond of quoting from Kahlil Gibran, who wrote in *The Prophet*: *'If the teacher is indeed wise he [sic] does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of his own mind.'* That sounds more like scaffolding than building, more like being a guide than a sage.

Others go further. Sugata Mitra – who has become well known because of his famous 'Hole in the wall' experiment, where slum children apparently learnt how to use a computer (set in a wall at their height) with no help from any instructing adult – argues that the current education system (in a digital age) is outdated and that we don't need it anymore. He imagines SOLEs (self-organised learning environments) where the only role of the guiding adult (who absolutely doesn't need to be a trained teacher) is to ask the right questions and then set groups of four or five students to tackle these questions by crowding around a computer terminal with broadband access and researching the answers. He would surely have agreed with Ivan Illich, who, decades ago, wrote in his book *Deschooling Society* that learning *'is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting'*.

Dick Allwright, to my mind one of the architects of communicative methodology, suggested in similar vein that if, in the context of foreign language learning, teachers focused exclusively on getting students to solve communication problems in the target language, then *'language learning will take care of itself'*.

Recent developments in adaptive learning (see Philip Kerr's many and remarkable postings about this at *www.adaptivelearningelt.wordpress.com*) go even further, since they appear to offer students the chance to learn languages by themselves online, where the software will react to everything they do in, it is sometimes claimed, a more individual and 'thoughtful' way than a human teacher.

It looks, then, as if teachers have had their day. They will be replaced by machines and by highly-motivated students and student groups who will learn on their own, far away from the old-fashioned constrictions of an outdated school environment.

Or will they?

Personal reflections

In one of the books I have most enjoyed reading recently, Gary Marcus, a cognitive psychologist, describes his experiences of learning the guitar 'from zero'. In one passage, he speculates on why we need (music) teachers at all. Among his conclusions are that teachers know things that students don't; that they can motivate students; that they can provide incentive; and that they can help students pinpoint errors and target weaknesses.

If we can persuade students of the need to do something – and give them a powerful reason for doing it – they have a very good chance of succeeding

Like most people, I have had a range of learning experiences over my life, some more productive than others! I have had some fairly unspeakable instructors, but when asked to describe *good* teachers, I always think of two people. One convinced me to succeed because he made me think I could do far better than I thought I could; the other enchanted me by having perfected the art of lecturing (which included judicious amounts of entertainment) – a definite sage!

As a music learner, however, Marcus seems to me to be spot on. My viola teachers – I have had three – have all known much more about viola playing than I do, and have been able to explain this knowledge in ways that I could cope with; they have provided incentive (knowing that a lesson was coming up, I practised quite a lot!); and what they have done spectacularly is to show me where I am going wrong and how I could correct this.

But then I have had other learning experiences, too. Learning how to use new software, for example. I have recently edited my first video, using *Final Cut Pro* software. It has been, to amend a cliché, not so much a steep learning curve as a nearly vertical one. And yet I haven't had any face-to-face teaching. I have relied on instructional *YouTube* videos I have found online and on postings I have searched for, where people explain how to do things. So, in that sense, I suppose I have been a kind of one-person self-organised learning environment.

What all this suggests to me is that, of course, people can learn to do things by themselves, provided that they have a strong enough need or desire to do them (as I did when learning the first steps of how to use *Final Cut Pro*) and provided they have access to appropriate information to help them do it. But also that with some kinds of learning, such as, in my case, viola playing, a teacher has been an absolute necessity. Above all, my teachers' feedback (pinpointing errors, etc) has been critical in helping me progress. And in other situations, teachers with charisma and knowledge have inspired me and deepened my understanding, even while in 'sage' mode.

Fundamental responsibilities

So what, then, as a result of this 'discussion', are teachers really for? I think we have four fundamental responsibilities:

1 Creating the need

If we can persuade students of the need to do something – and give them a powerful enough reason for doing it – they have a very good chance of succeeding. Many of the tasks, games, roleplays and projects that we ask our students to do have exactly this aim. But unless we can bring this 'need' into being – however superficial or profound it is – there is little chance that the students will willingly engage with the task before them, and without this engagement, proper learning is unlikely to take place.

What are teachers *really* for?

2 Giving feedback

In his various meta studies of the literature on learning success, the Australian educator John Hattie shows that teachers' formative feedback makes one of the most important contributions to successful learning. The way we give such feedback (pinpointing errors and weaknesses and helping the students to overcome them) is, I believe, crucial to our students' progress.

3 Creating the right atmosphere

One of the chief responsibilities of a conscientious teacher is to create the right kind of respectful, supportive learning environment for learning to take place. This involves setting the right kind of challenges, practising effective group leadership and ensuring that all are treated equally. This can be achieved when the students are working on their own, of course, but trained teachers are uniquely equipped to make sure things go smoothly and to intervene when things get awkward.

4 Passing on knowledge

It is true that we can find out all sorts of information online (that is, if we have access to the internet). This might suggest that all knowledge resides on some server somewhere. But that is not so. People have wisdom and judgement and accumulated knowledge about many things – in this case, the English language and how best to learn and teach it, and about how to work in groups in classrooms. To suggest that this human understanding in face-to-face environments can be supplanted by online resources doesn't make sense to me. When you have a teacher in front of you, you can tell whether or not to trust them (something which even children can do). This is not the case with online resources.

Effective feedback

Of these four responsibilities, the one that I most want to know more about is how to give effective feedback, since, as will have been obvious above, I believe this is a vital role for teachers in classrooms – and especially when dealing with student writing.

But what exactly *is* the nature of successful teacher intervention in a student's learning? Teachers on training courses learn several different techniques for showing their students that they have said or written things correctly or incorrectly. Sometimes they say 'very good' when students say something correctly, or they raise their eyebrows when they hear something less satisfactory.

Of these responses, 'very good' may be completely unhelpful since, as Jean Wong and Hansun Zhang Waring point out, students often don't know what they are being congratulated for, and when said with a typical falling intonation 'very good' closes off all further conversation! In the same way, a lot of written feedback seems, in that old English phrase, to be 'closing the stable door after the horse has bolted'.

> *Our students want to know how well they are doing or have done, but they also need our intervention to help them and motivate them to do better*

Perhaps, instead, we could think more of feedback as some kind of 'follow-up' – what Richard Cullen called the 'F-move'. In this scenario, the point of feedback is to move forwards, not concentrate on what has gone before. Instead of saying 'very good', we might well say something like 'that's interesting' and then add a follow-up question to get the students to add to what they have just offered us. Or we might say 'Can you think of another way of saying that?' Wong and Waring talk about using 'pursuit' questions to provoke the students into thinking and saying more, and Cullen, whilst seeing the importance of teachers' responses to show the students that they are being listened to, also identifies ways in which feedback can be used to help the students' future progress.

For that, in the end, is the true purpose of effective feedback: our students want to know, of course, how well they are doing or have done, but they also need our intervention to help them and motivate them to do better.

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And so yes, of course, we can all learn by ourselves, given the right conditions (such as appropriate exposure to the language in the right setting) and provided that we feel the absolute need to do so. But in classroom situations, this is more problematic and it is here, whatever your views on education in general, that teachers, good teachers, can really make a difference. ETp

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Storytime for the very young

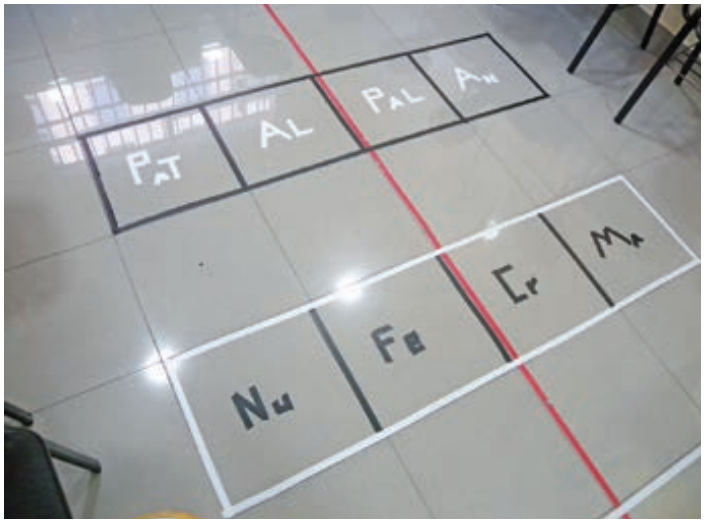
Chris Roland sits on his square.

Storytelling with very young learners has two important aspects. One is the story itself and the best way to present and exploit it in class. The other involves classroom management issues, such as making sure everyone is sitting quietly, and getting and maintaining the children's attention. In this article, we will look at both aspects.

Are you sitting comfortably?

Storytime in my classroom starts when I say *I'm sitting on my square!* (You will notice that, for instructions, I tend to use present continuous statements constructed from the students' point of view – language that they might meaningfully repeat back to me when I ask them what they are doing.) The children go to their designated boxes, marked out on the floor with insulating tape in various colours, their initials inside. These allow me to decide on seating positions prior to the lesson. Sometimes I will time the group to see how long it takes us all to get settled. Our record so far is about eight seconds, but the children are confident they can beat that in the future. If any students are sitting up on their feet rather than their bottoms so that those behind can't see, or if anyone is lolling on their front or back, then we have a quick round of *I'm sitting properly*, which my Spanish five and six year olds manage to learn just fine, and which extends itself to other situations such as *I'm waiting properly* at the start of the lesson. Then we begin.

Seating plan for a small class, and the children settling on their squares.





Storytime for the very young

Reading in the right order

In the literature on children's first-language literacy, conventional practice seems to be a full reading of a story first – that is, an uninterrupted rendition of the text – followed by an exploratory run-through, involving questioning and discussion.

For our ELT purposes, I suggest the reverse: an exploratory run-through first, followed by an uninterrupted reading. My rationale for this is that understanding a story's textual narrative sufficiently for it to be able to engage the child's imagination and enable them to sit through an entire telling on just that – the original words – is more fitting as an end aim than a starting point. Learners find it difficult to sit through something they don't 'get'. So by first clearing up doubts and clarifying meaning, we can give our audience the necessary inroads to comprehension that will see them through a meaningful listening of the whole.

Asking meaningful questions

A number of writers, including Frank Serafini and Catherine Maderazo and her colleagues, complain about the 'picture walk', one negative aspect of which involves us allowing the illustrations to hijack the narrative, leading our learners through a reduced version of the story by moving from one picture to another as we ask mostly surface questions such as *What's this here?* or *What can you see?* So, in order to encourage the sort of critical thinking that goes hand in hand with the development of real literacy skills, I try to include deeper-level questioning as well (for more, see Judith Schickedanz and Molly Collins). This includes questions about simultaneous events not visible in the illustrations, questions about how people in the story might be feeling, and also value judgements about what is going on. If you want to keep storytime all in English, the language of these questions still needs to be simple in terms of wording. Here are some examples from a story about a hungry crocodile by Carol Read and Ana Soberón.

Q: *Can you see the mouse? No? Where is the mouse now?*
A: *In the crocodile's tummy.*

Q: *Where's the monkey? (asked early on, although the monkey does not appear till the end)*
A: *In his house. Home. In a tree.*

Q: *How does the crocodile feel?*
A: *Hungry.*

Q: *Is the crocodile being good?*
A: *No, he isn't.*

Reading as it is written

I would argue in favour of reading a story as it was written – that is, sticking to the text. By preserving the original narrative, you enable the learners to experience the sense of rhythm intended by the author. In addition, by hearing the same version each time the story is told, the learners have more opportunity to internalise stretches of speech by exercising their capacities for recollection, prediction and memorisation. Guy Cook calls language committed to memory in such a way *intimate discourse*. Of course, when a teacher has a collective of squirming little bodies in front of them, and when the owners of said bodies consider it quite reasonable to interrupt the reading to tell the teacher they are going to the park later or that they have lost another tooth, then sticking to the story can require a certain gentle determination and persistence. I do think it is a worthwhile endeavour, though, and a respectable final goal, even if it takes a series of lessons to reach – covering a little more of the text each time, before or between attending to queries.

Progressing through the text

Moving on

Be it story cards, big books, picture books or projected slides, each time we need to transition to a new set of images and/or text, my students call out *Next page!* They take my subtle pauses or inactivity as a cue. I sometimes mime having run out of energy, as if my batteries have gone flat. Calling for a new page provides a channel for potentially disruptive energies. During exploratory readings, when we are discussing the story page by page, it also enables the learners to signal to me that we have lingered upon a particular page for long enough.

Hypothesising

Something to bear in mind when discussing the events of a story with your class is that small children are very much concerned with a need to establish the truth about the world – its veracity, coherence and permanence. For children, the world has magical properties precisely because they are still not always sure about where the causes of things are to be found, hence a constant hypothesising which we can exploit, responsibly, by playing their need for confirmation off against an element of uncertainty. An example from an invented story might be:

Teacher: *Was the little boy laughing when the mother dropped the cake? No? Are you sure? Let's go back and look. He's sad? Yes. But could it be a smile? Look at his mouth there. No. No? OK.*

or:

Teacher: *But what about the other cake? His mum drops one cake but there's another in the oven, isn't there? Are there two cakes or one?* (A student then points out that in the second picture where the mum and son are looking at the cake on the floor, you can see the open oven and there's nothing else inside it.)

Showing meaning

Holding story cards can limit your delivery in terms of mime and gesture. To compensate, I have started moving

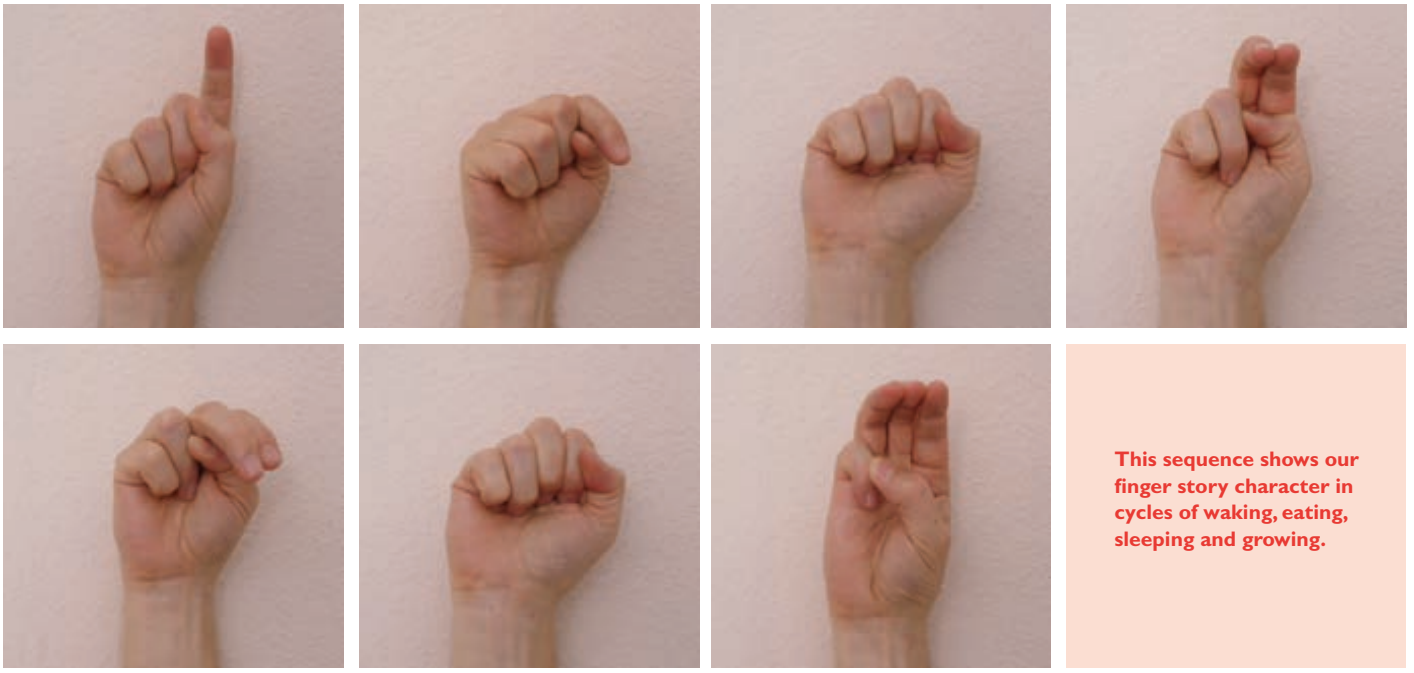


Story card gestures to accompany characters in a boat; riding a bike, horse or dragon; and sleeping.

the cards themselves to reflect the narrative. If a character in the story is walking, you can 'walk' the card you have in your hands by moving the bottom corners as if they were legs taking steps. Curling one of the top corners of a card can mirror a character looking left, right, round a door or searching for something. Holding a card horizontally, in the prone position as if in bed, then wobbling one end to the sound of snoring, can indicate sleep. Curling one card into a *convex* arch and mounting a second card on top of it can give the impression of a character in a boat. Curling the bottom card into a *concave* arch on the other hand, can give the impression that the top card is the rider of a horse, bicycle or even dragon. The range of possibilities here is probably as wide as the imagination.

Getting attention

Most primary teachers have some sort of technique to get their class's attention when it is time to give instructions, explanations or to transition to another activity. There are chants such as *1, 2, 3 look at me* as well as a myriad of gestures and 'zip your lips' type movements, combined with rhyme, signalling or the holding up of objects. Many require some sort of response from the learners over and above stopping what they are doing and listening to the teacher. One that I have used a lot involves me placing one hand on my nose and the other in the air, with the students doing the same. As a spin off from this, I started holding up individual fingers and wiggling them about as if they were



This sequence shows our finger story character in cycles of waking, eating, sleeping and growing.

Storytime for the very young



In this sequence, the hand character on the left has crept up on a sleeping friend and let out a shout. The sleeping character wakes with a start then tells off the 'naughty' hand with *No shouting please!*

little creatures, with the children mirroring the actions. I soon embellished these with sound effects and squeaky lines in English. These sequences, in turn, developed into whole narratives in second-long increments, so that each step could be repeated easily by the class.

In one, for example, I hold up a closed fist, fingers facing the class. Once they have copied the action, I pop a single index finger up with a staccato swishing sound (see page 23). This becomes our character for the story and it bends its head and squeaks: *I'm hungry.* The creature then finds some food nearby and bends right over to accompanied eating sounds. After yawning *I'm tired*, the finger disappears back into the hand, and we make snoring sounds. When the creature wakes up again, it has grown, and we represent this by two fingers popping up. The cycle of eating and sleeping is repeated, with the character awakening as a three- and four-finger creature and finally as the whole hand (thumb forming the lower jaw), which says goodbye to the class and disappears in another staccato swish.

In another story, I hold up two fists and, again, the children copy each chunk of movement and sound. One turns into a whole-hand puppet, which lets out a naughty little chuckle. For the other fist, we make a snoring sound and move it subtly to represent the rising and falling of sleeping breath. Our 'awake' hand turns to face the sleeping fist and slowly creeps up on it, stopping once or twice to chuckle on the way. When it reaches the sleeping hand, it hollers. The sleeping hand wakes up with a start, which we indicate by opening that hand fully. Then it recovers and admonishes the offender by squeaking *No shouting, please!* After a humble *I'm sorry*, both hand puppets disappear with swishing sounds.

With these simple finger stories we are taking signalling for classroom management a step further and turning it into a few brief moments of fiction as a vehicle for recycling language. The initial attention-capturing technique is more effective as there is real content-driven engagement and something for the children to do. A subsequent transition to the next stage of the lesson also, therefore, becomes easier.

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I myself am no master storyteller by any means. I know that because I have been lucky enough to watch people who *are*. In exploring some of the above facets of the craft, I have, however, been able to take satisfaction in my development towards being at least a *reasonable* narrator, and I hope that readers at a similar stage will find the ideas here useful on their own journeys. ETp

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PICTURE PUZZLE
Answers

Theme: Punctuation marks

semicolon, full stop, apostrophe, accent, square bracket

Teaching behind bars

Iain McInally describes the restrictions of teaching in a restricted environment.

This article is part of an account of a personal voluntary project that I carried out over three years in a local prison. Because of severe overcrowding, 'disciplinary' problems and ongoing industrial action by prison staff, this and other volunteer activities have now been suspended.

Rewards and achievements

One of the great things about teaching English to adults is the access you have to so many different kinds of people from different walks of life. In one recent week I taught (among others) a professor of economics, a group of farmers and, as part of a volunteer initiative, men in an Italian jail.

These courses were all at different levels, the relationship dynamics and the 'etiquette' of each teaching situation varied, and certainly the physical environments were very different. But I'd like to think that if you closed your eyes, you wouldn't know which lesson was which in some important ways: the focus on learning, the energy and the sense of complicity.

What continues to strike me when I teach is that, at the heart of things, people are far more similar than they are different – the fact that we are all unique is what we all have in common and is something that we normally accept effortlessly. And that uniqueness seldom gets in the way when objectives and circumstances in the classroom are shared, and the lesson is sufficiently in tune with individuals' preferences and expectations.

Nothing particularly exciting or dramatic happens in my prison classes, but there is a slow drama unwinding, as relationships develop and personalities emerge. There is an element of gentle excitement, too, as a sense of achievement is present in every lesson – the recognition that what we have done until now has been worthwhile. The rewards from teaching come from seeing results – seeing people achieve things they had set out to do, perhaps things they thought they couldn't do, knowing things that they didn't know before. The rewards here are great.

Boundaries and belonging

This is my third year teaching in prison, each new course starting out with different men, although one man has managed to enlist for all three courses, appearing mysteriously about a month from the end of the second year's course. His son was with him in my first year's group. Appearing and disappearing is part of the mystery of operating in prison and, especially in the second year, things were largely at the mercy of prison disorganisation. None of the men seemed to know what was happening: they'd been told one day to report to the library wing. Some had registered for an English course a while before, but they didn't know for sure if this was it. After the first lesson, one man approached me:

'Why am I learning English?'

'It's a useful thing to know.'

'Yes, but why?'

'It can help in all sorts of ways – getting a job, meeting people ....'

'I know. but I enrolled for bakery.'

I am allowed two hours a week, and I divide this into two lessons on two days – better for the students this way. About two thirds of the men I have taught here have been non-Italian, coming from around a dozen different countries. Their ages range from 19 to early 60s. I have taught a bus driver, waiters, a banker, a nurse – most don't profess any specific job as such.

At the beginning of each course I have a list of names, but this generally proves unreliable. Almost every lesson for the first few weeks, new men will be escorted by guards to join the class. They are usually as bewildered as the other members of the group are annoyed by the constant new additions and the disruption. Some of these arrivals are apparently mistakes, because sometimes during a lesson a guard will summon someone and we'll never see them again. Otherwise we are left alone; the only time we have had a guard in attendance was when one student was on suicide watch. He was a young German who could speak no Italian, and although his classmates took him under their wings, he was lost. *'Italy no good; prison no good – only English lessons good'* – it's always good to get thanked by your students, but this was quite another level.

Teaching behind bars

At the start of each course, most men are strangers to each other. The whole environment is strange to me, especially in the first year: I was the outsider, not the 'host' as I would be in courses at school. The lesson is the only place that most of them will ever meet, and they are certainly not free to socialise, even if they wanted to. Initially at least, men of the same nationality gravitate towards each other. The second year, there was a nucleus of young men from the same country who felt the need to assert their presence and flex their muscles. It took a while for them to understand that the only challenge anyone was really interested in came from trying to learn English, but other than this the only problems have come as a result of bad organisation – in particular, men not being allowed out their cell-blocks in time for lessons.

Signs seep through that these men are not all 'peers' in their community. Some clearly have status – they are given plenty of space and are never the butt of any of the humour that little by little becomes part of the fabric of lessons. Others are tolerated and absorbed into the group, while others are only just tolerated and take part from the edge.

Why this happens, I don't know. Maybe they find out what the others are inside for – I have no idea about inmate etiquette. Certainly, it's a topic that is not touched on in lessons, and it would be foolish to venture into that territory. The only time the subject cropped up in class was when I corrected a student's pronunciation: I thought he was trying to say that he was a 'butcher', only to discover five minutes into my attempts to explain to everyone what a butcher was, that he was telling me he was a 'pusher'. Lots of rowdy amusement.

Inside and outside

This is low-tech, speaking-based teaching. I made a flip-chart with illustrations of useful objects for these beginner-level classes: otherwise I have nothing apart from desks and chairs. We follow the teaching programme I've been developing over the last 20 years, which is geared specifically to the non-ideal circumstances many of us work in: having very little time. Teaching when the students have 20 hours in one week is not the same as teaching when they have 20 hours in ten weeks and no English world to step into outside class; priorities become different and the approach and procedures need to adapt.

In the same way that a game can be enjoyable and successful when the players play to the rules, our lessons have a very straightforward format, with clear roles and guidelines, and this helps establish the sense of the lesson as a safe neutral place with the teacher as a combination of motivated coach and impartial umpire.

There's also distance in the ease of describing experience – the job you had is no longer there, maybe the girlfriend or wife have gone, too

Classrooms are part of the real world, but they have their own distinct 'classroom reality' where the language of real things can be arranged and presented in a way that benefits learning. Often this distinct classroom reality has a membrane that is so thin that the students can mentally step in and out effortlessly. In prison, that membrane is thicker – the distance between here and 'out there' is far greater. Many prisoners don't really know where the prison is – they don't know what the surroundings look like or how far it is from the shops: we can't even see what the weather is like. There's distance in time, too – months or years since they last went out to eat with friends or watered their plants. There's also distance in the ease of describing experience – the job you had is no longer there, maybe the girlfriend or wife have gone, too. It's not easy to talk about a toddler son you haven't seen for two years because the mother's mother has forbidden any visits, or about parents who never visit at all, always finding a last-minute excuse not to come (I know these things from the chats some men like to have on the way back to the cell-blocks after lessons – naturally, you steer clear of these topics in class with these men).

A fine balance

As beginner-level students stop being beginners, more language becomes available and ever more possibilities present themselves in terms of what can be touched on – and our lessons are made up of lots of 'touches' rather than single dedicated themes. And this is where the 'engagement of classroom reality' comes into play: the men can put as much of their real selves into what they say as they choose to, or they may prefer to approach things primarily as 'learners' trying out 'language'. This is the elusive balance between meaning-based interaction and form-based practice, and the fine line that we tread between being 'interested person' and 'interested teacher'. I want people to feel free to 'have a go' – to lose themselves in their efforts to learn, without placing any sort of pressure on them to 'reveal'.

Some of the things that can make ordinary elementary lessons interesting are not interesting here: everyone wakes up at the same time, has their meals at the same time – exactly the same meals – and goes to bed at the same time. Mondays are the same as Fridays and Sundays: 22 hours a day in a cell, more often than not. These things are addressed with a kind of gallows' humour – they know it's not my fault that *get up* or *dinner* are important words to learn.

From a teaching point of view, I found I needed to introduce the past earlier than I normally would. Introducing the verb *to have* pretty soon prompts them to ask you how to say *had*: the car, the house, money and more – all things they once *had*.

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Well, one thing they *do* have for now is their English lessons. ETp



Iain McInally entered ELT after graduating in 1979, and found that teaching turned out to be far more intriguing than he had imagined. So began a career much longer than initially planned, spanning course development, writing and training. In 1989, he co-founded the Speak Your Mind School in Verona, Italy, where he is still based.

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Thinking skills 1

The two-part worksheet in this issue, which is on pages 28 and 29, is part of a series that aims to develop the thinking skills of IELTS candidates. It was prepared by Louis Rogers and Nick Thorner, and focuses on questions in the *Reading* paper where candidates read statements based on a text and have to choose between *YES*, *NO* and *NOT GIVEN*.

The challenge

The *YES*, *NO*, *NOT GIVEN* question (or *TRUE*, *FALSE*, *NOT GIVEN* in factual texts) is perhaps the most common question format in the *IELTS Reading* paper; it is also one of the most dreaded. The candidate has to look at a claim in the question prompt and decide if the text makes the same claim, contradicts the claim, or whether it doesn't provide the information for us to decide.

Students find it difficult for a variety of reasons. First, they have to locate the sentence in the text that shares the same topic (assuming there is one), which is difficult enough. But then they have to decide if the two sentences are synonymous or not. It's there that the real test begins, because often very subtle differences in meaning determine whether two sentences are synonymous, contradictory or neither. For example, would a claim in the question that *a few people go to college* basically convey the same meaning as a claim in the reading text that *a small minority go to college*? (Yes, it would). Or would a claim in the question that *the desert is spreading northwards* mean the same as a sentence in the text saying *it isn't spreading southwards*? In this last pair of sentences, we see a common difficulty. Some candidates may reason that if the desert isn't moving south, it is moving north, and select *YES* as their answer. But as the desert could equally well be moving west or not moving at all, the answer is actually *NOT GIVEN*. Another common trap is to read a statement such as *Deserts are hot places* and select *YES* because it seems logical, whereas that information may not actually be provided in the text, making the answer *NOT GIVEN*.

This style of question, therefore, requires careful practice. Yet candidates are often simply asked to undertake this difficult analysis while struggling with challenging texts. The result can be a feeling of frustration, demotivation and panic in the exam room. We believe the solution is to practise the analytical thinking skills separately from performing the exam-style task, so that candidates can focus on thinking skills without struggling with academic language. What's more, if we design the task as a pairwork activity, we allow the students to draw on peer support to make it less daunting. Standard reading tasks seldom permit such collaboration.

Aims

The first part of the worksheet is designed to give focused practice at finding synonymous and antonymous meanings (as well as ignoring unconnected meanings) in the format of a game. The students match sentences as a whole-class activity so that they can cooperate. The second page then provides exam-style practice, with a short text on an accessible topic to build on the skills work they have done. The lesson takes the theme of celebrities and heroes, and so would fit particularly well in a programme of work on the topic of society or the media.

Procedure

You will need a set of grey and white sentence slips (see page 28), and a copy of the second sheet (see page 29) for each student.

1 Ask the students who their favourite celebrities are. You could get them to show pictures on their mobiles, if possible. Now ask them whether they'd like to *be* them. Spend some time discussing the reasons they give.

2 Cut up the grey and white sentence strips on page 28. Use either the first eight, the first 12 or all 16 sentences. Make sure there aren't more sentences than students.

3 Divide the class into two. Distribute all the grey sentences to one half and all the white sentences to the other. If there are more students than sentences, ask some students to share sentences.

4 Further divide each half of the class into smaller groups. Then ask the students to read their sentences and discuss which they agree with.

5 Now tell the students with white sentences that they have to go and find the *grey* sentence with the same meaning. Tell the students with grey sentences that they must find the *white* sentence with the same meaning. Make sure they understand that the corresponding sentence won't use the exact same words as theirs.

6 Once they have found their 'partner' they should sit down.

7 Encourage the students to underline the words they found with a similar meaning. Take some examples of sentence pairs and write them on the board so that the students can explain their reasoning to the whole class.

8 The students should then repeat the task, but this time find the sentence with the opposite meaning. Ask them to find words or phrases in their sentences with opposite or contradictory meanings and to report their ideas to other pairs.

9 Follow up the activity by doing some exam practice, using the second sheet, entitled *Where are all the heroes?* This can be done as homework, but do remember that it may be more useful to the students if they get immediate feedback so that any questions they have are fresh in their minds.

10 If possible, get the students responding to some of the themes in the text with the following questions, so that they can practise expressing themselves in this key topic area:

Do you know anyone you would describe as a hero?
Do you think anyone can become a hero?
Are most celebrities poor role models?
Does the idea of instant fame make young people lazy?



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▶▶▶ Thinking skills 1

IELTS task answers:

1 No. The text explains that heroes are created by society. The author then notes that the heroes *seem to belong to a past age* … and asks: *Why has modern society stopped making heroes?* This suggests they are not produced so frequently.

2 Not given. (The text contains no information about this.)

3 No. The author claims that heroes in America *tended to operate more in teams* … . This contradicts the idea they acted alone.

4 Not given. (The text does say that tales of female heroes have been *less frequently recounted*, but this is not the same as saying that fewer female heroes existed. This is a good example of where something might seem likely to be true, but is not supported by the text.)

5 Yes. The author claims female heroes underwent *liberation from oppressive situations …,* which has a similar meaning to 'escape from difficult situations'.

6 No. The author claims new 20th-century heroes *struggle(d)* (fought) *against wrong and inequality rather than mighty armies*. This suggests they didn't fight physically against groups of enemies.

7 Yes. The author claims that the *new breed of heroes therefore reflected human values, as opposed to social roles and bodily strength* and also claims *wimps* (weak people) can be heroes.

8 Not given. The author refers to guiding young people and to choice, but does not talk about their relative importance: *Young people have more choice and freedom now in how they choose to behave, but perhaps they are less well guided.*



Many celebrities are paid an excessive amount.

Popular musicians and sports people receive too much money.

Famous people deserve all the cash they earn.

It's right that celebrities receive such large amounts of money.

We must allow personalities in the media to have privacy.

Celebrities should generally be protected from publicity.

It is fair that famous people get constant media attention.

It's right that we get regular news about celebrities' private lives.

Celebrities have a negative impact on our young people.

Famous people influence young people negatively.

Media icons have helped young people believe in themselves.

Famous people encourage young people to think they can achieve great things.

People in the media should try to set a good example in their behaviour.

Celebrities should lead lifestyles that provide good role models for others.

I think celebrities should be free to behave badly if they choose.

We can't expect celebrities to be responsible models for other people.

Where are all the heroes?



Heroes are instantly recognisable. They are usually in possession of great power, physical and mental, and are willing to give up their own interests for the good of their people. More importantly, as the sociologist Orrin Klapp points out, they are celebrated by the *whole* of society through popular stories, often told to inspire and educate the young. But what is happening to the hero? Many of the characters we would associate with heroism, such as Superman or Ulysses, seem to belong to a past age. Has modern society stopped making heroes, and does it matter?

Heroes from the past tended to go on what the American scholar Joseph Campbell defined as the 'hero's journey'. This involved being called away from the ordinary world to a special world of adventure, where they would be tested by enemies and return victorious, perhaps with treasure as well. This formula can be seen in more modern times, too, in particular in US popular culture, where again we see themes of conquest and survival in films like *Star Wars*. However, these heroes tended to operate more in teams, perhaps reflective of the corporate, democratic world they were conceived in.

There have, of course, been females too who've adopted hero roles through history, though often they have tended to fulfil symbolic roles as queens, goddesses or heads of armies, and their tales have been less frequently recounted in stories. One notable exception is the ninth-century tale of Queen Scheherazade, who told 1001 stories to save her life. However, by the 19th century, female heroines had found their way into literature, with characters like Pocahontas and Cinderella becoming popular. The journeys of heroic women involve less travelling and typically entailed liberation from oppressive situations, the rejection of inferiority and the fulfilment of a female 'role' as wife.

Yet model heroes became more varied in the 20th century. As concepts of universal human rights became more prevalent, a new kind of hero emerged. Like their predecessors, these heroes had to struggle, but their struggles were against ideas of inequality in the real world rather than mighty armies. For example, Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela struggled against racism; Gandhi against domination and violence; and the British Suffragettes for the right to vote. At the same time, the 20th century saw less certainty about correct modes of behaviour. From fighting in wars to getting married, traditional modes of behaviour were laid open to question. The new breed of heroes therefore reflected human values, as opposed to traditional roles or bodily strength. Nerds, wimps or solitary detectives could become heroes if they were willing to fight wrong.

As the hero's appearance and social role has become less recognisable, a new guide to character and lifestyle has emerged: the role model. They differ from the heroes of storybooks in that they are chosen by individuals: societies choose heroes, whereas individuals choose role models. But their purpose is perhaps similar. As psychologists like Kurt Goldstein have it, role models guide us towards 'actualisation': they tell young people how their life should and could be. They often originate in our own families or cities, but with the growth of media, role models are frequently media personalities, such as singers, bloggers or sportspeople.

Arguably, the 'celebrity' role model has, therefore, superseded the hero as a self-guide in the lives of many, and perhaps become more important to us as we seek to find the best way to live our lives. This is perhaps a product of our willingness to embrace individual choice and accept diversity. An obvious concern, however, is that celebrity role models adopt values that are questioned by many, such as wealth creation. Perhaps more worryingly, they are brought to us through our screens as 'already great' and so encourage the pursuit of instant fame, rather than endurance and perseverance. Young people have more choice and freedom now in how they choose to behave, but perhaps they are less well-guided.

1	Nowadays, heroes are created more frequently than in the past.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
2	Heroes in past ages were greater than modern heroes.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
3	US heroes often perform their heroic acts alone.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
4	There haven't been as many female heroes as male heroes.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
5	Female heroes from the past often had to escape from difficulties.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
6	The new kinds of heroes in the 20th century often fought physical battles.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
7	Modern heroes don't have to be physically strong.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN
8	It is more important to give young people choice than to guide them.	YES / NO / NOT GIVEN

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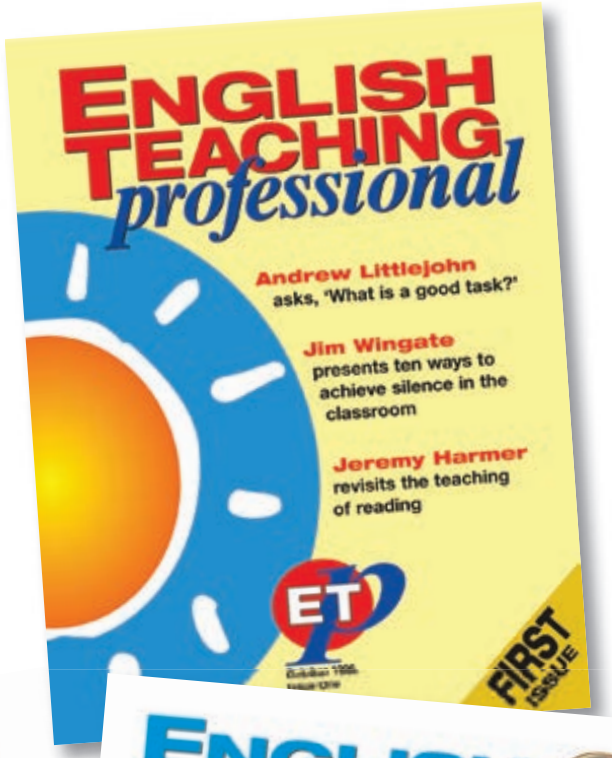
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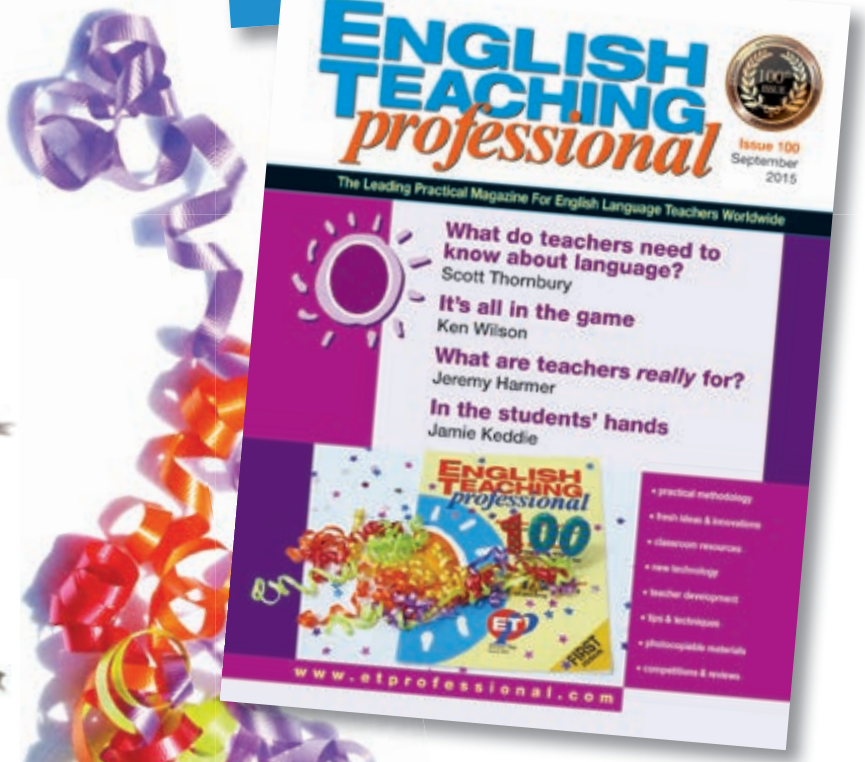
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To assign or not to assign, that is the question

Mohammed Arroub considers the homework dilemma.

Many teachers do not assign homework at all, either because of course time limitations or because their workload does not allow them time to mark it. Some question the usefulness of homework, believing that work done in class should be more than enough. Others assign it just because they think it is part of a teacher's job, yet they do so without regularly checking and discussing it in class. As a result, the students think that doing homework is not worth the effort since their teacher doesn't pay attention to it.

In this article, I would like to discuss the importance of homework to the learning process. I will suggest ways to improve students' attitudes towards it and explain how I have overcome the pressure of marking homework, and reduced the time it takes, by using a customised e-homework program.

The importance of homework

Lesley Painter underscores the importance of homework in accelerating and augmenting the learning process, and stresses the connection between homework and achievement: *'It is rare for students to have more than a few classroom hours per week. This is certainly not enough exposure to achieve proficiency in language, even over the span of several years. If learning is to be effective, a good proportion of it must take place outside these few classroom hours. Setting homework is one of the best ways to achieve this.'* Sarah North and Hannah Pillay also demonstrate the usefulness of homework, regarding it as a complement to classwork and not merely optional extra material: *'There is a general consensus in educational literature that homework does have a positive effect on learning, through extending the time available for learning.'* In addition, I would claim that homework can help students reinforce, review and practise what was taught in the classroom, thus facilitating internalisation of information. Equally importantly, it aids teachers in diagnosing problematic areas with which certain students are struggling, and provides information on whether the learning goals are being met, or whether re-teaching or remedial sessions are needed. Thus, homework serves also as a useful assessment tool for teachers, providing feedback on both their teaching and the students' understanding of, and ability to use, the language.

Attitudes towards homework

There are many ways to increase and maintain students' motivation when it comes to carrying out homework tasks – and to make these tasks an enjoyable learning experience.

- Demonstrate your own enthusiasm for homework and stress its importance from lesson one because, as Liliana Tavares says, *'students' habits reflect the teacher's attitudes'*.
- Always give feedback on homework. Consider giving an award each week or fortnight to the student with the most consistently good homework.
- Explain the purpose behind the homework you set in order to help your students see its value and usefulness. Make them aware how much homework enhances their learning.
- Make homework tasks interesting, challenging, varied and tailored to different learning styles and abilities. North and Pillay point out that homework may be demotivating if *'it is too difficult, too easy, uninteresting, monotonous or perceived as irrelevant'*.
- Don't set homework that will take too long to complete. This can be demotivating and cause the students to lose interest, even if the homework itself is interesting.
- Encourage the students to get involved in sharing ideas for homework and creating their own tasks.
- Allow your students to choose the homework tasks they prefer – those that target their needs.
- Encourage student reflection on completed homework, and always set goals to achieve in problematic areas.

To assign or not to assign, that is the question

- Let the students know that some questions in an upcoming exam will be similar to the homework tasks, and that practising these questions will help them perform better in the exam.
- Ask the students to try to personalise the homework when possible; this makes it more meaningful and, therefore, more motivating.
- Let homework count for a significant portion in your assessment criteria. Grades are a motivating force for students to perform well on homework.
- Do not reject late assignments, but institute a policy of mark deduction if homework is late more than once.

E-homework

The benefits

It is certainly true that checking, correcting and giving each student useful feedback on homework is a daunting task which can take up a large proportion of a teacher's time. To counter this, I have had a useful e-homework program developed for my website (*www.arroub-edu.com*). This program has sections for listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Depending on the type of question, the students sometimes have to choose the best answer, spot the incorrect answer out of three or four choices, or simply fill in their answer in a box. For pronunciation tasks, they have to choose from a list of words the one that rhymes or is pronounced the same as the word in the question. The writing section is confined to sentence-level activities, such as combining sentences using appropriate conjunctions or punctuating sentences correctly. The tasks are marked electronically, giving scores out of 100. Some answers garner more marks than others, and this is made clear to the students before they start. At the top of the e-homework sheet, the students are given the objectives and linguistic areas targeted in the homework. There is also a section for my feedback to the students, one where lingering problems can be highlighted and one for the students' own reflection. Apart from the listening section, there are time limits within which the students have to finish the tasks. As soon as they have completed the homework, they are shown their scores and their correct and incorrect answers in printable form. This program also provides me with a record of the students who have submitted homework, together with their scores and the date when they did it.

The process

To prepare homework materials, I often scan tasks from coursebooks or workbooks in pdf form (after getting the publisher's permission for this). The pdf is then converted into an editable *MsWord* document, using one of the many available online tools such as *www.onlineocr.net*. (Homework tasks from an online source do not need scanning and converting.) I then copy and paste the questions into the fields allocated for each, including an acknowledgment of the source.

Having taught a few different courses using this system, I have built up a useful bank of exercises, so now all I need to do is select a course, the level and the questions, and the students are ready to go. At the beginning of each course, I familiarise my students with the registration process and show them how to choose the course name and level. I tell them that the program gives the option of identifying the three or four questions which most of the class get wrong. In the next lesson following a homework assignment, I spend ten minutes discussing with the class the areas they have still a weakness in, as revealed by the program.

After three assignments have been completed, I provide each student with online feedback, commenting on the areas where they have improved and the ones which still need work. If a particular problem is common to the class, I either teach a remedial lesson or provide them with extra activities – or suggest ESL websites where they will find more practice exercises. Often, I ask some of the students to find further examples of usage to illustrate a particular language point which is causing problems. They then post these in the 'lingering problems' section of the program, which the whole class has access to. Sometimes this is done in the lesson. I usually vary the point in the lesson at which I discuss homework problems: sometimes at the beginning of a lesson, sometimes after a groupwork activity, sometimes at the end.

Later in the course, I ask groups of students to prepare homework material of interest and relevancy. Each group is assigned a skill, and they score full marks for that skill, without answering their own questions. The homework portion of the total course grade is 30%.

I also ask the students to choose items from their scored homework assignments over the course to add to their portfolios. They are also expected to reflect on their homework performance and progress every two weeks.

Most students enjoy submitting their homework electronically, and they especially like the idea of getting their scores as soon as they have finished. They also appreciate getting to know the learning problems which they share with their colleagues.

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In this article, I have addressed the issue of the value of homework and ways in which students can be persuaded to adopt a positive attitude towards it. I have also outlined the features that a customised e-homework system can offer.

I once heard a teacher trainer telling his trainees that *'the teacher who doesn't assign homework is a bad teacher'*. This remark has stayed with me and made me take as much care with my homework assignments as I do with my classwork, finding a way to deal with homework, regardless of the cost. ETp

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Our readership

ETp is read by teachers in more than 120 countries around the world. Some of them are native speakers of English. Many of them are not. We have readers in most sectors – from primary school to university – but the majority teach in upper and lower secondary schools and in language schools or similar institutions.

Reader friendly

We are looking for articles that are of direct relevance and immediate interest to teachers in the classroom.

Our aim is to be fresh and accessible. Teachers usually do not have time to read lengthy pieces or weighty prose. Please write clearly and simply, and avoid – or explain – technical terms or jargon. We are less likely to accept an article that says 'This is what we did' than one that says 'This is what we did and here's how you can do it too/adapt it to your situation, etc.' Please avoid long lists of references and bibliographies.

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Starting point

You may wish to submit shorter pieces to begin with. We are very pleased to receive letters and suggestions for publication, and contributions to the TALKBACK! and IT WORKS IN PRACTICE sections of the magazine.Good, innovative photocopiable materials are particularly welcome.

Article length

Most articles in ETp are between one and three pages in length, although we occasionally publish both shorter and longer articles. Approximate word counts are as follows:

- One page: around 850 words
- Two pages: around 1,400 words
- Three pages: around 2,200 words

If illustrations or diagrams are required, please reduce the word count to compensate.

Regular features

Please contact us before contributing to one of our regular features as these are generally commissioned by us and their content planned several issues in advance. Please write to us also if you have new ideas for regular features.

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Please bear in mind that we receive many more articles than we can possibly publish. We only produce six issues a year and there is a limited amount of space in each issue. We also have to balance the content of each issue to ensure that there is something of interest to everyone. This means that even when we accept your article, you may have to wait some time before you see it in print. Please be patient. It is very unlikely to go into the next issue or even the issue after that, but if we have accepted an article, we will get it in as soon as possible.

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Over the wall …



Alan Maley visits other worlds.

Of all the genres available to readers, the most popular in recent years has been fantasy. Sales of the *Harry Potter* books broke all records and have been equalled by *A Song of Fire and Ice*, where sales of 12 million copies of a new title within a few days are now commonplace. The possibility of temporarily inhabiting a completely different world which fantasy fiction affords helps to account for this popularity. And the film and TV versions have only served to strengthen the allure of the books.

Early examples of fantasy worlds would have to include the *Alice* worlds imagined by Lewis Carroll, and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. And one of the first to become a cult work of fiction through its film version was Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which still has the power to frighten as well as entertain. Although none of these come close to the mass appeal of the more recent works, it is interesting to note that they have an enduring attraction to readers. *Alice* has been extensively analysed, deconstructed and commented on by both literary and linguistic scholars, and is frequently quoted. *The Wind in the Willows* still appeals perhaps to a younger audience with its endearing cast of animal characters, and a play based on the book is frequently staged in the UK around Christmas time.

Fantasy and film

The fantasy genre seems to have burgeoned in the last 20 years, with the advent of film versions of most of the better-known fantasy series. The 'big four' would have to be Tolkien's trilogy *Lord of the Rings*, C S Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and George Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series – better known as *Game of Thrones*.

Each of these appeals in its own particular way. Tolkien's epic contest between the forces of evil of Sauron and the courageous 'Fellowship of the Ring' grips many people's imagination, with its geographical range, its endorsement of the power of the weak to defeat the strong, its rich and strange cast of characters and creatures, its incorporation of elements (including language) from Norse and Celtic mythology, and its use of magic, wizards and the rest – and of course, that ring. Lewis's *Narnia* series appeals partly through the major child characters, its use of Christian and other symbolism, the exciting events detailing the victory of good over evil and the sad realisation that childhood does not last. However, although it is still popular, some readers find it a little dated and are uncomfortable with the barely-concealed religious symbolism. J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, with their heady mix of magic, teen coming of age and the English boarding school story, are almost irresistible, despite their undistinguished 'pedestrian style', criticised by Harold Bloom as 'full of clichés and dead metaphors'. Clearly, none of this counts when compared with the excitement of the action and the addictive familiarity of the setting and characters. And there is no mystery about the appeal of Martin's *Game of Thrones* titles. These are dark, shockingly brutal, gritty, packed with sex of all varieties, and with amoral betrayal and violence. The characters have a contemporary feel in their lack of any moral compass. Here is a world which is a compound of Imperial Rome under Nero, the Papacy under the Borgias, Russia at the time of Stalin's purges and the crazy reign of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. In short, it is absolutely compulsive! The punters cannot get enough of it.

The *Gormenghast* series

Yet, for all the success of these major works of fantasy, the one closest to my heart is the *Gormenghast* trilogy. And I am constantly disappointed that it is not better known nor appreciated for the masterpiece it undoubtedly is. Mervyn Peake manages to create a complete universe in the physical presence of the great looming castle of Gormenghast, ruled over by the Groan family – a place peopled by a cast of grotesque, Gothic characters with bizarre names. There is Lord Sepulchrave himself, father of Titus, completely lost in his books; Flay, the faithful old retainer, and his arch-enemy Swelter, the head cook; Steerpike, the evil young schemer dedicated to the destruction of everything Gormenghast stands for; Dr Prunesquallor and his spinster sister Irma; the strangely moving Fuchsia, Titus Groan's sister, and her nurse, Granny Slagg; Titus's mother, the Countess of Groan, a forbiddingly eccentric woman who lives with a pack of white cats and attracts birds of all kinds to her massive frame – and a host of others.



And outside the walls live the Bright Carvers, who are a kind of underclass whose only function is to make carvings, most of which are burnt ritually once a year. Indeed, ritual is what rules everything that happens in Gormenghast. It is never questioned, however odd its manifestations: it must be followed to the letter, *'suckled on shadows; weaned on webs of ritual'*. And the castle itself is a palpable Gothic presence throughout – a labyrinth of corridors and tunnels, abandoned rooms, stone terraces, ivy-wreathed towers and rotting stairways. And unlike the other fantasy titles mentioned above, Peake does not rely on cloaks or rings that make you disappear, talking lions, dragons, phoenixes or orcs, or any of the usual paraphernalia of the genre. He creates a world of pure imagination, where evil is palpable and where the old and the new contend.

The three volumes total over 900 pages, so even a synopsis of the convoluted plot is not feasible here. Suffice it to say that in the first two books, the House of Groan is undermined by the evil actions of Steerpike, as he insinuates his way into an almost unassailable position of power. In the third volume, *Titus Alone*, Titus Groan, the 77th Earl, escapes his destiny and runs away into a different world altogether – a kind of modern dystopia with factories, machines and a sophisticated system of surveillance designed to dominate an underclass who are uncomfortably reminiscent of the Nazi camp internees Peake had seen as a war artist at Belsen in 1945. In the illustrated version, Peake's artistic skills contribute to our imaginings of the text.

Peake excels at the extravagent set pieces which drive the action along – the epic fight between Flay and Swelter, the fire in the library which drives Titus's father mad and to his bizarre death, the party at which Irma Prunesquallor is to ensnare her ancient husband, the great flood which engulfs the castle and leads to the final undoing of Steerpike. One of Peake's great strengths is his ability to describe people and places graphically in sharp images that almost spring off the page. A few quotations will give the flavour of this wonderful writing: *'… old weapons that were as rich with rust as a hedge of winter beech'*, *'Her eyes were as expressionless as mushrooms'*, *'… his flat feet sucking at the stones like porridge'*, *'an owl on wings of wool'*, *'laughing like crockery'*.

So why has *Gormenghast* been neglected? The fact that it has no film version must be a contributory factor – only an abridged TV film was attempted, and a brilliant stage version only used parts of it. It is doubtless also due to the density of Peake's prose style, which is brilliant but slow moving, and requires a quality of attention which is now rare. For all that, I hope some ET*p* readers will acquaint themselves with this masterpiece of English fiction.

★ ★ ★

I regret having had to leave out proper mention of Philip Pullman's well-written and engrossing trilogy *His Dark Materials*. And Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* books are unique in their capacity to evoke a real feeling of evil forces at work in the everyday world. They never fail to raise the hairs on the back of my neck. Again, it is unfortunate that Cooper is not as well-known as she undoubtedly deserves to be.

Fantasy fiction is unashamedly escapist, of course. But surely one of the pleasures of reading is immersing oneself in another world. And if you can persuade your students to submerge themselves in any of these titles that appeal to them, they will be hooked on reading for good. ETp

Baum, L F *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* Puffin Chalk 2014

Carroll, L *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* CreateSpace 2010

Cooper, S *The Dark is Rising Sequence* (five titles) Random House 2013

Grahame, K *The Wind in the Willows* Paragon Plus 1996

Lewis, C S *The Chronicles of Narnia* (seven volume box set) HarperCollins 1980

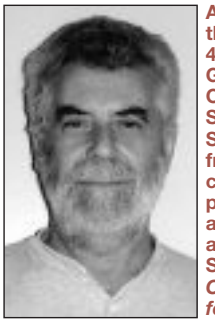
Martin, G R R *A Song of Ice and Fire* (seven volume box set) Harper Voyager 2012

Peake, M *The Illustrated Gormenghast Trilogy* Vintage Classics 2011

Pullman, P *His Dark Materials* (three titles in one book) Everyman 2011

Rowling, J K *Harry Potter* series (seven volume box set) Bloomsbury Children's 2014

Tolkien, J R R *The Lord of the Rings* (trilogy in one volume) HarperCollins 2007



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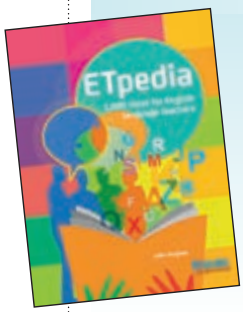
It **really** worked for me!

Did you get inspired by something you read in ET*p*? Did you do something similiar with your students? Did it really work in practice? Do share it with us ...

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IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

More tested lessons, suggestions, tips and techniques which have all worked for ET*p* readers. Try them out for yourself – and then send us your own contribution. Don't forget to include your postal address.



All the contributors to It Works in Practice in this issue of ET*p* are teachers at Chichester College, UK. We would like to thank Nick Wood for coordinating a spread of great activities from them. They will each receive a copy of *ETpedia*, by John Hughes, published by Pavilion.



Chichester College's teachers and CELTA trainers – Fiona, Nick, Kim, Mark, Gemma and Krisztian.

Rod ladders

Add colour to a dialogue-build or text reconstruction by helping your learners to identify and reproduce sounds accurately.

1 Write a dialogue on the board or elicit one from the learners.

2 Build a rod ladder on the board from top to bottom using Cuisenaire rods and Blu-tack®. Each colour represents a vowel or diphthong: wh**i**te /aɪ/, r**e**d /e/, light gr**ee**n /iː/, d**a**rk green /ɑː/, bl**ue** /uː/, bl**a**ck /æ/, br**ow**n /aʊ/, yell**ow** /əʊ/, **o**range /ɒ/, p**ur**ple /ɜː/, doll**o**p of Blu-tack® /ə/. Note that the corresponding sounds are represented in the words, as shown above in bold.

3 Elicit the sound for each colour and then write the phoneme next to the colour on the board ladder or invite the learners to do this. Briefly check the sounds and colours again.

4 Work on the dialogue. Demonstrate by placing the appropriate coloured rod (from those remaining in the box) above a sound in a word from the text and saying or eliciting the sound.

5 Put the students into teams and get them to compete to rush up to the board and place the appropriate sound/colour above a word. Award a point for every correct placement.

6 Drill the text as a pronunciation/dialogue drill. Start with choral repetition, then half the class as A and half as B, then in pairs.

7 Lead a progressive cloze (rubbing out selected words) until all the text has disappeared.

8 Get the students, in pairs, to reconstruct the text in writing and use the rods on the board to help them remember the content.

9 Practise the dialogue in pairs (or the pairs can adapt the dialogue).

10 Use rod placement in subsequent lessons to illustrate, prompt and check sounds.

Mark Turner

Personal 'Find someone who ...'

We all know the importance of icebreaking. The classic *'Find someone who ...'* combines the dynamic of getting students up on their feet to talk to everyone in the class with the virtue of memorising everyone's name in the act of writing and spelling it.

Add unique and curious information from each individual to the mix, and you have established a compelling reason to find out more about each other, plus fun associations for good class relationships.

1 Towards the end of your first lesson, give out slips of paper and ask the students to write down a fact about themselves that the other students don't know. Ask them to do this without showing the others. Give some examples, such as famous people you have met, prizes or competitions won, places you have been, calamities/accidents you have survived.

2 Collect the slips and type up a worksheet. For example:

Find someone who ...

... has been involved in making a movie. _____

Add pictures to help with vocabulary.

3 In the next lesson, hand out the worksheets and check that the students know how to make questions with the verb tenses used. Ask them to mingle, asking their questions until they get a 'yes' answer. They then write the student's name, and ask follow-up questions to find out more about this unique experience.

4 Get the students to share with the class what they found out about each other.

Fiona Cullum

'Back to the board' revisited

This is a variant of a classic activity, called 'Back to the board', with additional guidance (or challenge) and a productive stage at the end. It requires some preparation but no worksheets. You will need to have a computer and a projector in your classroom.

- Choose a short video, without any speaking (I have found that *Mr Bean*, some of *The Simpsons* episodes and adverts work really well for this). It shouldn't be longer than six minutes.
- Watch the video and divide it into about six parts.
- Make notes of 10–15 words per section. These words should be names of objects, things from that scene or adjectives describing people's feelings, depending on level and the vocabulary you want your students to focus on.
- Divide your class into two and get one half of the class facing the screen, the other with their backs to it. Play the first part of the video so only half of the class sees the screen (the others only hear the noise, music, laughter, etc). Stop the video and ask the 'watchers' to explain to the 'listeners' what has happened so far.
- Here you can reveal the first set of words you noted down, in order to help or guide and control your students' accounts. I find that an interactive whiteboard works well here, enabling you to reveal only the words relevant to the actual section.
- When the explanation is finished, ask the students to swap places or both parties to turn around. Now the 'listeners' become 'watchers', and vice versa. Play the next part, then pause and ask the students to explain it, revealing the next set of words to help them.
- Repeat the process until you have played the whole video.

Extension:

- Put the students into small groups, depending on class size. Project all the vocabulary you prepared on the board. Ask the students to piece the story together in their groups, using all the vocabulary from the board. Set a time limit for the preparation. Tell them that in their groups they will take turns to retell the story.
- Ask the groups to retell the story, using the vocabulary from the board.
- You can turn this part into a competition. Tell the students that you will mark their presentation of the story, based on certain criteria. Depending on level, these could include: vocabulary used, accuracy, fluency, teamwork (making sure everyone participates and helps out when the story 'gets stuck'), etc.
- Once all the groups have finished, give feedback and reward the most successful storytellers!

Good luck, and have fun!

Krisztian Varga

Interactive worksheets

This communicative 15-minute activity revises vocabulary, particularly collocations and phrasal verbs. It works every time – honest!

1 Prepare a worksheet (Worksheet A) by writing three interesting thought-provoking questions that reflect your students' life experiences and revise a lexical set. In each question, omit the word you're checking. For example:
Do you get _____ well with both your parents? Why/why not?

2 Do the same with three new questions to produce a second worksheet (Worksheet B).

3 Split your class into two halves: Group A and Group B. Give Worksheet A to Group A and Worksheet B to Group B. In pairs, the students complete the questions with the correct word. If a pair finishes early, ask them to write extra questions, using the lexical set you're practising.

4 Pair a Group A student with a Group B student. Each student asks their new partner Question 1 from their worksheet (with the gap). The listening student must say the missing word, then answer the question truthfully. Hopefully this will generate a meaningful discussion.

5 Repeat Stage 4 with new pairings for each of the remaining questions.

6 If you want to make the activity longer, get the students to prepare the worksheets themselves, instead of you.

Nick Wood

Song sections

This is a collaborative, student-centred song task, providing aural training, prediction practice and error correction work. It is suitable for intermediate to advanced students. Little teacher preparation is involved! You can source songs and lyrics on *YouTube*.

1 Choose a song with reasonably audible lyrics, eg Tracy Chapman's 'She's got her ticket'.

2 Tell the students that they will hear a 40-second section of the song four times only, and must write down the lyrics. Play the song once.

3 The students will panic after the first listening. Ask them what the song is about and have them agree strategies for more effective listening/collaboration before they hear it for the second time.

4 Play the song for the second time.

5 Get the students to compare notes with a partner (they will have more of the lyrics now). Tell them to use their knowledge of language/the world to make predictions about what any missing words might be.

6 Play it for the third time. Repeat Step 5.

7 Play it for the last time, and then get the students to discuss with their partner and agree on a final version of the lyrics.

8 Ask each pair to write an allocated line or lines on the board.

9 Get the students, as a whole class, to correct the lyrics on the board.

10 Reveal the actual lyrics and play the song again.

11 Finally, draw attention to any interesting/useful language in the lyrics.

Kim Servant

VOCABULARY

Feeling blue

Jane Neill has creative ways to aid memorisation.

There are many ways of teaching and reviewing vocabulary, and a number of excellent articles and books have been written to demonstrate a variety of ways of making words both more accessible to students and easier for them to retain in their long-term memories.

Of course, teachers are made aware of the benefits of teaching in lexical sets very early on in their training, and it is quite true that it is easier to remember words and expressions taught as a cohesive and coherent group. However, there are times when the topic area results in rather loose connections between words and some quite disparate items of vocabulary. How, then, can we improve the learning experience and enhance our students' ability to remember and retrieve these language items?

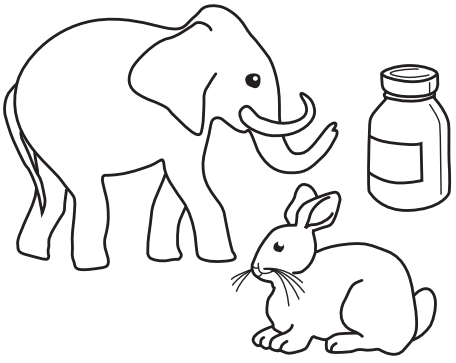
Contextualisation

Engaging with the language in a variety of ways will stimulate the students' interest and encourage more usage and better recall. Some teachers will highlight the history of a word or its source. For example, they may point out the nautical origins of expressions like *to know the ropes* or *to show someone the ropes*. Small details like this can attract the learners' attention and encourage them to record language in a new way – this often leads to better retention.

Visualisation

Another technique is to make a wildly imaginative picture story to go with new words. For example, you may have taught a lesson about ways of looking, using verbs such as *wink*, *glare*, *gaze* and *squint*. You can make up a story yourself, but it is far better for the students to make their own connections. By all means, start them off by giving them an example with illustrations:

A purple elephant fell in love with a rabbit. It followed the rabbit around, gazing at it with love, but the rabbit didn't like it. He shouted at the elephant to go away and glared at her. A fox gave the elephant a love potion. He said, 'If the rabbit drinks this, he will love you for ever.' He then winked at the elephant and added, 'But read the instructions carefully.' The elephant couldn't see the small writing without her glasses and squinted at the instructions, so she gave the rabbit the whole bottle. Unfortunately, drinking too much made the rabbit fall in love with everyone and everything he saw.



The more ridiculous the story, the easier it is to remember. The images, which either you or the students create, could be much simpler than a full story. For example, when recording words from a lesson involving jewellery, there might be illustrations with animals wearing the items, eg a giraffe wearing a tiara, a spider with anklets on each leg and a gorilla with bangles. For a lesson on furniture or household items, you could describe a situation with favourite sporting personalities using the things, for example David Beckham hanging his football shirt in the wardrobe.

Repetition

We all know the value of using words repeatedly, and it is this engagement with the lexical items which is vital to memory and recall. There are any number of review activities we can use with the class, and I have listed here some of the most popular:

- **Half crosswords**
  In two teams (A and B), the Student As have half of a crossword grid filled in,

and the Student Bs have the other half of the same crossword grid completed. In their teams, the students write out clues: definitions for the words they have. They then work in A/B pairs to exchange clues and complete the crossword.

- **Three definitions**
  In small groups, the students have anything from one to five words, depending on how long you want the activity to last. They write three definitions of each word, but only one is true. They read out their definitions and the other groups have to decide which is correct.
- **Backs to the board**
  One student sits with their back to the board and the rest of the class have to explain a word written on the board behind the seated student. This can be done as a team game and can be used as a warmer or cooler.
- **Strangers on a train**
  In pairs or threes, the students have a conversation about a common topic, eg holidays. They each have a word on a card and have to use this word in the conversation as naturally as possible. At the end of the activity, they have to guess which word was written on each other's cards.
- **No, it's not!**
  Working in teams, the students describe a word for the other team to guess by using negative sentences. For example, if the word is *feathers*, they might say: *They aren't heavy and they aren't hard. Cats don't have them.*
- **Creative writing**
  Pairs of students choose a context and six words for another pair, who must weave the words into a conversation in the given context.
- **Ongoing competition**
  The students earn points each time they use a word or expression on a class list. At the end of a week or month, there is a bar of chocolate as a prize.
- **Pass it on!**
  Every student in the class chooses a word or expression during a week, or after a couple of lessons. They write this on a card and then they try to pass the card to another student secretly, eg by dropping it into a coat pocket during the course of a lesson. The student who receives it has to use it in their homework or on a particular day. (If anyone receives two or more, they can just keep one and pass the others on.)
- **Our own dictionary**
  You can make a class dictionary, using a platform such as *Moodle* or on *Wikispaces*.
- **What does it look like?**
  The students have to draw images for the word. For example:



- **Consequences**
  Each student has a piece of paper and is told what to write at the top (see number 1 below). They fold it over and pass it on so the person receiving it can't see what was written. They are then told what to write next, and again the paper is folded and passed on. The order is as follows:

  1 [a woman's name] *met*
  2 [a man's name]
  3 *in* or *at* [a place].
  4 *He said to her*: [...]
  5 *She said to him*: [...]
  6 *The result/consequence was* [...].

  The idea is to use as many new words or phrases as possible.
- **First and last**
  The students work in small teams. Each team is given a word and told to think of a word beginning with the last letter. They say it and pass it on to the next team who, again, have to think of a word beginning with the last letter, say it and pass it on to the next team.

Colour and sound

Recently, I have been experimenting with the idea of using colour and sound to enhance learning and improve memory and recall. The students can choose colours to represent words, or you can use coloured cards, which will provide a wider palette. Ask your students what colour suits the new words or expressions, and they can build up a group of colour-coded words in a chart or word cloud. Review activities can focus on a particular colour, eg blue words. I have always thought of *geography* as a blue word and *chemistry* as yellow (probably something to do with sulphur experiments from school days!).

One activity which really highlights how coloured Cuisenaire rods can be used to represent vocabulary is the simple one of using them to lay out a street plan with shops on it.

The learners choose the Cuisenaire rod they want to represent the grocer, the supermarket, the cinema, the library, and so on. In subsequent practice activities and review lessons, the students engage with the lexical items on a different level – that of colour – and their recall is usually much improved. Every time you lay out the town and put the rods on the streets, more students will remember what shops and businesses they are from the colour associations. Cuisenaire rods or coloured cards can also be used to represent emotions very successfully. Students often have strong colour associations with feelings.

Many teachers use music as a way of presenting language, eliciting feelings or encouraging the students to say what they think is happening. There are many ways in which sound can be used in the class. During the contextualisation of new words, or activities to practise them, try playing different types of music in the background. Ask the class which sound suits the language and the context. When you want to review the lesson, put the same music on and see if the association improves the recall. By working with different stimuli, you can open up a variety of ways to access new information.

★ ★ ★

All our senses can be pathways to learning and memory, and perhaps it is time to try some creative approaches to learning through these channels. It is said that the sense of smell can be the strongest trigger for memory: some people recommend smelling basil before a test, to improve performance levels. With all the work being done on different intelligences and learning styles, we can cast the net wider and try some experiments with sound and vision. ETp



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Connecting the past and the present

Kayvon Havaei-Ahary presents the present perfect.

The present perfect is one of the most difficult features of English, both for learners to learn and teachers to teach. Some of the most common challenges are:

- its connection between the past and the present.
- its concept of unspecified time to describe an event in the past.
- its use of past participles with irregular forms.
- its use of many different signal words (eg *yet*, *already*, *since*, *for*).

I find that when teaching the present perfect, it is best to divide it into three different types of usage:

1 Life experiences:
I've been to every country in Asia.

2 Actions that happened in the past but have relevance now:
I've just had lunch. (So I am no longer hungry.)

3 Actions continuing from the past until now:
I've lived in Japan for three years.

The present perfect covers what happens from a past moment to the present moment, and it is important to establish this connection in your students' minds to help them avoid making mistakes.

Timelines are an effective way of presenting the differences between the three usages.

The purpose of this article is to provide teachers with practical present perfect tense activities that have benefited my students and me in the past, and will hopefully benefit others. These activities focus on the use of the present perfect, and can be used in conjunction with the introduction of it as a new grammar point, or as a review or warmer. They are predominantly aimed at pre-intermediate-level to intermediate-level students, but could be tailored towards lower-level students.

1 Life experiences

Have you ever …? questionnaires

The present perfect is often practised by means of questionnaires about life experiences. Each student is given a list of *Have you ever …?* questions (eg *Have you ever been to another country?*). The questions can be grouped around a particular theme or can be random. Next to the list of questions should be a space for the students to record other students' answers. This can be done in pairs, groups or as a whole-class activity. Higher-level students could devise their own list of questions.

Have you ever lied?

For this activity, the students work in pairs and both write three statements about themselves, using the present perfect. Two of these statements should be true and one a lie. They each try to guess which of their partner's statements is the lie.

Yes, I have

The students work in pairs and take turns to ask each other questions, using the present perfect. The aim is for them to ask questions to which their partner's answer will be *Yes, I have* (eg *Have you ever played the piano? Yes, I have.*). A time limit can be set (eg they compete to see who can get their partner to say *Yes, I have* the most times in three minutes) or there could be a point-based system (eg the first student to reach five points wins).

A variation is for the students to try to ask questions to which their partner's answer will be *No, I haven't*.

Expanding questions

For this game, the students can work in pairs or small groups. The aim is for them to take turns asking each other *Have you ever …?* questions. However, after each question the next student has to expand the previous question by adding language to it. For example:

Student 1: *Have you ever been to a museum?*

Student 2: *Have you ever been to a museum + at night?*

Student 3: *Have you ever been to a museum + at night + with your girlfriend?*

Chair shuffle

This is a lively activity for small or large groups. First, create a circle of chairs, enough for every student except one. Elect one student from the group to stand in the centre of the circle. This student has to make a statement about something they have never done in their life (eg *I have never played cricket*). On hearing this statement, any student who *has* played cricket must get up from their chair and find a new chair to sit on. The student in the centre tries to sit on a vacant chair. The student who ends up without a chair must then stand in the centre and make a new statement.

2 Actions that happened in the past but have relevance now

I've already done it

One way of practising the present perfect for actions that happened in the past but have relevance now is through drilling. This can be done through the following activity:

Write a list of expressions on the board. For example:

(Because) I've already eaten!
(Because) I've seen it a hundred times!
(Because) I've read it!
(Because) I've finished my work!

Have the students repeat the expressions and check that they understand the meaning. Then ask them questions, and tell them to respond using the expressions on the board. For example:

Why don't you want to eat with us?
Why don't you want to see 'Mission Impossible 2'?
Why don't you have your book today?
Why aren't you studying?

This game can be played in small groups once the students understand the concept. One way to develop it further is to provide the students with a list of prompt questions and get them to devise their own answers.

Sales ad

For this activity, the students can work alone or in pairs. Provide them with a bullet-pointed list of information about an item for sale. For example, if the item is a car:

Ford Fiesta bought in 2004
Blue
Two owners
No accidents
100,000 kilometres

The students have to think of questions (using the present perfect) to ask the owner about each piece of information. For example:

How long have you had it?
Have you ever changed the colour?
How many owners has it had?
How many accidents has it had?
How many kilometres has it done?

Finished or unfinished?

The students write three things that they have and haven't done this week, month or year. Then they discuss these with a partner. For example:

I have used the internet today.
I haven't played basketball this week.
I haven't been on holiday yet this year.

3 Actions continuing from the past until now

Lifeline

An effective way to practise the present perfect for describing the past until now is through lifelines. It is also a good way to practise *since* and *for*. Provide the students with your own lifeline or that of a famous person. For example:

1999: Harry moved to Tokyo.
2001: He got a job a teacher at Tokyo University.
2004: He married Yoko.

From the information provided in the lifeline, the students have to make sentences (in the present perfect) about Harry's life up to now. For example:

Harry has lived in Tokyo since 1999 / for 16 years.
He has been a teacher since 2001 / for 14 years.
He has been married to Yoko since 2004 / for 11 years.

Signal words – *already, yet, still*

Words such as *already*, *yet* and *still* are commonly used with the present perfect and can act as a signal that a present perfect form is required.

Travel itinerary

For this activity, the students can work alone or in pairs. Provide them with information about someone's travel plans, and then ask them questions about the information. For example:

Kanta is on holiday in Great Britain. Here are some of his travel plans:

Monday	(Morning) Buckingham Palace, London. (Evening) Take the train to Salisbury.
Tuesday	(Morning) Salisbury Cathedral. (Afternoon) Stonehenge.
Wednesday	(Morning) Take the train to York. (Afternoon) Arrive in York. (Evening) Visit to a British pub.
Thursday	(All day) York.
Friday	(Morning) Take the train to Manchester. (Evening) Fly back to Japan.

It's Wednesday morning. Are these sentences true or false?

Kanta has already been to Stonehenge. **T / F**

Kanta has not been to York yet. **T / F**

Kanta has already visited Buckingham Palace. **T / F**

Kanta has still not been to a British pub. **T / F**

Alternatively, you can just state the time and get the students to create their own sentences about the information (eg *Kanta has already been to Stonehenge*). The material should be tailored towards a context with which the students are familiar (eg places in their own country).

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These activities have been devised to give the students an opportunity to use the language in real-life contexts, in some cases requiring them to draw on their own experiences. Exposing the students to the present perfect tense through these kinds of contexts can help them to understand how it functions and how they can use the language themselves. ETp



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Reviews

Creativity in the English Language Classroom

edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey
British Council 2015
978-0-86355-767-5

So, what is creativity? Well, I think it would be fair to say that it has become somewhat of a buzzword in ELT, as the tendency to move away from dependency on methodologies has become increasingly popular and teachers strive to become innovative in their teaching practice. For some, creativity comes naturally, but for many, being imaginative and coming up with original ideas can be extremely difficult. The great thing about creativity, however, is that it has no boundaries and is appropriate for all teaching contexts, learner styles, ages and levels.

Creativity in the English Language Classroom is a kaleidoscopic collection of practical ideas and articles about creativity in ELT, edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey. The book is comprised of 18 chapters, each written by a different author: some experienced professionals and others new to the field. A variety of global teaching contexts are represented which encapsulate a range of ages and levels, and low-resourced learning environments are also included.

Each chapter has the same structure:

- It begins with an introduction by the author to their interpretation of creativity and the focus this manifests in their teaching practice.
- The author gives case study examples of tried and tested personal experiences and a selection of suggestions and activities to try out in the classroom.
- A short conclusion is provided, together with references.

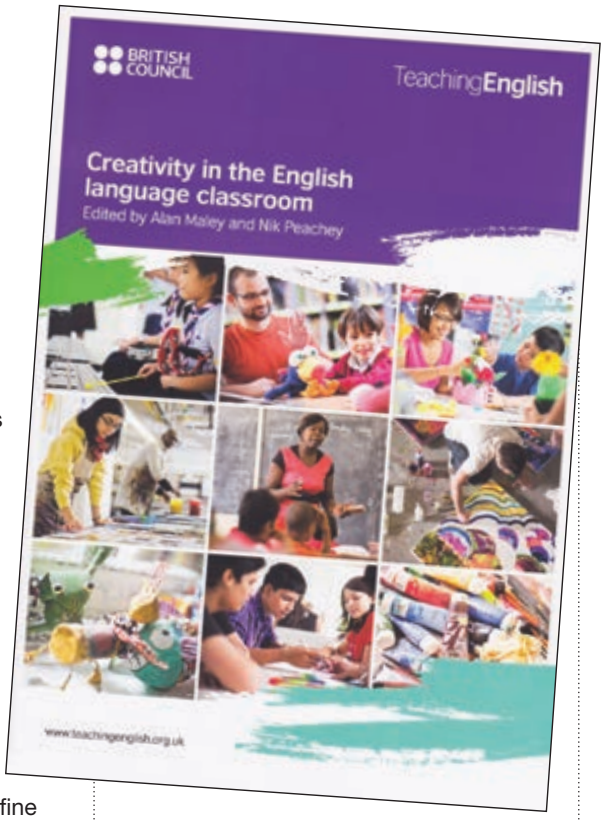
The book provides a plethora of practical ideas for how to become creative teachers by exploring ideas and generating opportunities to extract creativity from our learners. The focus of the chapters changes throughout, but the objective is always the same: to encourage creativity amongst teachers and learners.

Some examples of the topics covered in the chapters are:

- Oral creativity, including storytelling and improvisations.
- Written creativity, in the shape of drama and creative writing.
- Project-based learning, which includes model-building activities for children, and problem solving.
- Suggestions for using 'the learner as the creativity resource', providing a range of activities that derive from cooperative learning by harnessing the social skills required to realise activities.
- 'A framework for learning creativity' which sets out to 'redefine what it means to be creative', by breaking down what creativity consists of, and outlines ways to exploit it in teaching and learning.
- The ongoing educational technology debate, and whether it 'is killing or boosting the creativity of our students'; this is written from the perspective of a low-resource context where there is no access to technology, so the author creates a blended tool from drama and creative writing.
- New concepts such as 'Visible thinking'.
- Big 'C' and little 'c' creativity.
- Seven pillars of creativity in primary ELT.

There is something to cater for all learners and to motivate all teachers to experiment with. There are plenty of practical examples of possible modifications of coursebook activities, and there is even a chapter on teaching grammar creatively. Despite the paradox, the authors argue that *'creativity thrives on constraints'*.

If I were asked to define creativity, I would probably say thinking outside the box, flexibility in the classroom and



imagination. After reading *Creativity in the English Language Classroom*, however, I would have to say that *inspiration* is the key word. This book is an inspiration to break the rules, to have fun and to experiment and explore with your *teaching* and your students' *learning*.

Kat Robb
Manchester, UK

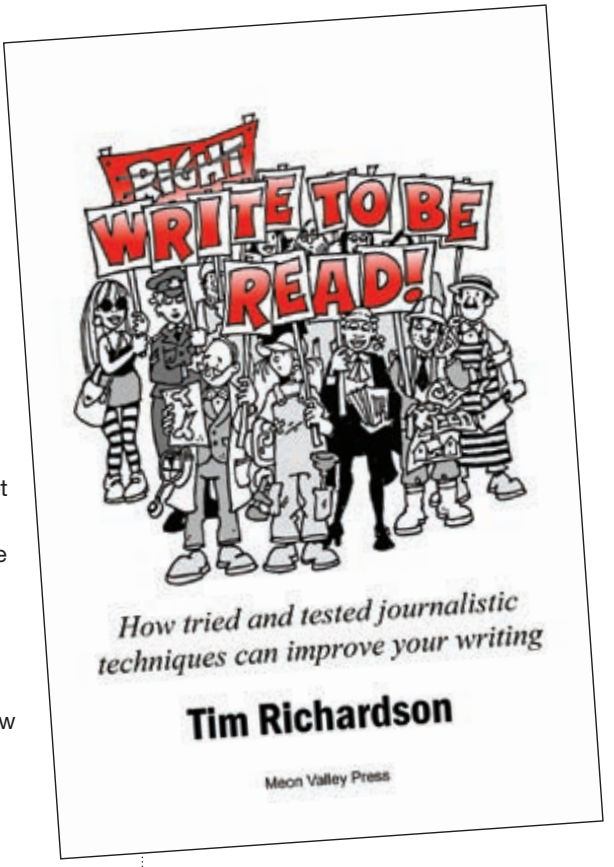
A free download of this book is available at *http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/books-resource-packs/creativity-english-language-classroom*

Write to be Read!

by Tim Richardson
Meon Valley Press 2015
978-1-51146-568-7

This is a book which addresses the need of everyone – from college students to professionals in any field whatsoever – to be able to write coherent English prose, whether that be an email, a blog, a press release, a company brochure or any other text that someone else is expected to read. The focus is on communicating a

Reviews



message clearly and economically, whilst attracting and maintaining the attention of the reader.

The author is a journalist, and his starting point is the principles and techniques taught to newspaper reporters at the start of their careers. He argues that a disciplined, almost formulaic, approach will enable anyone to improve their communicative skills and target their writing more successfully. His belief is that you don't have to be a journalist to write like one, and that everyone can benefit from the techniques he describes. And once the rules have been learnt, he shows how they can be broken, in order to make a piece of writing more personal and creative.

The book is extremely readable, and every point is illustrated by engaging and amusing stories, accompanied by some lovely cartoons. It is generously sprinkled with tales of crashing pianos, rescued dogs, fishy diseases, eco-friendly wine bottles, generous bank managers, penitent joy-riders, all of whom conspire to show how a story can best be constructed. The practical examples clearly demonstrate the importance of putting information in the right order, how the angle of a story can be changed again and again to make it more appropriate for different audiences, how a few simple word changes can make something more engaging, and how extraneous information can be omitted without damaging the integrity of a text.

Though this is not intended primarily as a book for non-native speakers of English, I feel sure that many ELT teachers and students would benefit from it. It would make a good text for business English students and for those preparing to study at university in an English-speaking country. Each chapter ends with either a 'Think about it' or 'Have a go!' section, or both. These encourage readers to reflect on what has been discussed in the chapter, to analyse authentic texts that they encounter in light of what they now know and to try their hand at using the techniques for themselves.

If nothing else, this very accessible book clearly demonstrates that good writing does not have to be complicated, and that sophistication does not consist of cramming your sentences with clauses, long words and literary devices. The final chapter, 'Refining your writing', is full of the kind of sound advice on drafting, redrafting, checking, etc that teachers of writing regularly give their students. In a nutshell, the message is that all writers should have at the forefront of their minds the audience they are trying to reach and the message they wish to communicate. The rest is easy – or at least the author makes it appear so!

Becky James
Stubbington, UK

Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ET*p* website and quote ETPQR0314 at the checkout.

ENGLISH TEACHING *professional*

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See pages 52 and 53.

SCRAPBOOK

What goes 99-clonk, 99-clonk, 99-clonk?
A centipede with a limp!

Living to **100**

One hundred is always a milestone – we have a huge fascination with centenarians, almost as if they have some magic which can rub off on the rest of us …

In spite of the ideas that some pursue, notably Woody Allen in his film *Sleeper*, the idea of living that long isn't always terribly attractive. 'Intermittent Faults' can rear their ugly heads at a much earlier age, and the number of things that can fall off in a century of living is potentially phenomenal. I have known sprightly 105 year olds who used to walk two miles to the shops every day, but they are, sadly, unusual.

There are, of course, exceptions to the reluctance to live to see their hundredth birthday – most of them are aged 99 …

American comedian George Burns had another incentive for becoming a centenarian: *'If you live to be a hundred, you've got it made. Very few people die past that age.'*

To return to Woody Allen, one remark of his is possibly nearer the everyday truth: *'You can live to be a hundred if you give up all the things that make you want to live to be a hundred.'*

Natural **life**

Life's too short

In the natural world, however, life spans are much wider-ranging than our own traditional 'three score years and ten' (and, these days, often a bit more). The humble mayfly measures its span in hours, having no mouth and no ability to feed; conversely, the not-so-humble macaw (a variety of large parrot) has a large sharp beak, and has been known to irritate people for 100 years or more in captivity. In the wild, those irritated are presumably more likely to do something about it …

Life in the slow lane

One of the creatures best-known for its longevity (190 years or so) is the Galápagos giant tortoise, and a similarly aged reptile is the tuatara, a lizard from New Zealand.

The best bet generally for a long span, though, is to arrange to spend your life in water. The koi carp, for instance, has a life



expectancy of over 200 years. It presumably shares with its near relative the goldfish the attention/memory capacity of some ten minutes, thus making even 200 years go by in a welter of new, fresh and continually unexplored experiences and habitats …

Life in the fast lane

Recent analysis carried out on bowhead whales suggests that they can make it to nearly 250 years – some of the gruesome evidence has been in the form of elderly harpoons still attached to their bodies.

Life begins at 400!

The prize, however, must go to the most unlikely candidate you could think of – the ocean quahog, which is a species of edible clam. It has a normal life span of just over 400 years, and there have been reports of some specimens reaching over 500 years old!

This would make food labelling quite an interesting sight, with such 'best before' dates as 2415 … mind you, it would seem rude, if not downright barbaric, to actually eat one; just imagine if it were about to celebrate its 400th birthday on the following day!

Tree of life

You will notice that I haven't yet got onto the subject of trees – a 20-minute drive from my house takes you to the site of a yew tree that is reputed to be some 1,100 years old, which rather brings our animal boasts into perspective.

The **numbers** game

Of course, with all this talk of multiple centenarians, I am not suggesting that this illustrious magazine is anything like that old (the editor would be rather cross if I were, I think). But the number 100 has a general attraction for us – as a milestone, it's a good round number.

And numbers always have a tendency to grab our attention. See how many of these numbers you can identify:

a) _____ **Deadly Sins**

b) _____ **Disney dwarfs**

c) _____ **Coins in The Fountain**

d) _____ **Trombones**

e) _____ **Dalmatians**

f) **A Tale of** _____ **Cities**

g) **Fahrenheit** _____

h) **The** _____ **Towers**

i) _____ **Night**

j) _____ **Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest**



Answers
a) 7 (wrath, greed, sloth, envy, lust, pride, gluttony), **b)** 7, **c)** 3 (1950s song and film), **d)** 76 (song from the musical *The Music Man*), **e)** 101 (book and film), **f)** 2 (novel by Charles Dickens), **g)** 451 (novel by Ray Bradbury), **h)** 2 (part of J R R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), **i)** 12th (Shakespeare play), **j)** 1 (novel and film).

Try this literary calculation:

Take the number of Men in a Boat, add the number of Days in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch, multiply by the number of Musketeers, add the number of Steps and the number of the Ladies' Detective Agency, subtract the Catch and add the number of Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.

The result should give you the beginning of the title of a recent bestseller.

Answer Fifty Shades of Grey

More significances of **100**

- **One hundred degrees Celsius is the boiling point of pure water at sea level.**
- The Karman line lies 100 kilometres above sea level and is used to define the boundary between the earth's atmosphere and outer space.
- **The US Senate has 100 senators.**
- Many currencies' major units are subdivided into 100 smaller units, which largely makes sense, until you consider the late Italian lira, which began life as equivalent to considerably less than the current Euro cent; the subdivision of this again into microscopic fragments of currency surely gives rise to a version of nano-economics ...
- **Quite the reverse of the Roman idea that a centurion had charge of 100 soldiers, rather than 100 small percentages of a soldier.**
- Percentages are a measurement of ratios: parts in a hundred. Therefore, 50 percent is 50 parts in 100, or one half. Thus, banks in the UK currently pay some one percent (£1 per £100 hard-earned cash) but *charge* some 15 percent (£15 per £100 of hastily-borrowed cash).

To infinity and **beyond**

Those who decide that 100 simply isn't enough tend to jump to the extreme of infinity (which is delightfully depicted as a figure 8 reclining tastefully in the Roman mode). Hence the unfathomable idea that an infinite number of monkeys, each armed with a typewriter, would eventually arrive at the complete works of Shakespeare. Like most modern 'labour-saving' ideas, this would generate much extra work – remember the 'paperless office'? – mainly by requiring the editing of spurious words: *'Is this a banana I see before me, the handle towards my hand?'* needs subtle editing before it is worthy of inclusion in the *New Macbeth*.

Scrapbook compiled by Ian Waring Green

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Game-based professional development

Gary Dean Hewgley suggests some activities for enhancing teaching strategies.

Game-based learning has become popular as a means of adding excitement and relevance, especially to students who enjoy gaming in their free time. Game-based learning has nothing to do with getting out a Monopoly board and having the students play a few rounds. Instead, it tries to take the elements of a game that makes it exciting and uses those exciting parts to enhance a lesson. Features such as levels, badges, experience points, recognition and many more can be incorporated into a lesson so that the students feel they are undertaking a challenge, rather than performing a series of mindless tasks that seem to have no purpose.

So how does it relate to teacher development? Well … professional development is often a matter of sitting in a room, listening to someone talk, and daydreaming about what you would rather be doing. While some people are naturally daydreamers and don't care, many *do* care and are just not interested in sitting in a room listening to someone talk for extended periods of time. When teachers do care, they will spend hours trying to figure things out. They can spend hours going through travel guides and manipulating numbers relating to their two-week vacation through Europe. You won't see such precise planning and love of maths very often! So why don't we try to make professional development more challenging and fun for teachers?

The main idea of the game-based activities described here is to get teachers to participate in games which will extend their repertoire of teaching strategies, and to get recognition for bettering themselves.

'Teaching strategies' bingo

This game uses a grid that was created in Microsoft *Word* and completed with teaching strategies from the list on pages 48–50. The template shown on page 47 uses a 4 x 4 grid, but it would be just as easy to create a 5 x 5 grid if you would like the game to be spread out over a longer period of time. As with all of the games, someone needs to be in charge of monitoring the process and reporting the results. The game could be played over a short period of time or a longer period, such as a month.

- Put the teachers into small teams and get them to look at the bingo grid and decide which strategies they would like to try (or the administration can assign the strategies).
- Have each team work together to produce activities using those teaching strategies and 'win' squares by either demonstrating them or giving a brief description as to how the activity would work as part of a bigger lesson.
- For longer periods of time, teachers would still complete the typical *forwards*, *backwards*, *diagonal* moves of the Bingo game, but evidence would be in the form of actual student work or video artefacts of the activity.
- There are no losers. The winners, and there can be more than one (in fact, the goal is to have many winners), can be given public recognition or some sort of 'teacher' prizes, such as pencils, papers or even a free lunch. Ideally, the artefacts and cards would be displayed in the hallway or office or on the school website to show everyone the good work the teachers are trying to do in their classrooms.

Chart your level

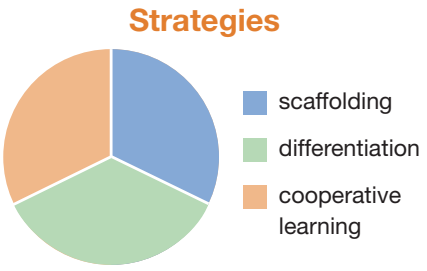
The second template (see page 47) was created by Alice Keeler for game-based professional development. It involves using a *Google Spreadsheet* for points and levels. This particular game was created for *SmartBoard* training, but, again, the teaching strategies listed on pages 48–50 could be substituted for the *SmartBoard* exercises used in the example. Each exercise would be assigned a level and points, based upon how much time and skill was involved in using that strategy. This activity would be a great way to differentiate the strategies and allow teachers to start by staying within their comfort zones and

'Teaching Strategies' Bingo **(scaffolding, differentiating and cooperative learning) *forwards*, *backwards* or *diagonal***			
Use graphic organisers to scaffold a unit	Pre-teach vocabulary words	Create and use an 'Activity guide'	Make connections to a student's first language
Use the 'Pass a problem' strategy in a lesson	Add a 'Circle the sage' activity to a lesson	Use the 'Think aloud' strategy during a lesson	Add videos, pictures and/or audio to supplement a lesson
Create an 'Anticipation guide' for a unit	Use the 'Team–pair–solo' strategy in a lesson	Activate/tap into prior knowledge in a unit or lesson	Use hints or partial solutions in part of a lesson
Create a WebQuest for a unit of study	Use the 'Pairs compare' strategy in a lesson	Use 'Reciprocal teaching' in a unit of study	Use the 'Show and tell' method (complete samples) in a unit of study

then slowly move up to harder, more complicated activities. These game boards are very versatile and can be adapted for other teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, or even something like a menu system for a student unit plan.

Colour your pie!

- The last game-based strategy described here is very similar to the game of *Trivial Pursuit*. Assign colours to *scaffolding*, *cooperative learning* and *differentiation*, and give the teachers pie charts divided into three sections.
- Get the teachers to 'fill the pie' (colour in a section) by using, say, two examples of each strategy type, without any repeats.
- The pie could be sub-divided into three sections of two, three sections of three, or any combination that is desired that stresses a particular area.



Once again, documented evidence in the form of student artefacts and/or videos would be needed in order to secure the corresponding piece of pie. The artefacts should be displayed and the resources shared on the school website, on *YouTube*, or even in the school office. ETp

Burke, J *Classroom Management* Scholastic 2008

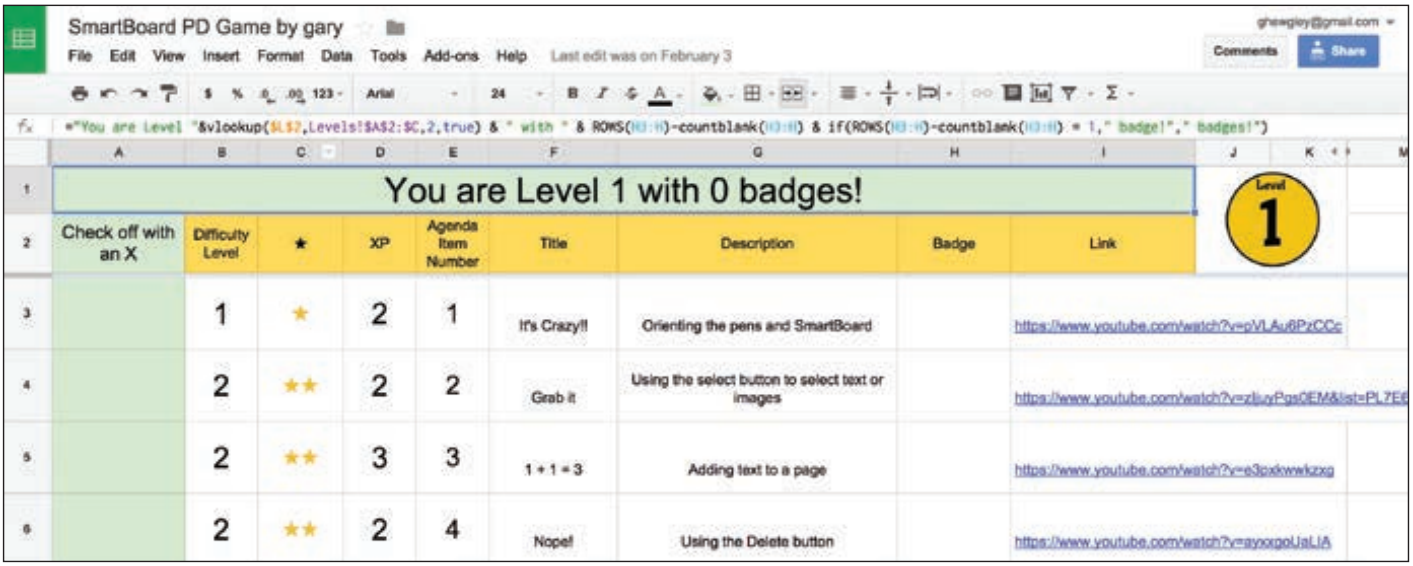
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Game-based professional development • Teaching strategies 1

There are many ways to teach, and there are many different names for these strategies. If you have a great strategy that is not listed, please share it with others!

Activate/tap into prior knowledge (scaffolding)
Has anyone ever started talking to you about something and you had absolutely no idea what they were talking about? Activating prior knowledge allows students to make connections between what they already know and what they are going to be learning. A review session might be used to help students connect old and new material. Activating/tapping into prior knowledge also helps put material into context so that it can be better understood and manipulated later on.

Activity guides (differentiation)
The teacher designs packets of materials so the students can work on similar tasks, but at different levels of complexity. These activity guides may contain any of the following: different sets of instructions, suggested steps for solutions, partial modelling of a task, performance criteria, options for presentation, various resources.

Anticipation guides (differentiation)
This strategy is a way to get students to use prior knowledge and think about something before beginning to read a text passage. The anticipation guide is usually made up of a series of statements with which the student must either agree or disagree. These are great discussion starters, as in real life there are often more than two choices, or the choices may actually be just as unfair. Anticipation guides are a nice way to get students to examine a topic and look at it from different angles. An example might be: *It's always wrong to take something that is not yours. Yes or no?*

Centres (differentiation)
Centres, or stations, are collections of materials and activities designed to teach, reinforce or extend the students' knowledge, understanding and skills. They are at different physical locations in the classroom where the students work on different tasks simultaneously. Not all the students have to visit all the locations all the time, nor do all the students have to spend the same amount of time at any location. Sometimes the teacher decides who will go where; at other times the students self-select.

Choice boards (differentiation)
Different assignments are placed in permanent pockets or folders. By asking a student to make a work selection from a particular pocket or folder, the teacher targets work toward student need and, at the same time, allows the student to make controlled/guided choices.

Circle the sage (cooperative learning)
The teacher selects students who understand a concept, or who can perform a particular skill, as 'sages' to model and be the 'expert' for their peers. Students gather around the sages to learn. Afterwards, they return to teams to share ideas. Students may also rotate from one sage to another to practise listening for information. Alternatively, you can have the sages rotating to give oral presentations.

Connections to L1 (scaffolding)
English language learners often come with solid language backgrounds in two or more languages. It might be helpful to scaffold sections and make connections with the student's first language. A student might not know what a pear is in English, but knows exactly what it is in Arabic – make the connection!

Corners (cooperative learning)
The students select, or are assigned, a corner or wall of the classroom where they can interact with small groups of other students. For example, students may give presentations over the course of the week rather than being required to do so individually at the front of the class.

Cubing (differentiation)
The students are required to look at a topic from six different sides: describe it, compare it to something, associate it with something, analyse it, apply it and argue for or against it.

Frayer vocabulary method (scaffolding)
The Frayer model is basically a big square comprised of four smaller squares and a circle in the middle for the word or topic. The top left square would be a definition (in the student's own words). The top right square might be facts and characteristics of the word/topic. The bottom two squares would be examples and non-examples of it.

Give one, get one (cooperative learning)
This activity involves a one-to-one sharing. It could be done with answers, notes, questions, observations, feedback, or whatever. The options are endless!

Graphic organisers (scaffolding)
These are visual ways to display information, but in a systematic way. They may be done with circles and lines, diagrams, flow charts, or in many other ways. *Microsoft Word*, *Kidspiration*, *Google Draw* and *SmartBoard Notebook* all allow shapes and lines to be used for organisers.

Guided text predictions (scaffolding)
This is a form of modelling where the teacher provides prompts to get the students to make text predictions. The goal of this strategy is to move to a point where the students get better at making their own predictions about a text and what may or may not happen next.

Game-based professional development • Teaching strategies 2

Hints and partial solutions (scaffolding)
Providing hints or partial solutions is an excellent way to get students started on an activity. Sometimes an activity looks so overwhelming that the students just shut down. However, once they get started, they find it's not really that bad. Obviously this is a scaffold that you would want to remove over time, and use sparingly once the students become better at using particular assessment formats.

Inside/outside circles (cooperative learning)
The students form two concentric circles (one circle inside another circle). This can be done standing or sitting, but each person should be facing another person in the other circle (so you need the same number of students in each circle). After a certain amount of time discussing something, one circle rotates one or two places and the students have a new discussion with a new partner.

Literature circles (differentiation)
The teacher may assign students to read different texts connected by theme or genre, or parts of a coursebook reading text. The students perform specific roles in preparation for participating in discussion groups. They may produce assessment tasks, such as reports or speeches, as a result of their discussions.

Menus (differentiation)
As with restaurant menus, there are sections for appetisers, main dishes, side dishes and desserts. The students choose one or more 'appetiser' activities, which are small, targeted introductions into a main activity. The main dish is an activity that everyone must complete and is the heart of the lesson/unit. The side dishes are supplementary activities to the main dish. These could be presentation formats, or material that needs to be inserted into a project. The dessert section is comprised of fun optional activities.

Multiple texts/resources (scaffolding)
Multiple texts might be something as simple as taking different reading-level texts and finding alternative resources such as pamphlets or web pages. These resources could be text-based, or based upon a video or audio source. The goal is to find a way to provide helpful material that will help a student to complete an assignment. An example might be finding alternate resources for the topic of biomes – assuming the science text is above the students' reading level.

Note-taking (scaffolding)
A very visual way of taking notes is to put ideas and topics on the left, and explanations and drawings on the right. Good resource videos for this can be found on *YouTube*.

Numbered heads together (cooperative learning)
The students are put into equally numbered groups. Each student is given a number from 1 to 4 (or however many are in that group). The groups are given tasks to do, but the trick is that the whole group is responsible for making sure that everyone knows the answer, how to get the answer, or knows how to solve the problem. When they have finished, a number is called out – say 3. All of the 3s stand up and give the answer, work out the problem or whatever. This is a great activity to get the students to help each other out and to make sure that everyone succeeds.

Pairs compare (cooperative learning)
Pairs generate ideas or answers, compare their answers with another pair and then see if, working together, they can come up with additional responses neither pair alone had. This is a great activity to use with note-taking or reading comprehension, where the students can share answers and find out why someone else came up with something different.

Pair review note-taking (cooperative learning, differentiation)
The students take notes from whatever materials are provided (text, lecture, etc) and then pair up with someone to compare notes and discuss why specific notes were taken or not taken, and why.

Pass a problem (cooperative learning)
The students form groups, examine something or read a text passage, and then create a list of thoughts or questions about it. These thoughts/questions are put into a folder and passed to another group. The new group examines the issue and adds their own thoughts and questions. When they have finished, the folder gets passed around again to have a third group add thoughts/questions. At the end, each folder can be organised and posted so everyone sees everyone else's contribution.

Pre-teach vocabulary (scaffolding)
Pre-teaching vocabulary involves skimming a text, finding difficult words and teaching those words before the students begin reading. The idea behind this is that we want to focus on the text and not spend a lot of time on vocabulary and then try to go back to the text. Once the vocabulary is taught, it also provides a connection/bridge so that the students focus on what the text is trying to say, not focusing on what particular words mean.

Read, pause, ask questions, pause, review (scaffolding)
This involves showing the students one strategy that might help them become better readers. The teacher first reads a section of text and pauses while the students think about how it connects with what they already know. The teacher then asks some questions about what was just read. After another pause, the teacher reviews what was read and the questions that were generated. This strategy can be modified to accommodate different lengths of text – maybe one sentence, two sentences or a whole paragraph at a time before pausing.

Game-based professional development • Teaching strategies 3

Reciprocal teaching (cooperative learning)
Reciprocal teaching is a great way to get students to help each other out. Students can often explain things better than teachers do, or differently. Maybe this strategy can be effective when a student is more receptive to peers than to teachers presenting ideas.
Reciprocal teaching also ensures that the students actually know what they are talking about, because the formative assessment consists of explaining it to a peer.

Round tables (cooperative learning)
In teams of four, the students take turns passing around the same paper (or iPad) from one student to the next in order to draw, write, plan a video or audio recording for that discussion item.

Scaffolded academic language (scaffolding)
While we may assume that our students understand our directions and the terms we use, this is often just not true. What is a *paragraph*, *indentation*, *double-spaced*, etc? What does *skim* mean? We, as teachers, need to make sure that our students understand the directions as well as the material they are working on.

Show and tell (scaffolding)
This is basically a method of showing the students what an assignment might look like when completed. Many students find this helpful, because if they know what an assignment should look like, they won't waste time going off on a tangent.

Socratic seminars (differentiation)
In the Socratic seminar system, the participants carry the responsibility for the quality and quantity of the discussions. Great discussions occur when participants study the provided text or information closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas. The discussion is not about particular right or wrong answers; it is also not a debate. Students are encouraged to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly while examining ideas in a rigorous, thoughtful manner. Socratic seminars are all about sharing, questioning and rethinking what we know about a topic.

Teacher-based read-alouds (scaffolding)
While getting students to read aloud can be a very effective strategy, teachers can also model reading aloud. This might be helpful to scaffold the fact that words/sentences have differing tones, speed and emphasis.

Team jigsaws (differentiation, cooperative learning)
The students participate in two groups as follows: They start out in a large 'home' group, within which individual students choose, or are assigned, the responsibility of completing one facet of the group's overall task, or covering one section of content to be studied, thus becoming an 'expert' in it. The home groups then disperse and the students reconfigure into groups studying the same facet. When these expert groups are finished, they return to their home (original group) where all the experts take turns sharing, until the original task is completed and the content is understood.

Team–pair–solo (cooperative learning)
The students solve problems (or answer questions) first as a team, then they divide into pairs to continue working, and finally work on those problems alone.

Think aloud (scaffolding)
This a method of simply explaining what you are doing and what you are thinking as you do it. This may involve explaining why you know to look for something in a sentence, or how you watch out for tricky words or sentences. Knowing *why* somebody does something can be even more valuable than knowing that they *did* it. Who cares if you underlined a word? What we care about is *why* that word was underlined.

Think–pair–share (differentiation, cooperative learning)
The students think about their responses to a question and then discuss their individual answers in pairs. Each pair of students then shares their ideas with another pair.

Tic-Tac-Toe (differentiation)
Tic-Tac-Toe grids have nine boxes in a 3 x 3 matrix. The students must complete three activities in a row, column or diagonal. Variations could be three in any location, or three with the middle square required of all students.

Tiered instruction (differentiation)
The tiering method allows teachers to design a lesson with multiple paths for learning a key concept. The tiered tasks and instructions can be changed and modified according to student interests, readiness levels and the time allotted to each portion of the unit.

Use videos, pictures and audio (scaffolding)
When teaching, add pictures of what you are talking about or to remind the students of what was covered. Add music to create a mood for a lesson. Add videos that show the topic and add audio files to assignments, to act as notes or reminders.

WebQuests (differentiation)
WebQuests may have fallen out of favour recently, but they can still be very powerful ways to help students learn. They are basically full units posted on a web page. The directions are posted, the resources are posted with links, and tests/quizzes are posted or links to them are given. WebQuests used to be held on specific WebQuest pages – now you can do the same with a basic web page service like *Weebly* or *Wordpress*.

Bridging the technophobe–technophile gap 1

Daniel Monaghan and **Tessa Woodward**

begin a new series with a look at how students can encounter a stimulus little by little.

Imagine this staffroom conversation: Teacher A loves using new technology in her language classes. She says, 'There's a great new app you can use in class, you know …'

Teacher B's eyes glaze over. 'Technobabble,' she thinks to herself.

Or how about this? Teacher C, on his way to class, has a rolled-up poster under his arm and a box of Cuisenaire rods in hand.

'Hi!' he says to Teacher D, who says, 'Hi!' and thinks, 'That's so last century!'

Teachers with very different views on teaching with new technology can sometimes have a slight communication problem. The fact that they prefer to use very different media in lessons can make it seem that they disagree utterly on how you should teach.

A real puzzle

This is not just an imaginary problem. A real group, in the UK for a two-week refresher course, were the stimulus for this series of articles. Some of the teachers came from low-resourced settings and were eager to experience *YouTube* videos, electronic dictionaries, apps and all. Others came from well-resourced settings and were sick of fighting for their students' attention when heads dipped to check mobile phones or use laptops. Some teachers had had the good fortune to be involved in the choice of the interactive whiteboards (IWBs) and related software used in their schools and had copies of the software at home so they could prepare there. They were positive about IWBs. Others had returned from holiday to find their normal whiteboard ripped out and an IWB in its place. They had had to start work with little training, and their attitude was quite different. In fact, they were pretty hostile towards IWBs! How could these different viewpoints be reconciled so that the group could work together?

A unifying framework

Our solution to this puzzle was to adopt a unifying framework for the course. There were several we could have used, but the one we actually chose was 'Stimulus-based learning and teaching'. We will explain the principles behind it as we go through this series. Whatever unifying framework you choose, it can run down the centre of discussions like a spine, allowing you to branch left or branch right from it, depending on whether you wish to teach using new technology or not. In other words, whether you wish to learn and teach plugged or unplugged!

Stimulus-based learning and teaching: Encounter

A stimulus is anything that engages a student's attention and encourages language learning and use. Thus, a stimulus could be a group of new words, a text, tweet, picture, email, object, a listening, a chunk of language, a visitor, a song, a *YouTube* video or a map. Whatever stimulus is used, we will gradually need to do a number of things

Bridging the technophobe–technophile gap 1

with it. In this series, we will identify five different things that we will call 'moves'. The first one is 'Encounter'.

Students need, first of all, to meet or encounter the stimulus. They can do this in many ways. They can meet it immediately and completely. So, a teacher who wants to work with a text can simply ask the students to turn to the page where the text is and to look at it. Many teachers, though, prefer to reveal a stimulus more slowly, building curiosity and student involvement.

Slowly revealing a picture

Let's imagine that the stimulus is a picture. You might want to use one as a lead-in to a topic or to give a follow-up reading text more impact. Without using any technology at all, a picture can be masked, or flashed for a brief time, or shown upside down. Or if a photocopier has been used, it can be blurred or made faint. The picture, if big enough, can be shown by the teacher, or students can have access to copies or can draw their own for use. Using any of the 'slow reveal' techniques mentioned above can encourage the students to ask questions about the picture:

Is there a boat in it?

Is it a family?

Did I see a roof?

Is it in Africa?

Alternatively, they can use speculation language as they try to 'get' the picture:

Could it be a group of camels?

I think it might be in this town because I saw a shop I know!

No idea what it is!

You can achieve the same slow reveal effect using technology, too. For example, you can choose a picture from the internet, project it onto a screen and use an app called 'Tunnel Vision'. With this app, a picture on a screen is blanked out except for a peephole that you can move around so that different parts of the picture are visible. The app is free at: *www.cockos.com/tunnelvision/* by clicking on *TunnelVision v0.02*. You will need to extract the file after you download it. You can then run the application.

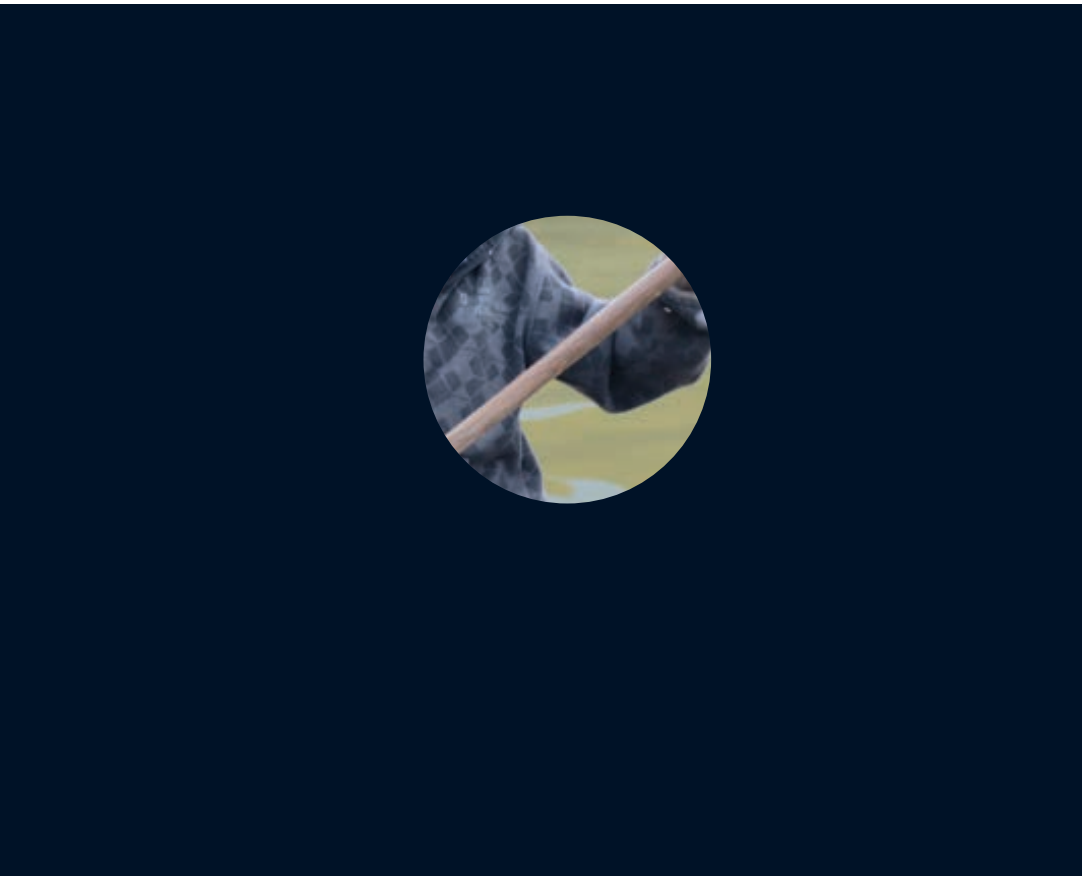
Caution: As soon as you run this app, all but a small portion of your screen will be blanked out. Don't panic! Find the bottom right-hand corner of your screen, near the date. There you will see the Cockos logo, which looks a bit like this:



Right-click on this and you can configure the program to show more of the screen, and you can also quit the program to show all the screen again.

On this page is an example of an image that has been mostly hidden using 'Tunnel Vision'. Can you guess what the full image shows?

Alternatively, you can distort an image using a free online photo editor. One example is Fotoflexer (*www.fotoflexer.com*). Simply click on 'upload a photo' to transfer a photo from your computer, use the 'effects' tools to distort it and then save it back to your computer. The photo on page 53 has been distorted using the 'Pixelate' tool. It is the same photo as before. Is it easier or harder to guess what it is now? Squinting at it may help if you're stuck!



Slowly revealing a text

We can use the slow reveal technique to help students encounter other stimuli, such as a text. You can, for example, use a 'word cloud' generator (eg *www.wordle.net*) to create a word cloud of a text by pasting the text into the generator. The more often a word appears in a text, the bigger it will be in the word cloud you create (grammar words such as *the* are ignored). You can then ask your students to make predictions about the text, based on the cloud. There is an example on page 53

It is fairly easy to guess the basic story from this cloud (a schoolgirl was so upset about being given a detention that she had a heart attack), but you can ask for more details, such as where the incident took place and whether the person survived. The story appeared in several newspapers, so the students should be able to find it easily by putting *Tabatha McElligott* into a search engine.



Slowly revealing an object

Alternatively, you may wish the students to encounter an object being used as a stimulus for language work in a lesson. You can wrap the object up and ask them to pass it around, guessing what is inside the package by its weight and size.

Using a more high-tech approach, you can play a sound effect related to the object and ask the students to guess what the object is. For example, if the object is a potato, you could play the sound effect of someone eating crisps. You can find an example of this sound by going to the website *www.soundbible.com*. This is an American website, so you will need to search for an 'eating chips' sound. Rather sweetly, if they don't have the sound effect you want, you can ask them to create it!

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The stimuli used above were pictures, texts and objects. The category of move applied was 'Encounter'. The activity each time involved slowly revealing the stimulus and having the students guess what it was or ask questions about it. The reason for the slow reveal was to increase impact and curiosity. The only difference between the activities each time was the medium used.

To enable those who love teaching with newer technology and those who don't to understand each other and work together, trainers and teachers can use a unifying framework, as outlined above. In the next article in this series we will consider the *analysis* of a stimulus by low- and high-tech means. ETp

Woodward, T *Planning Lessons and Courses* CUP 2001

Woodward, T 'Stimulus-based Teaching' *English Teaching Professional* 25 2002



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Go to page 43 to see the original of the photo used in this article.

Video cameras in ELT

1 In the students' hands

In the first of a new series, Jamie Keddie looks at the possibilities for getting students to make video recordings.

When I was 14 years old, my friend Bob (a bad influence) persuaded me to climb a crane on a building site. It was a summer's evening, there was no one around and it seemed safe enough. But when we were at the top, someone spotted us and called the police.

My parents were furious. 'What were you thinking? What were you trying to accomplish?' they asked me. To this day, they still won't let me see Bob!

Some things never change. Boys will be boys. Consider Vitaliy Raskalov and Vadim Makhorov. In September 2011, these two young Russians decided to climb the 119-metre Moscow Bridge in Kiev, which spans the River Dnieper. By crawling up the support cables, they were able to reach the top in approximately ten minutes.

But some things do change. Unlike Bob and me, Vitaliy and Vadim decided to film their stunt and upload the video onto *YouTube*. Within months, it went viral and the boys became internet celebrities. You can still see the video on *YouTube*. But please be warned: if you suffer from vertigo, you will not want to watch it.

Building on the success of their video, *On the Roofs* (as the boys now call themselves) decided to take on more challenging projects. Last year, for example, they went to Hong Kong to climb the China Online Centre, a 52-storey skyscraper in the city's Wan Chai District.

At this stage, I should point out that I am not condoning this type of activity. And I am certainly not suggesting that teachers make use of such video content in their classrooms. But Vitaliy and Vadim's story provides an interesting case study for anyone who wants to understand how the world has changed in the last few years as a result of video sharing.

From amateur to professional

First of all, Vitaliy and Vadim represent an ever-increasing group of young people who have discovered, mastered and reinvented the principles of film-making. And you can clearly see the evolution of this by watching their videos.

Their first video, produced in Kiev, was a 12-minute, single unedited shot. There, they used one camera to record a stunt. In Hong Kong, however, they use video tools to tell a story. Shots are carefully composed and set to music. They use a variety of techniques, equipment and aesthetics to build up the scene slowly. We are introduced to the city, the streets, the food and the people. Eventually, after about a minute, the boys enter the main door of the skyscraper and press the button to call the elevator. At that exact moment, we cut to the top of the skyscraper where the viewer gets a drone's eye view of what is awaiting them. This is non-chronological storytelling.

Secondly, *On the Roofs* have learnt how to make a living from what they do. You probably consider them to be foolish and irresponsible, but it is important to understand that they are shrewd and successful entrepreneurs. Their videos have been viewed 60 million times. This will have earned them some serious money through the *YouTube* partnership programme. On top of that, there are merchandising possibilities and sponsor partnerships (these have included The North Face outdoor wear, Vans footwear and Suunto watches).

Let's take a moment to think about this. When I was 14 years old, I climbed a crane and got a clip around the ear. Twenty-five years later, two young men do a similar thing and create a successful career out of it. My mum and dad were right. My foolish stunt could not have accomplished anything good. But I sometimes wonder what Vitaliy and Vadim's poor parents would have to say in order to persuade their boys to stop doing what they do!

From *YouTube* to *YouTubing*

Fortunately, the video activities of most young people are safer than those described above. If you don't know anything about videoblogging and if you can't name any *YouTubers*, then I would guess that you are over 21 years old and don't have any teenaged children.

Established *YouTubers* are young and savvy. They create 'talking head' videos in which they speak to the camera about a whole range of topics: video games, makeup and beauty tips, shopping, life as a teenager, etc. They



Vitaliy Raskalov and Vadim Makhorov at the top of the Bank of America Tower in Hong Kong

upload content regularly and interact with their subscribers through *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*.

Importantly, we are not considering isolated cases of extrovert attention seekers here. I have at least six friends whose teenaged kids create videos and would like to be established *YouTubers*. And despite what you might think, many *YouTubers* claim to be shy individuals.

As is the case with Vitaliy and Vadim, it is often possible to observe the technical evolution of an individual *YouTuber*. As they progress, they collaborate with others to master the tools of their trade. Successful *YouTubers* tend to create content of the highest professional standard. And like Vitaliy and Vadim, they can make a healthy living through their activities.

YouTubers fall in and out of fashion in the way that pop bands do. If you teach teenagers, ask them to tell you about their favourite *YouTubers*. You'll learn a lot!

From exploitation to creation

Online video is the medium of the moment. It is a medium that young people are embracing and reinventing. And when the medium changes, teachers have to take notice.

For many of us, it is safe to say that exploiting pre-existing video content in the classroom is mainstream practice. We go online to find adverts, music videos, comedy sketches, news clips and viral videos. We look for ways of using them to teach English.

However, despite the possibilities, the practice of video *production* in language teaching has yet to go mainstream. This is completely understandable. Teachers who want to incorporate video cameras into their teaching have a lot of social, technological, practical and pedagogical issues to consider. There are many questions to ask, and these include:

- What can I do with video-recording devices in my classroom?
- How do I get permission to use them from students and parents?
- How do I take steps to ensure online safety?
- What sort of video-production tasks can I set up?
- How do I set up collaboration between students?
- How do I get my students to share the videos that they create?
- What sort of feedback can I give?
- What if the students don't want to appear in videos?
- How do I provide technical support?
- How can we use them for teacher development?

Within the next ten years, video production in ELT certainly will go

In the students' hands

mainstream. This is a time for teachers to share experiences and allow things to evolve. This is a time to make sense of it all, and in this series of articles that is what I would like to attempt.

From teacher's hands to students' hands

Over the last year, I have been collaborating with a number of teachers who have been experimenting with video tools in their classrooms. I have seen a lot of great work come out of this, and I will be showcasing some of these videos in the next article.

I have also noticed that some teachers seem reluctant to give control of the technology to their students – a trap that I have sometimes fallen into myself. If the intention is to get an individual to speak to a camera in the *teacher's* hands, the result is usually a startled-looking student, looking up and speaking nervously in front of a group of silenced onlookers: not a particularly captivating performance!

There are a lot of possibilities for video cameras in the hands of teachers. However, in this article and in the next, we are looking at reasons and potential for putting video-recording devices and video-editing software in the hands of the *learners*. Here are some thoughts.

1 Less stress

For many people, speaking in front of a video camera can be a stressful experience. As mentioned above, a camera in the teacher's hands would probably be less conducive to a relaxed performance from a student. When students have control of the tools, they can create videos as and when they are ready to do so. They can film as many 'takes' as they like in order to get the performance that they are happy with.

2 Students' own devices

In many situations, we will be able to take advantage of the video-recording devices which are already in our students' hands: their smartphones or tablet computers. These can be regarded as all-in-one devices. They can be used to shoot, edit and upload video. They are the natural first choice for tasks and activities which require video production.



Video cameras in the students' hands

3 Reduced workload for the teacher

Shooting, editing, sharing and managing videos can require a lot of time. This is time that should be invested by technologically-autonomous students whenever possible.

4 Creative control for students

As the teacher, it is our job to set up a video task, coordinate it and provide support when necessary. However, it is the students who should have creative control of the planning, shooting and editing stages. Making films is naturally collaborative, and the results are usually best when the teacher takes a back seat.

5 Opening the learning space

Understandably, many schools ban students from bringing their mobile phones into class. Fortunately, this is not a problem: the classroom is generally not a good choice for filming in any case. When everyone is required to make videos in the same room, the result is noise pollution.

Mobile devices open the learning space. They allow students to create videos in their own time, in locations more interesting and less noisy than the classroom. Students can decide what to wear. They can include props if necessary. And importantly, they can make themselves look nice in front of the mirror before pressing the record button.

6 Content ownership

When students create video with their own smartphones or tablets, they automatically retain ownership of the content that they create. This means that students and parents can worry less about where their video files will end up.

In cases where we want our students to share their videos online, they can choose to do so on a site of their choice with the appropriate privacy options. Again, this means less dependency on the teacher: if a student or parent wants their video to be removed, they have the control to do so.

7 Getting permission

It may be easier to get permission for filming if parents realise that your intentions are for their children to make videos of their own. We can even invite parents to take on a monitorial role, oversee the video-production process and screen the final product before allowing it to be submitted.

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In the next article in this series, we will look at some good example videos that were produced by learners of English. We will consider the tasks that they were given and discuss problems that were encountered. ETp



Jamie Keddie is the author of *Images* and *Bringing Online Video into the Classroom*, both published by OUP. He is also the founder of the recently-relaunched *lessonstream.org*. Jamie is a teenager in his early 40s and his dream is to be a *YouTuber*. You can find out more about his video channels at *jamiekeddie.com*.

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Five things you always wanted to know about information overload

(but were too afraid to ask)

In this series, Nicky Hockly explains aspects of technology which some people may be embarrassed to confess that they don't really understand. In this article, she discusses how she separates the data from the smog.

1 What is information overload?

The internet has brought us access to more information than we could possibly ever want or need. Some of this information is interesting and useful, some of it less so. For example, researching online for this article led me to all sorts of interesting things: from a discussion on *Quora* about what percentage of human knowledge is available on the internet, to an academic paper on the measurement of human knowledge, to a book about how the internet is rewiring our brains … Soon I found myself bogged down in all sorts of tangential material. Then a feeling of panic set in, as it was abundantly clear that I could never possibly read everything there was online about information overload … You get the idea. You are probably already familiar with the feeling of being overwhelmed by too much data. This is information overload.

2 Why should I care about information overload?

Information overload has some good synonyms: *infobesity*, *infoxication*, *information glut* and (my personal favourite) *data smog*. These terms reflect the psychological stress that being exposed to an endless stream of digital information causes us. Countless emails, *Facebook* status updates, online newspaper articles, blog posts, tweets, *YouTube* videos, *Instagram* selfies … Just trying to keep up with reading and viewing all of this can make you feel stressed, giving you the feeling that you are only just keeping your head above water. Add to this the sense that everybody *else* knows a lot more than you do, and that everybody *else* seems to be so much more active on their blogs, on *Twitter*, on *Facebook*, on *YouTube*, on discussion lists, etc, and you have the effects of information overload – feelings of panic and inadequacy, with a constant undercurrent of low-level anxiety.

3 What can I do to avoid it?

According to writer Clay Shirky, *'It's not information overload, its filter failure'*. In other words, you need to accept that the amount of information being pushed your way will only decrease if you put filter strategies in place. For example, I used to follow lots of blogs – probably around 100. Of course, trying to read these required a certain amount of self-discipline and time, of which I seemed to have less and less. Now I only follow a few. These are blogs by people outside the sphere of ELT, who read widely and write intelligently on issues related to educational technology in general – the area I'm most interested in. Applying this sort of filter to almost all of my social media feeds (blogs, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*) means that I only see content that is most likely to interest me. But beware. Filtering is not without its limitations. See Eli Pariser's TED talk on the dangers of 'filter bubbles': *www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles*

4 How is this relevant to English language teachers?

The internet is one of the greatest free continual professional development resources ever. There are online courses, discussion groups, *Facebook* and *Twitter* communities, and lots and lots of resources aimed at English language teachers and learners. Joining an online teaching community can help you filter teaching-related content for your own teaching context. Here are a few recommended online groups you could join to get you started:

- *Twitter*: #eltchat – *http://eltchat.org/wordpress/*
- *Yahoo!* discussion group: Webheads – *https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/evonline2002_webheads/info*
- *Facebook*: IATEFL LTSIG (Learning Technologies Special Interest Group) – *www.facebook.com/LTSIG*;
British Council Teaching English – *www.facebook.com/TeachingEnglish.BritishCouncil*

5 What else can I do to avoid information overload?

Here are five extra tips:

Tip 1: Accept the inevitable. You will never know everything, and you will never be able to fully keep up.

Tip 2: Make a list of all your ongoing online professional development sources (*Twitter*, discussion groups, blogs, webinars …). Prioritise them. Choose just a few to focus on each week or month.

Tip 3: Use time management – allow yourself to log on to *Twitter*, say, once a day for 15 minutes only. Allow another 20 minutes a day – or every few days – to check your RSS feed and read a few blog posts.

Tip 4: Use personal management tools to help you organise incoming information. For example, use some sort of 'read it later' application or strategy to deal with fast incoming info from a source like *Twitter*. Send tweets with useful-looking links directly to *Evernote*, to *Instapaper* or to *Pocket*, to check out when you have time. Or mark the tweets as *favourites* and read them later.

Tip 5: Be selective about the links you save permanently. Use social bookmarking (see ET*p* Issue 96), so your bookmarks are accessible from anywhere and searchable by tags – by you and your network. *Delicious* and *Diigo* are two popular options.

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And finally, to celebrate ET*p*'s 100th issue, I've written an article called '100 ways to deal with information overload', available on my blog … Just kidding. That would be information overload!



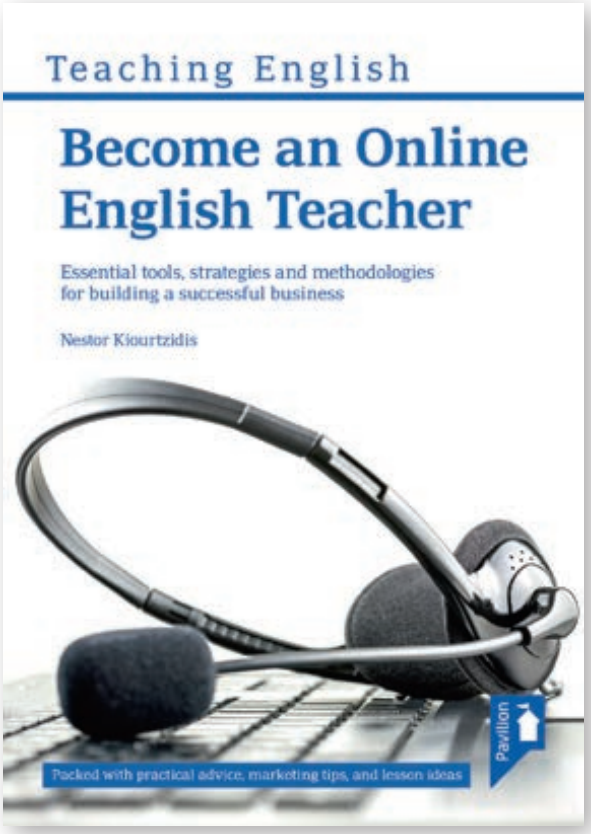
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Webwatcher

Russell Stannard puts the ELT back into technology.

It is the 100th issue of ET*p*, and *Webwatcher* is one of its longest running columns. It seems appropriate now that I stand back and take a look at the current relationship between technology and ELT, and provide a few thoughts around its future.

Thinking about the teachers

I have seen far too many talks in which the ideas suggested really don't relate to the contexts in which many teachers actually work. I confess that in the past I have given talks like this, too. Many of the things we suggest simply don't take into consideration the time the teachers have to learn the technologies, the amount of infrastructure in place, the curriculum the teachers have to work to, the rules set by institutions, etc. We need to start with what teachers actually have at their disposal, rather than always suggesting new things.

Recently, I did a workshop on using *Microsoft Word*: a simple enough subject and a technology that is readily available to all. The teachers really related to it, as they could go straight into their classes and use the ideas immediately. This really got me thinking about this issue. I am not suggesting that we don't put forward new ideas, but I believe that much more consideration needs to be given to what teachers can do now.

Looking at lists

I am not a fan of lists any more, especially long ones. I spend my life looking at and using technology, and I see my job as being to help busy teachers to make decisions about it. So a list of the top ten podcasting tools is probably not that useful, whereas a list of two or three might be. If I go into a phone shop to get a new phone, I hope that the shop assistant will help me to narrow the choices down. We need to get out of the habit of making huge lists of technologies and concentrate, instead, on a few ideas.

Linking technology to pedagogy

One of the biggest obstacles to the uptake of technology is the pedagogical training that many teachers have. Teachers will not see the possible affordances of technology unless they first believe that language learning takes place through communication and language use. If teachers are looking to maximise opportunities for communication, for groupwork, for processing and using the language, then they are more likely to see that technology can play a role in facilitating this. Even more revealing is that teachers will often say they subscribe to a certain set of beliefs, but what they do in the class actually contradicts this.

Feeling free to take chances

Innovation takes place when teachers feel free to experiment – and have the backing of their bosses and their institutions to do so. We need to create environments that allow teachers (and students) the chance to take risks and to experiment. This means putting far less pressure on teachers to get through a long list of grammar-based syllabus items and, instead, produce a curriculum that focuses more on using and processing the language.

Thinking about the learners

Blending courses should not simply mean adding more readings, more videos and more articles for the students to look at in their own time. We need to consider our students' needs and the efficient use of their time, making sure we are not overloading them. In the past, teachers have tended to feel that the more that they add to their course, the better. I really believe we need to re-think this.

Focusing on feedback

Many talks on technology address the question of feedback, and for me this is one of the biggest challenges. Firstly, I think we need to change the culture and expectations of our students. Not all feedback needs to be done by the teacher. It is far more cognitive and thought-provoking to get the students to analyse their own work or each other's work. This requires them to be trained in feedback, and demands a cultural shift in their attitudes to it. As an example of getting the students more involved in the feedback process, suppose they produce ten podcasts in one year. We might arrange for them to receive peer feedback on all their recordings, together with sporadic comments from their teachers. At the end of the year, we might ask them to choose the best two podcasts and submit these for formal evaluation and feedback.

David Kluge did something like this, and Icy Lee has also used this approach with writing. There are many creative ways that we can get our students involved in the feedback process, and this will help them to develop their ability to evaluate their own progress and become more independent as learners.

Technology allows an enormous amount of student output in the form of videos, blogs, wikis, podcasts, screencasts, etc. Although it is simply not possible for teachers to give feedback on everything the students produce, if the students learn to organise their digital outputs, placing them in a single repository like an e-portfolio, it will be much easier for the teacher to view the work, leave comments and provide feedback.

The future is autonomous

In the future, our students will need to update their knowledge constantly, and they won't always have a teacher to consult. So it is vital that they become more independent and more able to evaluate their own progress and development. Whether students are able to make the most of opportunities to learn will depend largely on their levels of motivation. I believe that learner autonomy will be at the heart of much of what we do in the future. Our job will be partly to develop and cultivate the students and help them to become more effective learners; this, in turn, will help their futures.

Kluge, D 'Boosting speaker fluency through partner taping' *http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kluge-PartnerTaping.html*

Lam, R and Lee, I 'Balancing the dual functions of portfolio assessment' *ELT Journal* 64 (1) 2009



Russell Stannard is the founder of *www.teachertrainingvideos.com*, which won a British Council ELTons award for technology. He is a freelance teacher and writer and also a NILE Associate Trainer.

Keep sending your favourite sites to Russell: russellstannard@btinternet.com

PICTURE PUZZLE

Find the words hidden in the photos and identify the common theme.

Hint: photos that are joined together are part of the same word; complete words are separated by a space.

Can you puzzle it out?

The answers are on page 24.

(This idea is taken from *The Independent* newspaper's 'Get the picture' column.)





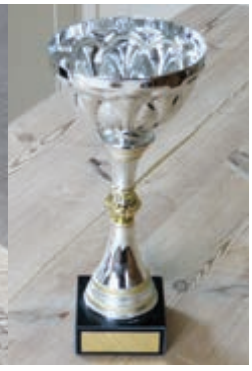




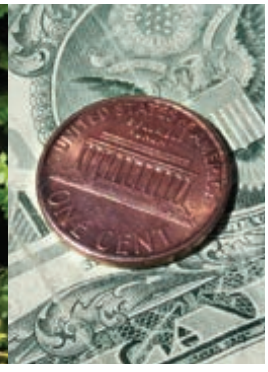






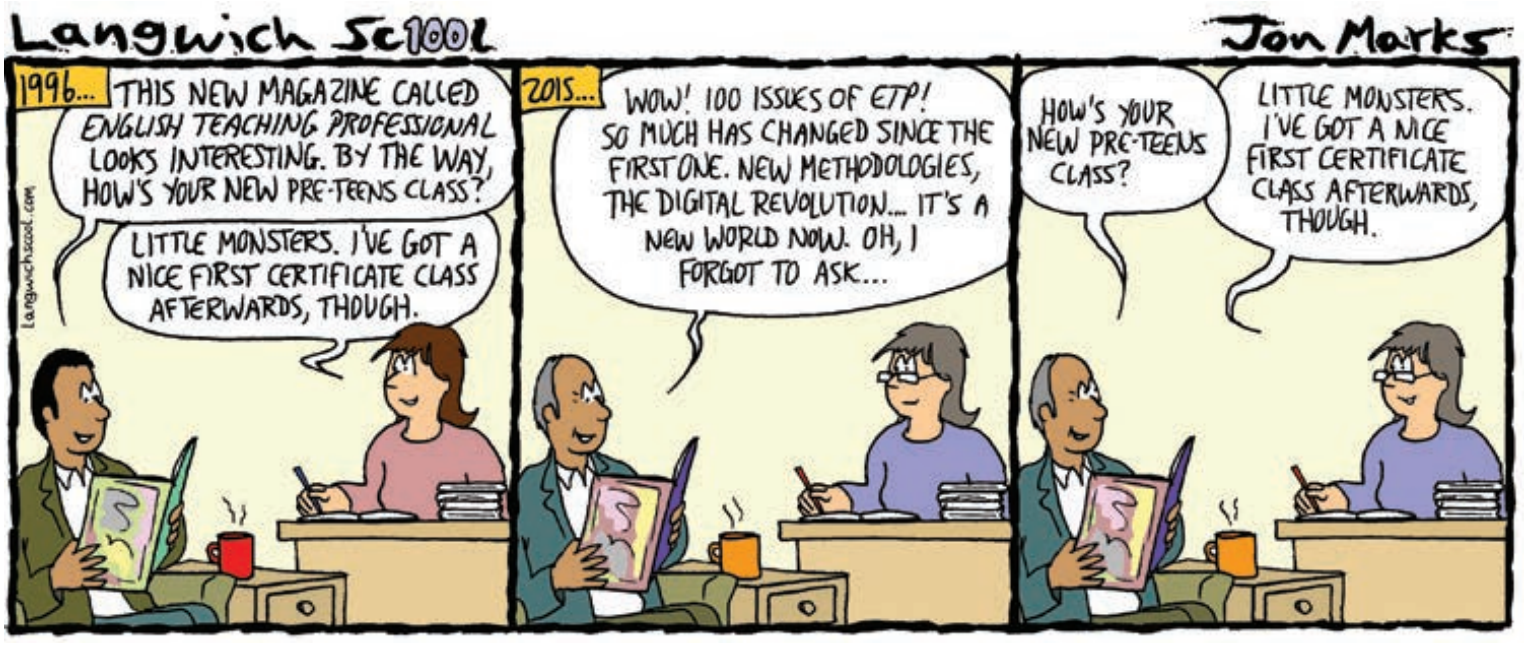












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