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Chris Payne

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Editorial

In our main feature, Chris Payne sees a dichotomy between what many language school teachers, following modern methodological orthodoxy, feel they should be teaching their students and what those students actually want to be taught. He argues that if students, and sometimes their parents, measure progress in terms of the passing of exams, then perhaps we are letting them down by insisting on communicative competence and viewing 'teaching for the exam' as necessarily a bad thing.

Another dichotomy is identified by Vahid Parvaresh and Saeed Ketabi, who point out that theories of teaching practice, even those put forward by as eminent a linguist as Noam Chomsky, don't really seem to lead to a clear practical method for language teaching. They suggest drawing on the insights provided by linguists but not trying to base what we do in the classroom too closely on their theories, finding instead what actually works for us.

Good advocates of this approach are Paul Bress and John Ryan, who share ways that they have found for making idioms and phrasal verbs more comprehensible to their students and more memorable. As competence in these two language areas, rightly or wrongly, represents the holy grail of language learning for many students, it would seem that they are both giving students what they want and, at the same time, fulfilling their own perceptions of how language should be taught.

Charles Mercer, on the other hand, finds productive things to do with business students who don't know what they want or why they are there, while Tisa Rétfalvi-Schär finds ways of dealing with students who aren't there at all!



Helena Gomm
Editor
helena.gomm@keywayspublishing.com

ENGLISH TEACHING *professional*

PO Box 100, Chichester, West Sussex, PO18 8HD, UK

Tel: **+44 (0)1243 576444** ***Email:*** **info@etprofessional.com**
Fax: **+44 (0)1243 576456** ***Web:*** **www.etprofessional.com**

Editor: Helena Gomm

Editorial Consultant: Mike Burghall

Editorial Director: Peter Collin

Designer: Christine Cox

Advisory Panel: Dave Allan, Ruth Gairns, Susan Norman, Janet Olearski

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Schools of thought

Chris Payne examines the extent to which the English taught in private language schools caters for students' needs.

Please finish the following sentence, using your own words:

Language is ...

Several words may spring to mind, but some responses that I have been given are: *culture*, *identity* and, overwhelmingly, *communication* and *meaning*. Yet what if I were to complete the sentence myself as:

Language is passing exams?

There's a good chance that I would be asked to justify such a seemingly outmoded comment.

Teaching

Private language schools usually have smaller class sizes than state schools, so it is more feasible for teachers to use tasks and adopt a communicative approach to teaching if they so wish. In fact, the private sector tends to be associated with umbrella terms such as 'direct method' and 'communicative language teaching' (CLT). Many teachers of English who work in private language schools around the world are proponents of a communicative approach. In my own teaching, I use ideas from task-based learning (TBL), which can be said to be a 'strong' version of the communicative approach. I also regularly implement lexical approach ideas and help students use English for a real communicative purpose. A lexical approach places communication of meaning at the heart of language and learning, in the tradition of the communicative approach. However, I feel that although I help students learn to communicate in English by using the aforementioned approaches, some of their ideas about content do not take into account the day-to-day needs of students, especially in the area of sentence grammar.

Learning

My particular experience is in Spain, predominantly in the private sector, but I have also taught in the Spanish state system.

Why do students attend private schools? Many do enrol in order to acquire a high level of English so that it can be used for real communication. But this is not the whole story. I would like to disabuse you of the popular belief that all students in private schools are highly-motivated learners who strive to communicate in English. This may be the case for adult learners, and indeed many children are undoubtedly keen to learn. However, a considerable number of the children enrolled by their parents attend against their will. For these students, it entails further study after they have already completed a full day at school, and they bring little intrinsic motivation to the classroom. Their main motivation is extrinsic, that is, driven by external factors such as passing exams and parental pressure.

Many parents ostensibly enrol their children so that they learn English for meaningful communication, but if they achieve this aim and then fail an exam at school, something is drastically wrong. Regrettably, some parents and students equate exam performance with level of English, and their mindset is that passing exams is the most important sign of making progress.

How many teachers know students who only really make an effort when an exam is approaching, either at school or in their language school?

Exams

If concern about passing exams sometimes overrides a desire to learn English for communication, shouldn't this be reflected in our teaching? We may dislike the fact that some learners are only motivated to study in order to pass an exam, but we must bear in mind that progress is still measured in terms of exam success by a substantial number of parents and students, and dare I say it, some teachers. It is quite possible that this state of affairs is applicable to other countries as well as Spain.

I suggest that if we genuinely care about the overall learning process of all of our students, we need to strike a balance between teaching learners what we *believe* they need for sound language acquisition and what they *actually* need for passing exams. Before I continue, I am at pains to point out that I do not propose a wholesale return to a grammar translation method. Nor do I espouse the idea of always teaching towards an exam.

Grammar

It seems that there are certain areas of teaching, primarily in grammar, that retain their currency on state or private school syllabuses, but are disliked by some distinguished linguists. Let us look at some of these evergreen grammar points that might be said to conflict with a more communicative approach to learning.

Dave Willis favours task-based learning and a meaning-based syllabus. In *The Lexical Syllabus*, he states that the passive and the second conditional have been elevated to an undeserved level of importance and that reported speech was artificially created in the name of pedagogy. A few years later, in *The Lexical Approach*, Michael Lewis goes even further by suggesting that first, second and third conditionals, the passive voice and reported speech could unquestionably be deleted from grammar teaching. The reason he adduces is that they lend themselves to convoluted transformation exercises which have no place in the classroom because they practise language that has simply been mis-analysed in the first place.

We might agree with the acerbic comments of Willis and Lewis, but we need to realise that it is precisely grammar like that mentioned above which is often tested in exams. If students need to know it, it is patently useful for them to study it. By extension, if the primary aim of students is to pass a written exam, communicative competence can be perceived by some as being of limited use.

Generally in Spain, written exams still predominate at school, although in some schools importance is also attached to testing oral and listening skills. The 'Selectividad', which is the Spanish university entrance examination, comprises only a written paper in English. A mandatory oral component will be introduced in 2012. The written paper commonly requires students to transform sentences from active voice into passive voice, and from direct speech into reported speech. It is not uncommon for linguists to inveigh against the teaching of reported speech, yet it is interesting that it is also included in transformation exercises in the exams set by internationally recognised examination boards.

We need to strike a balance between teaching learners what we believe they need for sound language acquisition and what they actually need for passing exams

Tuition

In the absence of an overarching litmus test of quality and appropriateness in ELT, we need to remember that there are schools, both state and private, that are still firmly entrenched in a structuralist tradition. Until the spell of grammar influence is broken, the perhaps uncomfortable reality is that a large number of students will still need to do meaningless transformation exercises in order to pass exams. Therefore, if we really consider ourselves to be learner-centred, we ought to accept the situation without demur and re-examine the role sentence grammar and exams play in the lives of our students and their parents, who are, of course, stakeholders in their children's English tuition. If students need practice for exam-type questions, they should have it, even though we might think time is better spent doing other more communicative activities. For most students, getting a good mark in English is more important than our noble and lofty thoughts on methodology.

Balance

The most sensible approach is to balance helping our students practise language that is relevant to the requirements of an exam or syllabus with offering them favourable conditions for acquiring English for communication. However unfashionable and questionable teaching certain grammar may seem to us, we should not feel guilty, as it is not an abdication of duty to teach something that is both useful for and needed by our students.

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I would advocate that teachers in private language schools carry on with their principled eclecticism, but that in addition to helping students learn to communicate in English, we also remember to focus on the traditional grammar that is still necessary for many to succeed in exams. We could adopt a dual approach in which we are proactive and reactive. Being proactive is well suited to communicative tasks and teaching lexis selectively. Being reactive and aware of students' needs can help them with pronunciation difficulties such as stress and intonation, and common grammar points, such as the ones already discussed.

Hopefully, it's food for thought. ETp

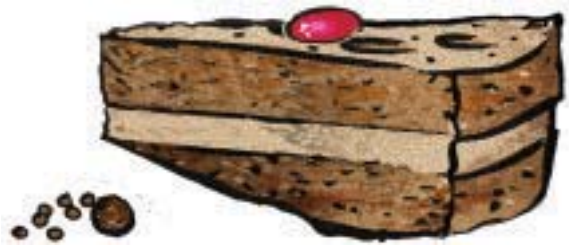
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Chris Payne is the owner of Paddington School of English. He has been teaching in Spain since 1993 and is a Cambridge oral examiner trainer for examiners of young learners. He is especially interested in a greater focus on lexis in language learning.

paddington@terra.es

A piece of cake



Phillip Burrows

Paul Bress reveals his recipe for teaching idioms.

If you tell students that they are about to learn some idioms, they usually sit up and take special notice. Why is that? I think it's because they think that they are, at last, learning 'real English' – the kind of English that will mark them out as being proficient users of the language. However, in my experience, students very often use idioms badly. They use them in the wrong situation, they often get the grammar wrong, and they sometimes even pronounce them poorly.

Let's consider ways in which teachers can help students to use idioms in an appropriate way and with correct grammar and comprehensible phonology. I'll look at four ways in which you can help your students achieve this, using the idiom *a piece of cake* as an example.

1 Make sure that the students understand the meaning and register of the idiom.

This can be done by providing them with typical contexts and then by using prepared concept questions. Here are five possible contexts to show students when the idiom might be used:

a) 'Hi, Pete! How was your exam yesterday?' 'Oh, it was a piece of cake!'

b) Hi, Carol! How's your new job going?' 'Oh, it's a piece of cake.'

c) 'Hiya. How's university?' 'Oh, it's a piece of cake.'

d) 'I hope you're not going to worry about this. It really is a piece of cake.'

e) 'How was your driving test?' 'Oh, it was a piece of cake.'

After the students have heard the idiom used in these contexts, you can ask them to discuss, in pairs, what *a piece of cake* means. Then ask the whole class these questions:

1 If something is 'a piece of cake', is it extremely difficult or extremely easy?
2 Is it a formal or informal expression?

Once you've elicited the correct answers, you can then reinforce them by stating that if something is 'a piece of cake', it's extremely easy and this is an informal expression.

A combination of the five contexts, the concept questions and your final statement should give the students a good grasp of the meaning of the target idiom.

2 Help the students to say the idiom as well as they can (grammatically and phonologically).

Next, you need to model the sentence *It's a piece of cake.* Say it as naturally as possible. Point out that *of* is hardly said at all, and that *it's* and *a* sound like one unit.

Then you can get individual students to say the sentence. Guide them if you think that a native speaker would struggle to understand what they're saying. Finally, give each student the chance to say it again and again *to themselves* for about 30 seconds.

3 Set up situations in which the students can practise saying the target idiom freely.

Divide your class into pairs, and arrange them in a circle (if possible). Give each pair a role card with a situation in which the idiom might be used, such as:

Student 1:	Ask Student 2 if they did their homework last night.
Student 2:	Say yes, and say it was easy.

Ask each pair to have a mini-conversation on the basis of the instructions on the card. Then tell them to swap roles. When they have finished, ask each pair to pass their role cards clockwise. This process continues until each pair has practised two conversations with each role card. By the time they are practising with their last role card, the target idiom should come quite naturally to them.

4 Feed the target idiom back into future lessons from time to time.

Recycling the idiom is important. For example, when the students are settling down at the beginning of a lesson, you could ask individual students if they did their homework the previous night. If they say that they did, you can ask them if it was easy or difficult. If they say it was easy, you can then ask them if it was very easy. At this point, they may well respond with *'Yes, it was a piece of cake'* and laugh!

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I think that the technique outlined above applies also to phrasal verbs. Students are often particularly keen to learn both these language items, but some teachers may rush the teaching process, which means that the learners don't have the chance to internalise the new language. I think that idioms should be taught in much the same way as any other target language – except that they need even greater diligence. Due attention needs to be paid to both meaning and oral production. In my view, it's much better to teach one idiom soundly than to confuse your students with ten under-taught ones. ETp



Paul Bress works both in the fields of personal growth and ELT and has published very widely in both areas. He is a life-long, non-stop learner – he learns more from everyday experience than from formal research. His life coaching website is www.bemycoach.co.uk.

paulbress@talktalk.net



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One classroom, many worlds 1

Alicia Artusi and **Gregory J Manin** **broaden the language learning experience by exploiting real-world resources.**

Language learning often seems to happen in a closed universe. Goals are limited to completing homework assignments, passing tests and possibly gaining some kind of certificate or diploma down the line. Use of and exposure to the target language is largely limited to the classroom itself or the language lab (if there is one).

It is true that most modern coursebooks attempt to offer a degree of real-world engagement by incorporating newsworthy topics, 'cross-curricular' texts and references to popular youth culture. However, because of the way the topics are handled in the classroom, their relevance to students' everyday lives is minimised if not entirely erased. No matter how interesting or relevant the topic is, the sole focus in the classroom becomes the acquisition and consolidation of grammar and vocabulary, with the content reduced to a mere backdrop to the mechanics of the language. Rather than engaging the students' interests, pre-existing knowledge and active learning skills, the act of language learning becomes divorced from the real world that exists just outside the classroom walls. By bringing that world into the classroom, teachers can give their students the chance to develop real knowledge and real skills along with the acquisition of the more abstract details of the target language. The more invested students are in the learning process, the more they will learn – and 'making it real' is the best way to do this.

Language is only one of the ways in which we learn about the world around us. We also use our senses and a variety of instincts that come into play without our knowledge or choosing. But as we mature, language becomes one of the basic tools for acquiring knowledge of the world – and there is no rule that says that only your *first* language can be that tool. In fact, English can offer access to multiple worlds, which can be described as follows:

The world around
This comprises your students' immediate environment – the city, school and neighbourhood; the places, trends and attitudes that have an immediate impact on their lives.

The world inside
This is the inner world of emotions, past experiences, needs and interests that make up the individual.

The world outside
This is the wider world, including other countries, knowledge areas such as science, mathematics, history and literature, and the realms of philosophy, belief and speculation.

The classroom world
This is the world of the teacher, the person who decides what and how the students will learn. The teacher is responsible for bringing all the worlds mentioned above together within one classroom, with its variety of personality types, learning styles, levels of experience and knowledge. The classroom world also encompasses varying degrees of motivation to learn and an array of reasons for being there in the first place, from a sincere desire to learn the language to a not-so-willing need to fulfil the requirements of the school syllabus. At the same time, teachers are also professionals, eager to implement new methodologies and material as a way of challenging themselves, developing their own teaching and finding motivation in their daily jobs.

A multi-purpose process

It is worth reminding ourselves on a regular basis that every single one of our students is capable of learning to use English in a functional and meaningful way as long as their interests, needs and abilities are called into play. We can engage the students' multiple worlds if we view each lesson as multi-purpose process directed to a mixed group of students. Dealing with different topics, sharing feelings and dealing with difficulties through English open a whole new world to the class.

Below are some of the challenges classroom teaching presents and ways they can be taken advantage of by bringing the different worlds into play.

1 The world around

The classroom and the school around it are a limited and limiting world by definition. To many students, school means lack of freedom, lack of movement, lack of autonomy and – worst of all – lack of personal relevance. On the positive side, many of their friends are there and they have the

chance to achieve certain definable goals and receive recognition for their achievements. (And – not the least important – their latest love interest may be sitting just a few rows away!) The teacher of any subject needs to recognise that the school environment *is* the students' world for a good part of the day, and that what happens there can and should be exploited in the classroom.

Challenge 1

According to students, English is an academic subject, so it can't be relevant or interesting.

Many of your students may be in an English class because they have to be, not because they choose to be. They are stuck in classrooms all day long, being fed with information that probably seems to have little to do with their lives. Why should an English class be any different? The formula *'obligatory subject + classroom + teacher = boredom'* is a hard one to overcome. Proving to your students that English is not 'just another subject', but is a means of communicating things that are important to them, is one of the keys to success.

Suggestions

- Leave some 'blanks' in your teaching plan, and allow your students to add something they are really interested in to the syllabus. You could even challenge them to bring in material that relates to the particular grammar point or vocabulary area you are covering. In this way, they are applying their knowledge of the language and expanding it into their own world.
- Liven up your environment. If you are lucky enough to have your own classroom, an array of posters, student artwork and other visuals can cheer up the surroundings and make them more friendly. Surrounding students with visuals and other materials like board games, CD players, maps and other real objects or tools can give them the opportunity to explore their different abilities in class. If you are teaching in borrowed space, bringing in portable visuals which the students can focus on during discussions will help.
- Use music. The use of music as a mood-setter, back-drop or focus of an activity can also help. Select some music you like or songs from artists mentioned in the coursebook, or ask a couple of musical students to make a selection of music for some specific units. Play instrumental music while discussing the unit's visuals, either for prediction or to activate the imagination and stir emotions. Bringing music into the classroom might be distracting at first, especially if it has been present up till now only in the form of songs, but once the students get used to it, music from different composers and cultures will add to their cultural background and knowledge of the world.
- Change the arrangement of the classroom seats to suit the activity: rows, circles and semicircles are all valid, depending on the activity and number of students. Change your own position in the classroom so that you encourage the students to turn around, see each other's faces, and look at posters, maps, etc. By changing small things, we make our students see the learning experience from a different angle.
- Organise an open lesson to be shared with another class. In this way, you are opening your door to other students and teachers, who usually like to listen and see what their peers have been doing. If you want to avoid disruption, invite younger students to share your class, since they tend to look up to older students.
- Attend or participate in school events even if they are not related to English. Students like to see that you are part of the wider community and that you share in their interests outside the immediate classroom. Discuss the events in English in the next lesson.

Challenge 2

We switch to L1 to talk about things that really matter.

We ask our students to interact in English when discussing material from the coursebook, but we may switch to L1 to talk about school events, arrangements, difficulties and rules. As a consequence, English is not considered an option to communicate with the world around and only becomes relevant in the very limited coursebook world. When students have to express themselves in simple daily situations, they don't feel confident enough or lack the vocabulary and/or structures to communicate, so they either switch to L1, use gestures or simply wait till the English class finishes.

I was once observing a class of teenage students who were discussing the outcome of project work when water started leaking through the ceiling onto one student's desk. The teacher was writing on the board so she was unaware of the situation. The student looked at me and made gestures that clearly expressed that he needed to move to another desk. The teacher and the other students laughed. No English was used at all while the situation was played out. When the student in question had changed seats, English was used again to continue the lesson. The 'real world' had stepped into the classroom and nobody knew what to do with it.

Suggestions

- Take advantage of any situation that arises in the classroom to use English. If the CD player breaks down, discuss the problem and ask for the students' help in English. If you need to change classrooms for some reason, explain the situation in English. If the students have not acquired the necessary vocabulary to understand or express themselves, use the situation to teach some key words and expressions. Dealing with the unexpected should not be seen as a waste of time, but rather as an investment that will pay off in showing students that English does have applications in the real world.
- Exploit any situation you can to consolidate and expand the students' knowledge of the language. Any situation, no matter how trivial, can be exploited to show English as another language for communication. After all, we use our own languages to discuss trivial things all the time. Why not English?
- Institute an 'English only' policy for part (or all) of the lesson. If a student uses their L1, simply say *'Pardon me?'* and wait for them to switch to English. For most students, this becomes a fun challenge.

►►►

One classroom, many worlds 1

2 The world inside

We all know that our classes are made up of different individuals, with different histories and widely different circumstances. The world inside the class is not always visible, but it is crucial for its success. The students' inner world will soon become clear in their attitudes, relations with others and behaviour. Paying attention to or ignoring those feelings can make a world of difference. Group-, pair- and individual work will help us make a sociogram of the group. English can be a perfect tool to unmask social situations and emotions. Why not use English as a 'therapeutic tool' and discuss something with the students they probably wouldn't share with us in their L1?

Challenge 1

Students usually discuss feelings outside the English class.

It seems the English class is not considered the appropriate place to share emotions and worries. We do share interests and hobbies, but rarely deal with attitudinal issues in English. Once again, the language is restricted to more artificial, 'staged' situations.

Suggestions

- Read short stories dealing with universal issues and characters. Stories present a gallery of personalities and social situations that the students might identify with. They also open the classroom doors to other cultures, ways of thinking, dressing and behaving.

- Try using visualisation as a tool to break through the walls of the classroom. Ask your students to shut their eyes, listen to some music and answer two or three questions. These could be predicting what a text will be about, or visualising the characters' appearance or personality. Music can evoke images and emotions that will add something new to a text, thus enriching the material and bringing the students' inner world into the classroom. Rappers, salsa artists, classical performers and pop singers each have a different style and represent a part of society and a lifestyle; therefore by playing their music, you can bring up images and feelings before the students read a text.

Challenge 2

Students feel they don't have the language level to discuss emotions.

Many situations come up in the classroom that can disrupt the flow of a lesson. These often remain unexpressed, but can be felt as an undercurrent or heard as a constant L1 grumble. Some other situations are very obvious and disruptive and just cannot be ignored: they must be dealt with on the spot. For example, if you see two students quarrelling or a student crying in class, you cannot go on with the lesson. You need to stop and address the problem immediately.

English can be an excellent tool to discuss the inner world. As a second language it may offer the possibility of dealing with a problem in a more detached way, as if the situation were happening to somebody else. If students feel they have the tools to express what is going on in English, it may be much easier to clear the air and, at the same time, give them the sense that English is a valid problem-solving tool for dealing with real-world issues.

While we suggest that bringing personal topics into the language classroom is a good idea, there are topics that will always be considered too much to handle without the help of a professional. You might want to discuss what is going on in English and then inform a specialist of the problem so they can help the students. Personal or family traumas, unfair criticism of a student's appearance or behaviour – in fact any subject that can cause real personal hurt or upset to a member of the class, whether present or absent – should be dealt with outside the class.

Suggestions

- Start a conversation in L1 and finish it in English. If tensions are rising in the classroom, it may be convenient to talk with the students in their own language and then try to wrap up the conversation or even outline an 'action plan' in English. For example, if some students are quarrelling because they don't want to work together, you could approach the group and discuss the problem in their native language. After that, get the group to write down three things they could try to do to be more tolerant and cooperative, and ask them to present their solutions in English. Then discuss their ideas and try to find ways to apply them.

- If time allows, take the opportunity to give your students some useful vocabulary to help deal with an emotional situation. If you write the date on the board in every lesson, you can add a 'mood report' next to it. For example: What's the general mood today? *Frustration* (because most people didn't pass the maths test), *Happiness* (because they're going on an excursion soon), and so on. What is the reason for the feeling? They think their *needs* are being *ignored*. And so on. The new vocabulary will stick with them because it is attached to a real feeling.

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In the next part of this article, in Issue 64 of ET*p*, we will be looking at the world outside and the teaching world, and considering the issues and possibilities that these, too, raise for broadening and deepening the language learning experience. ETp




Alicia Artusi has worked in the ELT profession as a teacher, teacher trainer, presenter and writer. She is now teaching and writing EFL materials. Gregory J Manin has taught English in Italy, Greece and the USA and is currently a writer and of English language coursebooks. Together they have written *Engage, No Problem* and *ECCE Result*, all published by OUP.

aliciartusi@infovia.com.ar
gjmanin@msn.com

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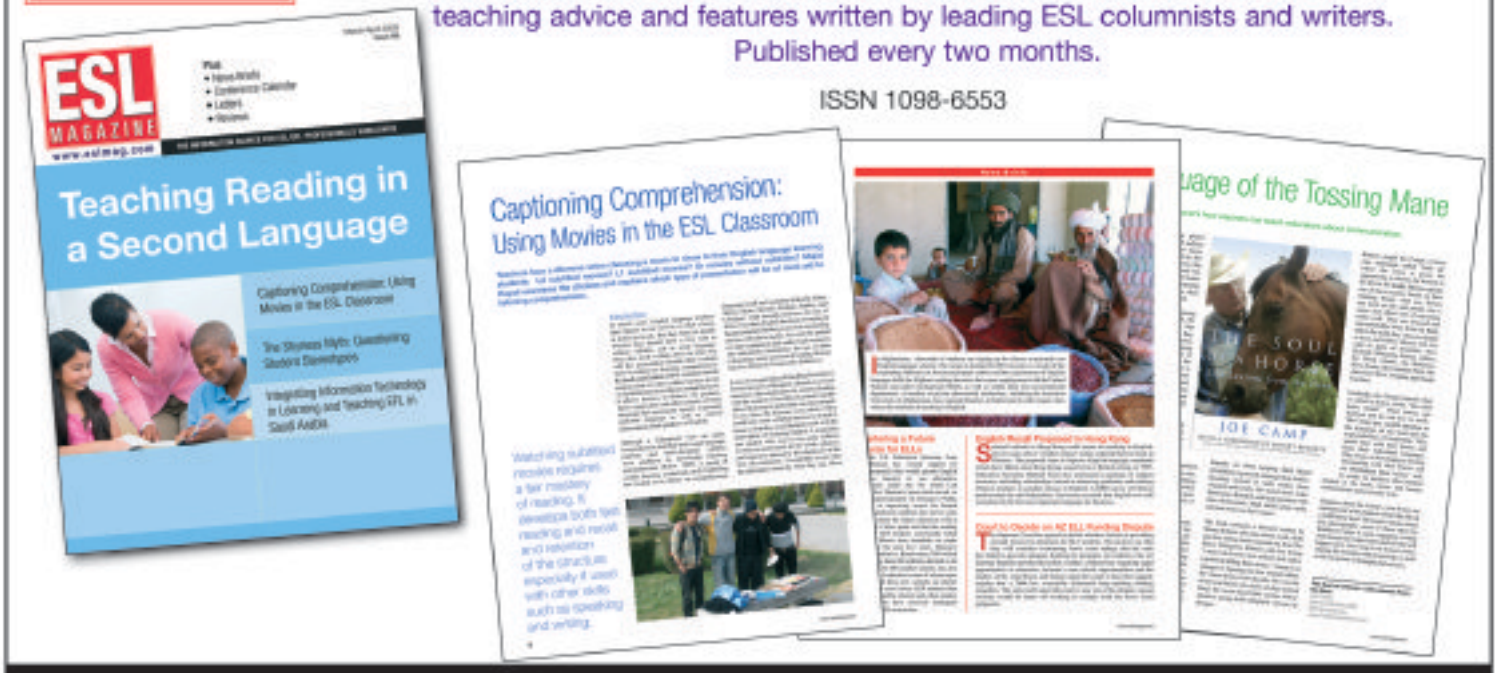
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METHODOLOGY

Rabbits, birds and country dancing

Vahid Parvaresh and **Saeed Ketabi**

ponder the professional preoccupation with principles and pedagogy.

In the history of language teaching, there seems always to have been an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to make language teaching represent the best linguistic, psychological and pedagogical trends, tendencies and practices of the time. Scholars in the field have been preoccupied with the question of how to teach a foreign language in the best way possible, and this has resulted in the emergence and then disappearance of many schools of thought, interpretations and recommendations – some writers have even identified a cyclical pattern in their rise and fall. The ultimate aim of all this activity seems to be to get the practices of language teaching professionals to represent a kind of unity between the three dimensions of second language teaching, namely linguistics, psychology and pedagogy.

In this article, we will discuss how the works of Noam Chomsky have helped improve the practices of those involved in teaching English in a way which might result in this unity.

Linguistics

In the mid 1950s a revolution took place in the field of linguistics with the creation of Chomsky's powerful theory of 'generative grammar'. Chomsky's work not only changed the dominant linguistic theories of the 50s, but also the psychological trends of that period. And his work continues to influence not only linguistic but also political mainstream scholarship.

Chomsky questioned the then-dominant theories of behaviourism, especially those of B F Skinner. In doing so, he turned the linguists' focus away from *knowledge* of language towards an understanding of the mechanisms and processes by which children are able to *acquire* a language.

Chomsky tried to explain the uniformity, rapidity and effortlessness of children's language development. He argued that it can be explained by postulating that each child is endowed with an innate language acquisition device, consisting of a set of principles, which are consistent across languages, and a set of parameters, which might vary from one language to another. He summarises the importance of this innateness in the following way:

'To see that language is not innate is to say that there is no difference between my granddaughter, a rock and a rabbit. In other words, if you take a rock, a rabbit and my granddaughter and put them in a community where people are talking English, they'll all learn English. If people believe that, then they believe that language is not innate. If they believe that there is a difference between my granddaughter, a rabbit and a rock, then they believe that language is innate.'

From the mid 50s onward, a major focus for many researchers of language

has not been the sounds that learners produce, but the underlying processes and mechanisms going on in their heads to activate this acquisition device, to set those parameters appropriately, and then to retrieve the structures in the fastest time possible.

Psychology

Chomsky's nativist view has also been taken seriously by scholars in the field of psychology. One distinguished scholar here is Steven Pinker, who believes that the ability of human beings to acquire a language is comparable to the nest-making behaviour of birds. In this regard, he goes to the extreme and argues that language learning ability is one of the instincts which human beings are provided with. He contends that language is not a cultural artifact that human beings learn in the same way that they learn to tell the time or understand how the federal government works. Language is, according to him, a distinct piece of the biological makeup of the brain.

In fact, it can be deduced that, although some differences do exist between the two scholars, as far as Chomsky's and Pinker's views regarding the status of children's brains at birth are concerned, they both believe that they are not blank but have 'something written' on them. Pinker argues that language is an intricate and highly likely system with a grand design produced by the only engineer of nature, natural selection. For this reason, he sees language as an adaptation. His argument is that genes turn whatever is crucial to survival and reproduction into instincts. Language is absolutely vital for human survival and reproduction, and this is why genes have turned it into an instinct.

Steven Pinker believes that the ability of human beings to acquire a language is comparable to the nest-making behaviour of birds

Pedagogy

What happens if language teachers stick to the points proposed by Chomsky? The answer is simple: the main purpose of pedagogy would be teaching students how to think like native speakers of the target language in order to reset their parameters accordingly. But how? Are the processes and mechanisms through which all children go in order to acquire their first language fully known at the moment? The answer seems to be *no*.

Sampson argues that languages are institutions like country dancing or the game of cricket, cultural creations which individuals may learn during their lifetime

Another important question concerns the validity of what Chomsky says. His position has been severely criticised. Steinberg, for example, criticises him on the grounds that some of the rules he proposed seem not to be psychologically valid. In a similar vein, Sampson argues that languages are institutions like country dancing or the game of cricket, cultural creations which individuals may learn during their lifetime.

It should also be mentioned in passing that some attempts have been made to apply the theories proposed by Chomsky into second language pedagogy. Approaches like 'cognitive anti-method', 'minimal strategy' and 'immersion programmes' have been developed, in response to Chomsky's ideas, but no one can claim that they are complete and infallible.

It seems that Chomsky's theories may continue to provide a reference for principles, but not for actual techniques. This view has been proposed by Henry Widdowson:

'I see Chomsky's position as consistent with the view I expressed earlier, namely that the theoretical disciplines provide a reference for establishing principles of approach but they cannot determine techniques. So suggestions from the fundamental disciplines must be viewed with caution and skepticism. This is very different from disregarding them altogether.'

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Linguistics is an extremely diverse field of study, and Chomskyan linguistics is not the only approach, although it is the one most widely quoted and worked upon. Other approaches and schools of thought continue to offer their own contributions to the fields of language teaching and applied linguistics. Chomsky has had an enormous influence, but his position seems not to have resulted in a fully-fledged method for language teaching. Perhaps it is advisable that language teachers dispense altogether with the concept of method and should not expect the linguistic views of scholars to result in complete, unquestionable methods. In other words, they should draw insights from linguists such as Chomsky, but not fully depend on what they say. ETp

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Vahid Parvaresh received his MA in TEFL from the University of Tehran and is now a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Isfahan, Iran, where he also teaches some courses at BA level. He is interested in discourse analysis and cross-cultural pragmatics.

vparvaresh@gmail.com



Saeed Ketabi has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Cambridge, England, and is currently teaching various ELT courses at graduate levels at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Isfahan, Iran.

ketabi@fgn.ui.ac.ir

S is for spelling – and success

Youssef Mezrigui suggests spelling is an essential part of an English syllabus.

It is believed that before learning to write, students need to become familiar with the use of such things as punctuation and cohesive devices because of their key role in conveying written messages in a comprehensible fashion. In addition, I believe it is equally necessary that students acquire a satisfactory mastery of English orthography in order to achieve a sufficient level of accuracy in written communication. This language area, however, seems not to be given the significance it deserves in many English classes. I should like to examine the reasons for not teaching spelling, and consider why and how it *should* be taught.

Why we don't teach spelling

Work on spelling often involves the use of dictation, an activity which seems to be viewed rather badly. One reason is that it is considered to be a testing exercise rather than a learning activity, primarily because it would appear to examine only one of the students' learning abilities – and because there is an obligatory correction stage either at the end or during a later class. This represents a burden to students, who usually dislike tests, and also to teachers, who have to do the correction. Dictation is also thought to be boring: the teacher dictates a series of separate words or a short passage, and the students just write it down. A further reason why students do not like dictation, especially when it is done frequently, is that it is often used as a punishment: dictation can easily quieten a noisy class.

Another reason for not teaching spelling may be that teachers think it is already being practised indirectly during reading and writing activities. They may believe that students can learn spelling through simple exposure to reading texts and also via teacher correction of any spelling errors they make in written work.

Why we should teach spelling

It seems illogical and unfair to test students on a language area which they have not actually been taught, yet international English exams often contain an error-correction task which includes errors in spelling. Moreover, students are generally penalised for spelling errors in written tests. So, one simple justification for teaching spelling overtly in class is that the students will be tested on it, and will be penalised in tests for any spelling errors they make.

Perhaps the most important reason for spending time on spelling, however, is that many students are very poor at it. It is generally maintained that English spelling is very difficult for both native and non-native students because it is phonemically inconsistent: there is a mismatch between spelling and pronunciation. For example, the phoneme /ʃ/ can be represented by different letters such as *sh*, as in *shirt*, *ch* as in *champagne*, *c* as in *ocean*, *ss* as in *pressure*, *t* as in *patience*, and so on. Some of the inconsistencies of English spelling are shown in the table below.

Nevertheless, spelling is important because it contributes to the success of the process of learning English. Here are some of the advantages of teaching it:

- Learning correct spelling helps students to write English accurately.
- Learning spelling through dictation also helps students with pronunciation. As the teacher dictates, the students hear the words being pronounced correctly.

Problem	Example
1 Some letters do not represent any segment in a particular word.	through, sign, give, palm
2 A group of two or more letters can be used to represent a single segment.	think, chip, bread, schedule
3 A single letter can represent a cluster of two or more segments.	saxophone /ks/, exile /ks/ (or /gz/)
4 The same letter can represent different segments in different words.	sure /ʃ/, preserve /z/, measure /ʒ/
5 The same segment can be represented by different letters in different words.	/uː/ in rule, loop, soup, chew, sue, to, two, shoe, sleuth

(Adapted from Dobrovolsky and O'Grady)

- Knowing the correct spelling and pronunciation of words helps students increase their reading speed.
- Knowledge of correct spelling can help students with listening comprehension. It can, for instance, help them to work out the correct form of words that they may have misheard. It may enable them to guess meanings of unfamiliar words, or recall words they have forgotten. John Field illustrates this last point through a personal example:

  'A knowledge of spelling might even enable the learner to access meaning without looking the word up. The word may be a cognate of a word in L1, but simply pronounced very differently. To give an example, in a recent lesson which I filmed, the word "consul" occurred. Not a single member of the class recognised it or understood its meaning, even in the (relatively clear) context in which it occurred. However, immediately they saw it written on the board, all those who had Latin native languages (and a few more) immediately recognised it as a word with whose meaning they were already familiar in L1.'

The reasons why many teachers avoid dictation are mentioned above, yet, properly handled, dictation exercises offer an excellent opportunity to integrate the four language skills. The teacher dictates a passage, while the students listen and write it down. After the dictation is over, students check their work through reading, and then they can discuss it in pairs.

Of course, even though another benefit of dictation is that it can help with class management, the teacher should not show the students, either directly or indirectly, that the exercise is simply a means to keep them quiet, and it should never be presented as a punishment!

Improving spelling

Before setting out to teach spelling, the teacher should find out the reasons for the students' spelling errors so that remedial work can be targeted to achieve the desired goal.

Two common sources of non-native-speaker spelling errors are the discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation, as outlined above, and students' ignorance of spelling rules,

The teacher should not show the students, either directly or indirectly, that the dictation is a means to keep them quiet

which makes them spell words according to the way they are pronounced. Yet another source is language transfer (or interference). In other words, certain spelling errors may be due to the influence of the students' mother tongue or another foreign language they are studying. For instance, a French learner of English may misspell words such as *responsibility* and *pronunciation* as *responsability* and *prononciation*, that is, in the same, or roughly the same, way as their French cognates are spelled.

A remedial programme aimed at the improvement of spelling may be initiated by dealing with the different orthographic rules, together with some focus on exceptions. Alongside this, the teacher can resort to the following procedures, many of which, supplemented with some clarification of my own, have been taken from the *English Teaching Forum*.

1 Prepare a list of the common errors the students often make so you can deal with mistakes in a more focused way.

2 Draw the students' attention to the incompatibility of pronunciation with the written form of words to demonstrate the inconsistency of English spelling. Help the students by asking them to categorise problematic words according to different spelling criteria. For example, prepare a list of words containing the sound /ʃ/ as represented by the letters *sh*, *ss*, *t* and *c*, then read them out and ask the students to write them down in the correct categories.

3 Do some work on problematic words such as homophones (words like *knew* and *new*; *right*, *write* and *rite*; *you*, *ewe* and *yew*, which are pronounced similarly, but spelled differently) and homographs (words with similar spelling, but different meaning and/or pronunciation, such as *record* (verb) and *record* (noun); *separate* (verb), *separate* (adjective); and so on).

4 From time to time, check the students' spelling of words borrowed from other languages, and others whose written forms look so strange that they can be easily forgotten, such as *ewe*, *yacht*, *xenophobia*, *Xhosa*, *xylophone*, *onomatopoeia*, *spinach*, etc.

5 Deal with spelling errors which are due to interference. In an attempt to overcome errors caused by the influence of French, the teacher could ask the students to provide the French cognates of the following English words: *independence*, *responsible*, *example*, *exercise*, *measure*, etc.

6 Get the students to practise reading aloud. Emphasise the correct pronunciation of words and ask them to pay attention to how they are written.

7 Recommend that the students use monolingual dictionaries to help them improve their spelling. They should be taught the phonemic symbols so that when they look up a new word, they can find its meaning, spelling and pronunciation.

8 Get the students to use a specific variety of English (British or American English) as a spelling model so as to avoid confusion.

9 Use dictation exercises as reinforcing activities, concentrating on common errors and problematic words.

Diversifying dictation

What can teachers do to make dictation interesting, rather than boring, and effective in improving the students' spelling?

Firstly, the dictation should not consist of a series of separate words or thematically unconnected paragraphs. Instead, it should take the form of successive topic-related passages telling a short story full of suspense or dealing with an absorbing topic so as to arouse the students' interest. It is a good idea to divide a short story into parts, each of which is to be dictated during one lesson. If possible, end each part with an element of suspense so that the students can be asked to speculate, either orally or in writing, about what will happen next, thus engaging them in a language skills integration activity. (As the main objective of the dictation is to improve spelling and link it with pronunciation, the teacher should, of course, start by doing some work on spelling after the

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S is for spelling – and success

dictation is over before moving on to the language skills integration exercise.)

Below is a four-episode story for dictation. The original story came from a news magazine, but I made a lot of changes, including an element of suspense at the end of each episode to make it motivating and interesting. Beneath each part are suggestions for things that teachers can focus on for pronunciation and spelling practice and which highlight certain problematic words.

Part 1

June 6th, 1944, was to have been Juliette Brault's wedding day, but the invasion began, and the sixteen-year-old Frenchwoman was told that her fiancé Georges and her father had disappeared, and that both of them might have been killed. Juliette was with her mother at her parents' house. The following day, someone knocked at the front door. When her mother opened it, Juliette saw an American officer and heard her mother saying 'Really, can I believe it?'

After dictating the first part of the story, focus on the sound /ʒ/ represented by the letter *s* as in *invasion*. Get the students to give examples of other similar words (*leisure*, *measure*, *pleasure*, etc). Guide them into saying what other letters can represent the sound /ʒ/ and give examples, eg *g* as in *garage* and *massage* and *j* as in *déjà-vu*.

Draw attention to the word *knocked* and focus on other words spelled with a silent *k*, such as *know*, *knee*, *knife*, etc. Pointing to the word *fiancé*, you could have the students suggest other words taken from French, such as *café*, *déjà-vu*, *rendezvous*, etc.

Part 2

No sooner had her mother closed the front door than Juliette hurried to her, asking 'What's the matter, Mum?'

'He told me Georges had turned up alive,' she replied.

'Really? Where is he now?' Juliette gasped.

'He didn't tell me where he is,' her mother answered.

There was a sad silence. Both women were whispering prayers. Each was praying for her own man's life. At about ten that night, they heard a continuous knocking at the door.

Here the focus can be on the following:

1 The spelling of the simple past tense forms of regular verbs ending in *y*, such as *carry*, *hurry*, *play*, etc. (Rule: When the base form of the verb ends in *y* preceded by a consonant, the *y* should be replaced by *i*, and then *ed* should be added. For example, *hurry – hurried*, *carry – carried*, etc. However, when the base form of the verb ends in *y* preceded by a vowel, we simply add *ed*. For example, *play – played*.)

2 Words containing silent *gh*, such as *night*, *fight*, *light*, *sight*, etc.

Part 3

Both women's hearts were beating violently. Juliette rushed to the door, and before she reached it, her father pushed it open. She cuddled and kissed him, and then said shivering, 'Where's Georges?'

Her father said he did not know anything about him. Some time later, the bombing began. It was a dreadful night. The family rarely talked. They were threatened by death at every moment. In the morning, they took refuge on a farm. The Americans and the Germans were bombing the place on both sides. Juliette prayed that Georges had not been killed.

Here the focus can be on the following:

1 The sounds /ʃ/ and /ʧ/, represented by the letters *sh* and *ch* respectively, eg *rushed* and *reached*. Point out some exceptions: in certain words, such as *champagne*, *ch* is pronounced /ʃ/. In others, such as *architecture* and *chemistry*, the letters are pronounced /k/.

2 Words containing a silent *b*, such as *bomb*, *climb*, *comb*, *lamb*, etc.

Part 4

The family moved again near to an American camp where they took refuge. While they were hiding there, an American soldier came along with Georges. Juliette was so happy that she ignored the dreadful atmosphere. The couple decided to get married, but the bride had lost her white shoes. The Americans brought her three pairs of shoes. One huge pair from a parachutist rose high over her ankles, and the shoes just weren't pretty. Another pair was much too big for her. The third came from an officer. Although these shoes did not fit or suit her, she wore them for her wedding. The mayor who married the couple spoke of 'love in the ruins'.

Here the focus can be on the following:

1 Words containing the sound /ʤ/ represented by the letter *g*, such as *refuge*, *huge*, etc, by the letter *j*, such as, *just*, *June*, *July*, etc, and by the letter *d*, such as *soldier*, *education*, and so on.

2 Words containing the final silent letters *gh*, such as *high*, *sigh*, *neigh*, etc.

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I used this type of activity for more than a semester and it proved to be interesting and motivating. It was also effective in improving the students' spelling. In addition, I noticed an enhancement in their autonomous and cooperative learning: a few students suggested bringing texts or writing short stories to exploit for dictation exercises and language skills integration activities in class. Others selected what they called 'strangely-spelled words' to dictate to their fellow students in the classroom.

In brief, I believe that not teaching spelling in English classes may be seriously detrimental to developing a non-native learner's ability to use the language in its written form. By implication, therefore, the teaching of spelling as an independent skill may be reckoned as a necessity. ETp

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Youssef Mezrigui has been teaching secondary school students for 15 years. He also taught grammar and language skills to freshmen English majors at Jendouba University, Tunisia for three years. He holds a Master of Philosophy in English Studies and Educational Methods from Glasgow University, UK, and is currently doing a PhD at Rennes 2 University, France.

mezriguiyuceph@yahoo.fr

A storytelling experience

David Heathfield entertains his students.

Language teachers tend to make good storytellers, and language learners can benefit enormously from being told a story, whether their teacher is a native or a non-native speaker. As John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri put it, *'the communicative gain will at least outweigh the un-Englishness you may hear in your telling'*. Like all classroom practice, for teachers it's a question of learning through experience. Perhaps my story will encourage you to build more storytelling into your classes.

Storytelling is at the heart of how I teach and is a generic skill that crosses professional, educational, social and cultural boundaries. It is extraordinarily versatile in the context of language teaching. Over the last few years, I have combined my career as a teacher of English with that of being a professional storyteller. The more I tell stories, the more convinced I am of the value of oral and unscripted storytelling in every kind of language classroom.

A recent experience

Earlier this year, I was fortunate to be invited to spend a week in the south of Italy doing a storytelling project with elementary learners of English in technical and professional schools in rural Basilicata. As I look back, I am considering what the value has been for the students.

Essentially this was, for many of the students, their first experience of meeting a native English speaker, and it was clear in each of the one- and two-hour storytelling sessions I did that, at the outset, most of them didn't expect to understand much at all, if anything. Some of the teachers also doubted that their students would be able to follow the stories without simultaneous translation from them. In fact, the quality of attention the students paid to the storytelling was remarkable. They instantly followed the first and simplest story and, by the end of the session, they were able to demonstrate that they had at least got the gist of each of the subsequent stories. Evidence of this was that they were able to retell a story in pairs in their mother tongue. Pairs also successfully re-enacted scenes from a story.

I enjoyed this storytelling experience because it challenged many of the students' beliefs that they would not be able to deal with an extended piece of foreign language spoken by a native speaker.

An illuminating experience

It all started about ten years ago when storyteller Mike Dunstan visited the Isca School of English summer school programme for young learners of English in Exeter, UK. I was astounded that he could hold the attention of an audience of young learners for an hour, even though he made no obvious concession to their limited language knowledge. The students sat entranced and followed the tale that he told. I cannot say with any degree of certainty how they interpreted the words they didn't understand, but it was clear that they were all involved in the story.

Human beings are primed from infancy to listen to stories, and there are universal features in the structure of traditional tales. If the students were familiar with the underlying structure, this may have supported their understanding. Many of us have had a positive experience of listening to stories told to us as children, whether at home, at nursery or at primary school. It is possible that the students were able to bring themselves back to that open and relaxed story-listening state.

Human beings are primed from infancy to listen to stories, and there are universal features in the structure of traditional tales

A magical experience

The art of storytelling is to engage listeners with live and unscripted telling. It does not matter whether it's a folk tale, a personal anecdote or a story from history – if the teller connects with the listener, the message will get across. Perhaps you, too, have had the experience of being told a story in a language you hardly know and felt that you have understood. If the story is told from the heart, it's as if there's some magic going on.

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A storytelling experience

A believable experience

I was already performing as an actor in community theatre when I became interested in oral storytelling. Since then I have found my own set of techniques for getting a story across. Movement and gesture, voice modulation, singing and choral chanting, percussion, props and interaction with the listeners all play important roles, but the key is getting the essence of the story across as effectively as I can. When asked by young listeners if the fairy story they have just heard is true, some storytellers say *'It was true while I was telling it to you'*. For me this holds the key to effective storytelling – it has to do with belief in the process on the part of the teller and the listener, when both are giving their full attention to the story as it unfolds. The same might be said of teaching in general.

> *Individual listeners experience stories in a rich variety of different ways*

A sensory experience

One feature that I have consciously incorporated into my storytelling is a multi-sensory approach. I have become increasingly aware of the fact that individual listeners experience stories in a rich variety of different ways. The significance of mental imagery – in other words, perceptions inside listeners' minds – has been brought home to me most strikingly in workshops led by Mario Rinvolucri. Most listeners describe seeing mental pictures of scenes from the story, either still or moving, either in brightly-coloured or colourless tones, either in or out of focus. Others will feel close to the action of the story and identify themselves in a deeply kinaesthetic way with the main character. More auditory people will tune into the rhythms and sounds of the story. Like many people, I experience different moments from different stories through different sensory channels. To enhance the experience of a story, I often refer to different senses in the oral text as well as provide stimuli for these senses through movement, gesture, voice modulation, song, music and percussion. However, I avoid using visual aids and I give minimal visual description in order to give full creative freedom to the listeners' mental imagery. There is a strong link between language, emotion and mental imagery. According to Jane Arnold, Herbert Puchta and Mario Rinvolucri, *'Mental imagery can improve comprehension and recall … language material is processed more deeply through the use of imagery and is stored in a more permanent manner. In fact we could say that images are essential for us to get meaning out of language.'*

> *I avoid using visual aids and I give minimal visual description in order to give full creative freedom to the listeners' mental imagery*

I rarely write down the text of a story I tell, but in order to demonstrate this multi-sensory approach, on page 19 is a very slightly amended transcript of a recording of me telling the old Scottish fairy tale *The Stars in the Sky* to a class of Japanese learners.

I use gesture to invite the listeners to join in with the repeated verbs (eg *she paddled*) and to guess which creatures the girl met. This often affects the course of the story and may take it in a new direction for a while. At the end, I ask the listeners to share their imagined endings in pairs before they are invited to listen to and compare endings as a whole group. Here, it is essential to value each ending, as they are all personal and revealing. Some say she reached the top and became the star. Some say that she slipped back down and found her way home with the help of the fish, the horse and the fairies. There are as many different endings as there are listeners. (You can watch me tell *The Stars in the Sky* at *www.youtube.com/watch?v=caQKGmSO00A*. Feel free to email me your ending. I would love to hear from you.)

A singing experience

I often find that song is a key element in stories I tell to students. Indeed, many traditional British and Irish folk songs are narrative stories. There is just a small step from the heightened speech we use when telling a story to chanting or singing. Students are easily engaged by just a few lines of song at the beginning, middle or end of a story. Often I'll sing or chant a chorus and invite students to repeat each line after me. In many instances, the chorus is repeated at intervals during the story, which increases the level of involvement and consolidates vocabulary, pronunciation and rhythm. As the story progresses, students pick up the song or chant and often join in together with me. It's a natural and fun part of storytelling and an enjoyable alternative to traditional choral drilling.

For an example of singing and choral chanting within a story, you can see and hear me telling the traditional and ancient British tale *The Child Rowland* (it is recorded in two parts) at the international storytelling festival 'IX Jornadas do Conto da Universidade do Minho' in northern Portugal by following the links from *www.memoriamedia.net/canal/canal_memoriamedia.html*. ETp

There are many stories and examples of useful classroom activities which involve storytelling in the following excellent publications:

Arnold, J, Puchta, H and Rinvolucri, M *Imagine That!* Helbling Languages 2007

Jacobs, J *English Fairy Tales* Everyman's Library Children's Classics 1993

Morgan, J and Rinvolucri, M *Once Upon A Time* CUP 1983

Paran, A and Watts, E (Eds) *Storytelling in ELT* IATEFL Publications 2003

Wright, A *Storytelling with Children* OUP 1995

Wright, A 'Stories and their importance in language teaching' *Humanising Language Teaching* 2(5) *www.hltmag.co.uk/sep00/mart2.htm* 2000

Wajnryb, R *Stories* CUP 2003



David Heathfield tells stories and runs storytelling workshops for teachers in the UK, throughout Europe and beyond. He writes about student creativity and bridging cultures. He works for himself, for Pilgrims UK, for Horizon Language Training and for INTO University of Exeter, UK.

david@davidheathfield.co.uk

The Stars In The Sky

adapted by David Heathfield

There was a girl and all that she wanted was to play with the stars. Nothing else, she just wanted to play with the stars. Whatever her mother and father brought her she turned away, for all that she wanted was to play with the stars. One night, she left her home and she walked and she walked and she walked until she heard the sound of the babbling brook:



'Every night the stars shine so brightly in my waters. Take off your shoes, take off your socks, step into my waters and paddle and perhaps you'll find a star.'

So the girl took off her shoes and took off her socks, and she stepped into the cool clear water. And she paddled and she paddled and she paddled. But not one star did she find. She climbed out of the babbling brook and she walked along feeling the cool wet grass between her toes. And finally, she came to a deep blue pool:

'Every night the stars shine so brightly that I can hardly see. Jump in and swim and perhaps you'll find a star.'

So the girl jumped in and she swam and she swam and she swam. But not one star did she find. She climbed out of the pool and went along and came to the place where the fairies play:

'Dance with us for every night the stars sparkle so brightly in the long wet grass.'

So she danced and she danced and she danced. But not one star did she find. She was sad.

'Will you go back to your mother and father or will you go on searching?' said the fairies.

What did she do? (*Without exception, audiences want her to go on searching.*)

'Go on until you find four legs, and four legs will take you to no legs at all, and no legs at all will take you to the staircase with no steps, and if you climb the staircase with no steps, you'll find the stars … or you'll find another place.'

The girl walked away from the fairies. Before long, she found, tied to a tree, an animal with four legs. Perhaps you can guess what it was … (*I usually get a variety of suggestions from the listeners: let's say it was a horse*).

'Will you take me to the stars?'

'Nay,' said the horse, *'I know nothing of the stars. I only do what the fairy folk tell me to do.'*

'The fairies say that four legs will take me to no legs at all.'

'Well,' said the horse, *'climb on my back.'*

They rode and they rode and they rode. The girl could feel the wind blowing in her hair. And then she could smell the salt of the sea as they rode down to the shore. And the horse stopped at the edge and they looked and there was a silver path running across the surface of the sea and at the end of that silver path was a great arch reaching into the sky, and it was all the colours of the world.

'Climb down,' said the horse, *'I can take you no further.'*

She climbed down and the horse galloped away along the shore and out of sight, and she stood there and she cried. And then between her tears, she saw a creature swimming towards her across the surface of the sea along the silver path. And you can imagine what kind of creature it was … (*more suggestions: let's say it was a fish*).

'Take me to the stars.'

'No,' said the fish, *'I know nothing of the stars. I only do what the fairies tell me to do.'*

'The fairies say that no legs will take me to the staircase with no steps.'

'Well,' said the fish, *'climb on my back.'*



She climbed onto the great silver fish, and it splashed away from the shore. They swam and they swam and they swam along the silver path until they came to the bottom of the great staircase with no steps.

'I can take you no further. Climb off.'

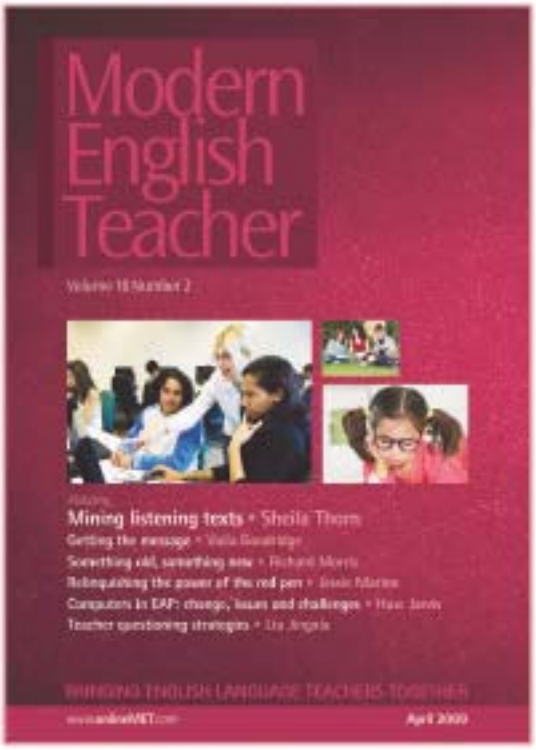
So she did and the fish dived under the sea and disappeared. The girl started to climb the staircase with no steps, and she climbed and she climbed and she climbed.

We are nearly at the end of this tale and your ending is in your head. Perhaps you can say what it is …

Phillip Burrows

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GRAMMAR

Phrasal verbs? They're easy! 2

John Ryan takes on verbs that take *on*.

As I said in Issue 62 of ETp, we need a *keyword* to understand verbs that take the preposition *on*, whether they are phrasal verbs or not. By this, I mean a common thread, a meaning which will apply to all verbs with *on*. Look at the following sentences:

- *The bottle is on the table.*
- *Peter and Tom get on.*
- *The film went on and on.*

What do these sentences have in common? The answer is *contact*. And *contact* is our keyword for all verbs with *on*. So when learners see the word *on*, they ask *'Where is the contact? Between what and what?'*

Look at the first sentence. Here, the contact is simply physical: between the bottle and the table. In the second sentence, the contact is between Peter and Tom; it is social contact. If you don't get on with someone, do you have contact with them? No. In the third example, there is too much contact: the film is too long.

Let's go back and start again from the beginning.

Are you on for it?

Before we look at any phrasal verb group, we should look at what the preposition means when it is used with the verb *to be*.

*The bottle **is on** the table.*

As we have already said, here the contact is simply physical contact between the bottle and the table. But what if I were offering you a coffee? Offering you a coffee is like saying *'You–coffee–contact?'* or in idiomatic English, *'**Are** you **on** for a coffee?'*

Similarly, I might ask, *'What **are** you **on** for doing this weekend?'* (ie with what would you like contact?)

We can use the same idea for other idiomatic expressions. If you are intending to treat someone in a restaurant, when the bill arrives, it's *'Me–bill–contact'*, so you can say, *It's **on** me!*

So *on* means *contact*, whatever the structure and whatever the context. It doesn't have to be a phrasal verb.

Do you get on?

*I **get on with** Tom.* There is (good) contact between us. If we ***don't get on***, there is no contact.

Does it go on and on?

Look at these sentences.

*The film **went on** a long time.*

*The meeting **went on and on**.*

Here, there is too much contact. The film and the meeting were both too long. If we want to make the idea even stronger, we could say:

*The meeting **dragged on and on**.*

Likewise, if someone talks too much about his car, it is boring; we have too much contact and we can say:

*He **went on and on** about his car.*

Keeping the same idea, sometimes in conversation we say *'Go on!'* Why is this?

It's like saying, *'I like the subject, keep contact with it. please.'*

However, if we say *'Come on!'* the meaning is just the opposite. I now want you to stop your conversational journey and make contact with me instead. Basically, I don't agree with or believe you!

Will you take it on?

To take on is another interesting verb. It can quite simply mean *to hire*, which is just *'employer–contact–new employee'*. But a more interesting side of the verb is that it represents contact with *responsibility*.

If I ask you to babysit my well-behaved child, you might say yes, but if I asked you to babysit ten premature babies, you might say: *'It's too much to take on.'*

When we take something on, we accept contact with it. We allow it into our lives.

Hang on a minute!

Another idea of contact is asking someone to wait. When you say *'Hang on'* or *'Hold on'*, you're saying *'Keep contact with that. Don't move!'*

You're putting it on!

Imagine a little boy who doesn't want to go to school on Monday morning. What does he do? He probably groans at his mother and holds his stomach (the stomach is always a good bet because it's difficult to prove you're lying). So what the boy is effectively doing is wearing a mask: coming into contact with his 'sick mask'. He's ***putting it on***. Or if a boy says *'I love you'* to a girl, but he's really only after her money, *he's **putting it on***.

Is it switched on?

We *turn on* the TV or the microwave. Why *on*? Again, it's contact. Think about the switch and the wiring. If it*'s not on*, there's no contact. If it*'s on*, there is contact.

What did he touch on?

*During his speech he **touched on** a few interesting things.*

In this example, there is short, brief contact. He only mentioned these things; he didn't talk about them at length.

Another example of brief contact is to *hit on* something. Imagine millions of potential ideas are floating around the universe like balloons and you blindly reach out and burst one. Aha! *You've just **hit on** a great idea.*

*'Yesterday I **hit on** a great idea for making money!'*

But if the idea occurs to you slowly, then it *dawns on you*. Just as the sun slowly comes over the horizon, you slowly see the light in your mind:

*'It **dawned on** me that I could get a better job.'*

And that's it! *On* means contact. Try now to take any random group of verbs and find the idea of contact within them. When you see it, you'll feel you are **on**to something!

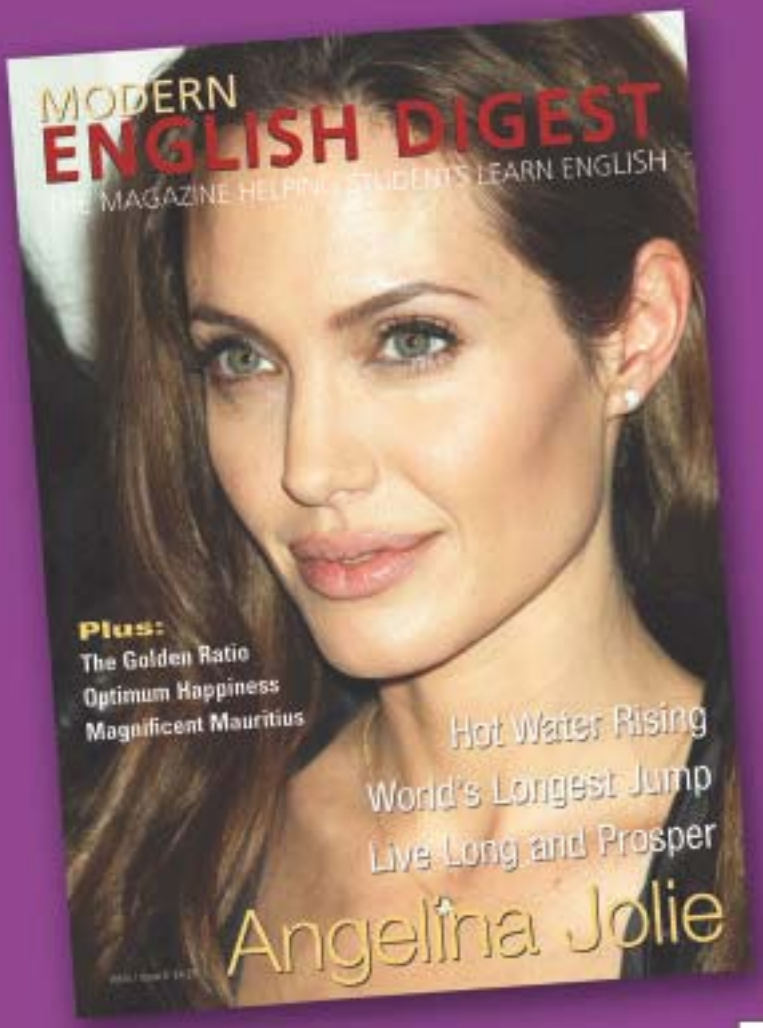
I'll *carry on* in the next issue with phrasal verbs with *up*. ETp



John Ryan is the Director of Studies at Delfin School of English, Dublin, Ireland, and believes that the English language is accessible to all learners as there is an underlying logic, which exists even in the most idiomatic of phrases. Bringing this logic to the learner is his goal in training.

lifethroughenglish@gmail.com

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Don't forget to write!

Betka Pišlar uses a school magazine to enhance her students' writing skills.

In my work with primary school children in Slovenia, I have noticed that their speaking, reading and listening skills tend to be far more developed than their writing skills.

As a result, I set myself the following objectives:

- ★ to find ways to help my students improve their writing;
- ★ to inspire them to engage in creative writing;
- ★ to motivate them to use dictionaries;
- ★ to encourage them to use their prior knowledge;
- ★ to incorporate new activities in my teaching.

To meet these objectives, I decided to encourage the students to produce a school magazine in English. I got them to write some articles during their regular English lessons, I set others for homework and also organised after-school writing sessions. The students had all been learning English as a second language for four years.

Making a magazine

Our first magazine meeting took place at the beginning of the school year. The students were divided into groups of three and each group was asked to discuss a name for the magazine and possible topics that it could cover. They decided upon the name *Stars* and, with memories of their summer holidays still fresh in their minds, chose holidays as the topic of the first issue.

Issue 1

Groupwork proved to be a good way to begin, as the students were prepared to listen to each other and to work together. They then began writing word puzzles, riddles, quizzes and essays about holidays. Writing in groups generated plenty of discussion and the exchanges of ideas resulted in a lot of fun and enjoyment. The students were practising grammar without realising they were doing so.

Issue 2

The topic of our second issue was sports and free time. Sport, leisure and the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle is already part of the school curriculum, and the students were able to expand their vocabulary and express prior knowledge using some new expressions. In addition to learning English expressions to describe familiar sports and sports equipment, they also had the opportunity to discuss sports which are not very popular in our country. Among these were cricket, polo and baseball. They also became aware of some of the major language differencies between English and Slovenian. I tried to focus their attention on the large number of exceptions to any rule in English grammar. We also revised irregular plurals and the use of the gerund. All this helped them write their assignments in their free time. Articles were written at home, while word puzzles, sport descriptions and interviews were written at school.

Issue 3

The third issue was published just before Christmas. It was entirely dedicated to various celebrations. The students liked discussing the festivals in the English-speaking world and they particularly enjoyed comparing cultural differences between British people and Slovenians. They were eager to write about how they celebrated Christmas in their families. They also wrote letters to Father Christmas, produced Christmas cards and lists of New Year's resolutions, and decribed their memories of the previous Christmas.

Issue 4

In the fourth issue, the students published articles on nature, endangered species, seasons, clothes and the impact of weather conditions on the life of people and animals. They gathered information from the internet and the school library and also from their parents and family members. They then wrote interviews, reports, word puzzles and riddles.

★ ★ ★

The students involved in writing the English school magazine all made progress in accuracy and creativity. During the project, they revised the past simple and past continuous, regular and irregular verbs, gerunds, plurals and the *will* future. Of course, they still made some grammar and spelling mistakes, but they became more self-confident and were very proud of their work. Their participation in the magazine project also helped them to acquire computer skills. Cooperation was an important factor, and it was clear that the more active and creative pupils were helping those with less experience and knowledge. Not only was this sharing of ideas very educational, but my students also found that learning and writing in English can be a lot of fun. ETp



Betka Pišlar has taught English to young learners, secondary school students and adults for over 18 years. At present she teaches English and French at the Ziri Primary School, Ziri, Slovenia. Her main educational interest is motivating primary school children to learn.

betka_pislar@t-2.net

Treasure trove

Emilce Vela helps her students progress from reading stories to writing them.

Nowadays, children and young people have come to expect their needs for communication and learning to be satisfied by images, sound and the virtual world. As a result, the demands on teachers have increased, as students want them to use these means in class and this requires a considerable investment in both time and effort.

So, encouraging students to spend time at school reading a real (not virtual) book and helping them to develop a taste for reading may be quite a challenge at the present time. It may be even more challenging to create a peaceful environment in the classroom in which students can open themselves to the world of creative ideas and fantasies and to get excited about both reading and writing for pleasure.

Being an enthusiastic reader and writer myself, I decided to face up to this challenge in my classroom, and I prepared a project to engage my students in the reading and writing of literature through a range of different activities. I used this with elementary-level students whom I saw for three classes a week, devoting one of those classes to the project.

Motivating the students

At the beginning of the school term, I took a large box and made it into the shape of a book. It was attractive and colourful, with a big label on the front cover showing the title: *My Literary Treasure*. I then filled the box with a set of graded readers appropriate for the level of my students. I carried it into the classroom one lesson, having previously raised my students' interest in the previous class by mentioning a hidden treasure which we were going to discover together during the literature class the following week.

I tried to create a cosy and inviting atmosphere in the classroom by arranging the tables and chairs so as to make it possible for the students to sit in a semi-circle around me and my 'book'. I showed it to them so that they could read the title and I invited them to guess what the hidden treasure was inside. After one of them guessed correctly that the big book was full of smaller books, I opened it and handed out one reader to each student. I asked them each to spend a few minutes looking at the book they had been given, touching it, browsing through it and smelling it, before passing it on to the student on their left. I then collected the books, wrote a list of the titles on the board and asked the students each, in turn, to say which ones they would most like to read. I put a tick next to each title as it was mentioned and at the end calculated the three most popular choices. Then I told the class to form three groups so that in the next class they could begin to explore these readers in more detail and decide in which order they wanted to read them.

Engaging the students

Before the next literature lesson, I prepared a worksheet for the students to use to guide them in their exploration of the three readers they had chosen. The worksheet had instructions for a number of activities. Once the students had got into their three groups, I distributed the three readers and gave each group a worksheet. I told them they needed to start with the warm-up activity (which involved identifying the various features,

such as title, author, publisher, etc, which you find on the covers of books) and make notes on all three books (passing them around the groups) before continuing the other activities with the book they had originally been given. By photocopying and cutting and pasting the covers and parts of the covers of the three books along with some extracts from the texts onto the worksheet, I formed a series of matching exercises:

1 Match the titles to the front covers.

2 Label the features you see on the front covers.

3 Match the front and the back covers of each reader.

4 Match the titles to these extracts from the books.

5 Put these sentences from the first paragraph of each book in order. Which book is each paragraph taken from?

6 Match the first paragraph and the last paragraph of each book.

As a final task, the students had to decide in their groups their preference for the order in which the books should be read.

After they had completed the worksheets, the students handed them in and I announced the results and the order in which we would read the books. Each student was then given a copy of the chosen books.

Reading

We used different methods during the actual reading of the books. Sometimes I, or a student who enjoyed reading, read aloud to the whole class. Sometimes the students read aloud in groups or read in silence. At other times, I read to one student or a group of students, or we listened to a recording of the book, where an accompanying CD was available. So long as there was no disturbance, I allowed different reading options for different students or groups according to their wishes. I also varied the location where the reading took place, sometimes taking the students to the school library or to the playground. At the beginning or end of the reading class, I helped the students to retell the story or part of the story by making comments, summarising it or answering questions about it. I always encouraged them to continue reading at home, especially the chapter or part of the story to be read in the following class. This was always set in advance.

Princess Eva can't laugh

Yesterday Princess Eva was happy. She went to a carnival party. It was snowy. And the food was delicious. There were clowns and a band. But there was a bad magician at the carnival party.

Princess Eva saw the magician and she laughed. The magician did not laugh. He touched her mouth with a wand. He said, 'From now on you can't talk and you can't laugh.' And Princess Eva could not make a sound.

Princess Eva could feel, hear, see, smell and taste, but she could not talk. She could not laugh. A doctor came and looked at her fingers, her ears, her eyes, her nose and her tongue. She was not sick. But something was wrong. Even a clown could not make her laugh.

But then one day, a nice man came to town. He had a band of animals. His dog, his cat and his horse sang for the princess. They made loud noises. They sounded very bad. The princess started to laugh and laugh. 'Look, I can talk!' she cried. 'I can laugh.' It was again a happy day for her.

Writing

During the reading period, I encouraged the students to start thinking about ideas for a plot and characters for a story of their own. When it was time for them to start writing, I devoted several writing classes to helping them organise their ideas, working either in groups or individually. I also allowed them to work on drafts at home if good ideas came to them out of school time. When their stories were ready, I asked them to write out clean copies to hand in. You can read one of the stories, the story of Princess Eva, in the box above. I then invited the art teacher to come to class and help us make a book with all the stories they had produced. Some students designed the front and back covers, bearing in mind the features of covers we had discussed at the very beginning of the project. I was deeply touched when I read the stories: they really were a dream come true, so I added a note of thanks to the students at the top of the front cover.

★ ★ ★

The students proudly showed their storybook to the school authorities, who in turn showed it to the whole school during assembly. I suggested leaving the book in the school library so they could continue working on it the following year by doing a version translated into their native language.

Looking back, I believe that doing this project has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my teaching career and one that I will always treasure. ETp



Emilce Vela teaches English at primary level in state schools and at tertiary level at Del Carmen Teacher Training College and Instituto Educativo Santa Trinidad in San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina. In addition, she is a National Public Translator of English and does freelance translation work.

emivela@yahoo.com.ar

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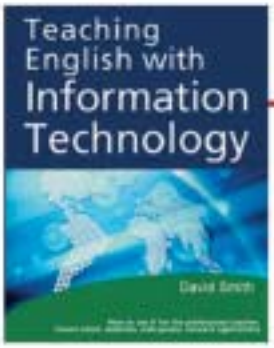
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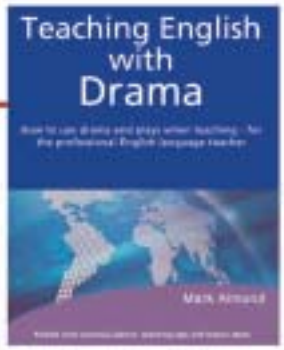
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Over the wall ...



Alan Maley recommends reading for teachers who teach teens.

The aim of this series is, as I explained in the opening article in Issue 62 of ET*p*, to review a number of books relating to a given theme. My theme in this issue is adolescence and the 'teen thing'. This is relevant for many, if not most, teachers since it is a phenomenon they have to deal with on a daily basis. But I must emphasise that my intention is not to offer pedagogical advice as such, but rather to open up the topic, raise awareness and suggest some interesting reading.



Being an adolescent is indeed an awkward age, both for teenagers and for those they come in contact with. As Quentin Crisp remarked, *'The young always have the same problem – how to rebel and conform at the same time. They have now solved this problem by defying their parents and copying one another.'*

I will be looking principally at four novels about growing up in the awkward age, and one practical handbook of advice to parents on the issue.

The novels

One of the earliest fictional treatments of adolescence, now a classic, is *The Catcher in the Rye* by J D Salinger. Set in the New York area, it takes us through an action-packed period of about 24 hours in the company of the arch 'anti-phony', Holden Caulfield. Holden is about to be expelled from his latest boarding school. He hates school, and the whole adult world of 'phonies'. Holden is a confusion of self-doubt, unkept resolutions, internal conversations about what he would have said or done, fantasies, mood swings between exhilaration and despair, erratic behaviour, an obsession with – and fear of – sex, loneliness, intolerance combined with moments of extreme generosity, haphazard trains of thought, wild exaggeration, bravado and, above all, a contempt for the world of adult 'phonies', of whom his own parents are the archetypes. He hates the idea of belonging to the adult world, yet has no idea of an alternative future for himself, except through his fantasies. The novel is very funny, yet profoundly and disturbingly sad. Holden makes damningly perceptive observations about the adult world, yet he is aware of his own faults while incapable of changing them. It is incredible that a book first published in 1945–6 should still offer such an accurate picture of the adolescent mind and such a strong individual narrative voice.

> Being an adolescent is indeed an awkward age, both for teenagers and for those they come in contact with

My second novel is an even more picaresque treatment of adolescence, telling the story of a rather strange Thai boy growing up in the household of his extended family of rich, upper-class Thais in Bangkok without the company of his parents. S P Somtow's *Jasmine Nights* is a truly original treatment of the passage from childhood to adolescence. It is set in 1963 at the outset of the Vietnam war and coincides with Kennedy's assassination. Justin, aka Little Frog, aka Somsonthorn, is an extremely precocious, anglicised 12 year old, steeped in Shakespeare, Euripides and the classics, but fundamentally innocent of the ways of the world. He is in denial of his own ethnicity, refusing to speak Thai or eat Thai food. He lives partly in a spirit world evoked by his dead pet chameleon, Homer, partly in the confusing world of the adults who surround him: his three maiden aunts, his grandfather and uncle, his ancient,

Over the wall ...



beloved great grandmother, the randy English Dr Richardson and his family, and the family of black Americans renting the house next door. The story proceeds in a series of extravagantly outrageous and funny incidents as Little Frog resolves his need for intercultural friendship, his growing interest in girls and his awareness of himself as a Thai. His parents, who turn out to be CIA agents, are briefly returned to him at the end. And on the night of his 13th birthday, he is fully initiated into sexual intercourse with not one, but all three of his 'women'. This is a rewarding read, not only for its stylish language and comic incidents but for the insights it gives into the boy's mind.

Black Swan Green by David Mitchell is the story of 13-year-old Jason trying to cope simultaneously with the pressures of school, bullying, sex, finding his place in a confusing and frightening world, coping with his older sister and coming to terms with his parents' fracturing marriage. To cap it all, he is a stutterer. It is 1982 and the Falklands war is raging. Jason lives in a new middle-class area of a semi-rural part of Worcestershire, whereas all his classmates are from working-class homes. He is an outsider from the beginning and is mercilessly victimised, mocked and bullied. Mitchell is expert at conveying the underworld of school with its rituals and tortures. Jason lives in perpetual fear and uncertainty as he tries to conceal his stuttering and to find his way in this labyrinth of tribal behaviour. Interestingly, he draws comfort and learns from encounters with a number of adults from outside his family circle: the eccentric old Belgian woman who encourages him to express himself through his poetry, the American antique seller who shows him that his nightmarish fears of parental punishment are unreal, and a group of gypsies who show him a completely different lifestyle. Jason does eventually learn to stand up to the bullies, discovers that he is attractive to girls and can even cope with his stutter and the break-up of his parents' marriage. But his problems are not over. Life will go on hurting.

In *Submarine*, by Joe Dunthorne, we enter the world of 15-year-old Oliver Tate, living near Swansea and preparing for his GCSE exams. There are two main strands to the story. The first concerns Oliver's first sexual relationship with a girl, the manipulative Jordana. He loses her partly through neglect and partly through his own preoccupation with the problems of his parents' marriage. It is true that they have a strained relationship and there is reason to think that his mother may be having an affair with a former lover. But Oliver's hilarious attempts to thwart them are both misjudged and pointless. There was no affair. In the last part of the book, his attempts to come to terms with breaking up with Jordana and to reconcile himself to the fact of his parents' imperfect yet stable relationship is both sad and very moving.

A recurrent theme in all these titles is the important role adults who are not their parents can play in the development of teenagers



The manual

Get Out of My Life – But First Take Me and Alex Into Town is a first-rate manual for parents of teenagers, and anyone else dealing with them. It combines perceptive analysis with hard-nosed and practical advice. Part 1 describes adolescence, and explains why adolescents behave as they do, offering advice on being a parent with this age group. Part 2 is a more detailed treatment of relationships between parents and teenagers. Part 3 deals with serious life issues such as divorce, school, sex, drugs and drink and suicide. The authors point out that teenagers are growing up in a world that is both more permissive and more uncertain than ever before. *'They will confront a future where you no longer simply grow up, get a job, bring up a family and grow old. Now you leave school and see what happens …' 'Teenagers battle to dismantle their parents' authority but can find themselves adrift if too successful.'*

They examine the common adolescent syndromes: self-deception (and deceiving others), allergy to parents, living in a bubble of the here and now, seeing adults as flawed, viewing parents as an embarrassment, the need to be popular with peers, being in love with the world and finding their love unrequited: *'they have great longing but are never quite fulfilled'*. The authors' advice can be summarised as: set rules and stick to them (even if teenagers will certainly break them); don't get drawn into wrangles; love them unconditionally but unsentimentally; learn to let go; have confidence that this is a stage of development which will, thank God, pass! *'The unabated nastiness does run its course and fade away.'*

★ ★ ★

A parting thought: a recurrent theme in all these titles is the important role adults who are not their parents can play in the development of teenagers. As teachers, we will often find ourselves playing this role. Let's do it well! ETp

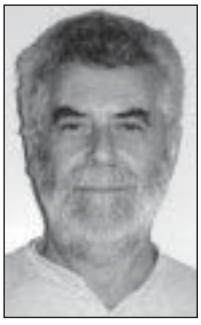
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Alan Maley has worked in the area of ELT for over 40 years in Yugoslavia, Ghana, Italy, France, China, India, the UK, Singapore and Thailand. Since 2003 he has been a freelance writer and consultant. He has published over 30 books and numerous articles, and was, until recently, Series Editor of the *Oxford Resource Books for Teachers*.

yelamoo@yahoo.co.uk

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Wet Wednesdays



Charles Mercer

knows what to do with students who don't really know what they are there for.

As a business English teacher, you may be asked to visit a client's premises and set up a course tailored to the exact needs of a particular company. In this commercial environment, the students are usually well motivated and are familiar with many business terms because they already use them every day. The primary need for such students is to sort out tenses and basic grammar items like prepositions, the placement of adverbs and the correct use of passive structures. However, in a language school, where I teach business English, the situation can be very different. Students have often never heard of business terms like *bill of lading* or *irrevocable letter of credit*, and a considerable shift of focus is required.

Why are they here?

One question I always ask the students in a new class is *Why are you studying business English?* The usual reply, surprisingly, is *I don't know*. This is both good and bad news. It could mean that you have a number of students who are just in your class to keep out of the rain on a wet Wednesday afternoon. On the other hand, it gives you a clean canvas to take the class exactly where you want to go. I try to base my courses on a cycle of eight weeks, with four afternoon lessons of one and a half hours each. This allows me to cover the syllabus for the Cambridge Business English Certificate (BEC) at the Intermediate, or Vantage, level. Not all my students want to take the exam or are able to stay for the whole course, but within this framework there is the well-defined goal of working through the speaking, listening, reading and writing exercises to achieve a quantifiable level of competence.

I use the BEC Vantage level as a benchmark because students can be below this minimum standard when they join the class. I have always felt that students should be at upper-intermediate level in general English before studying business English because of the more complex language issues required. However, commercial constraints don't always allow such a luxurious selection process, and the material available for the BEC courses does provide adequate ammunition for me to survive in a mixed-ability environment. In this context, I have found the *Market Leader* series (Cotton, Falvey and Kent) and *New Business Matters* (Powell) most helpful.

> *In a commercial environment, students are usually well motivated and familiar with many business terms because they use them every day*

Where do they start?

For a new class, I find a good place to start is with the preparation of a CV. This is motivating for the 'don't knows' because the document is something they will soon need when they apply for their

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Wet Wednesdays

first job, if they aren't already in employment. It gives a real focus to the class because it drives home the point that business English is not just a vague, abstract subject. As the chosen international language of business, it is something students really must have if they are to succeed in a globally competitive environment.

A good exercise to follow the CV writing is to put the students into groups and to ask them to imagine that they are an employer looking for a new sales manager. They have to list the characteristics and qualifications they think the job requires, then have a class discussion to produce the ideal candidate. This is an excellent way to show a different perspective on the job application process.

What do they need?

It is apparent that the need for formal letter writing is rapidly declining with the change in the way we now communicate through the internet and email. However, I think we cannot avoid looking at letters and memos, which are still in daily use. With my more advanced students, I like to point out some of the sweeter subtleties of business English language. For example, '*Would you **kindly** send a cheque to cover your last delivery*' actually means '*What are you doing, why haven't you paid us?*'

Here are some suggestions for amusing writing exercises which will help to hold the students' interest.

Mad memos

The box at the top of the page is an example of a task you could set as a memo in the BEC style, requiring a response in 40–50 words. (Note that the date of a memo is a good area for discussion as different nationalities present and read dates in different ways. For example, in British English, 6/7/09 means July 6th, whereas in American English it means June 7th.)

Ask the students to write the memo that the Human Resources Director sends to the staff in response to this request, after explaining the need for slightly less formal language than that required for a letter. I guarantee the results will surprise you if you teach mixed-nationality classes: you will get very different cultural responses from, say, students from Germany and those from Japan.

From: Managing Director
To: Human Resources Director
Subject: Car parking
Date: 6/7/09

I have had some difficulty parking my Rolls Royce recently, because people are parking in the wrong areas. To avoid this happening in the future, would you please write a memo to all staff asking them to use the numbered bays?

Crazy complaints

After you have explained the basics of letter writing – the greetings *Dear Sir*, *Dear Madam*, *Dear Mr Smith*, *Dear John* and the salutations *Yours faithfully*, *Yours sincerely*, *Yours truly*, etc – you can ask your students to write a response to a letter which you have prepared. Students like responding to letters of complaint so you can really use your imagination here. If you can make your letter funny, with some absurd reason for the complaint, so much the better. For example, your letter could be from a customer writing to complain about some solar-powered lighting he has bought for his garden which will not work because there has been no sunshine for the last month. The subject is plainly crazy, but the reply has to be set out in a formal letter style, with the correct address format, date, heading, greetings, body text and salutations. The BEC standard of around 120 words would be fine for this response.

Circular correspondence

One of the dangers in a business English class is of becoming too teacher-centred. This can easily happen because you sometimes have to explain new concepts (advertising, marketing, finance) as well as related vocabulary and grammar. To get the students more involved, a good activity is to construct a problem involving three different companies. A group of three or four students then represents each company and they jointly construct letters (if you require practice in formality) or emails to deal with the problem. This creates a nice three-way correspondence, and it can get quite animated if a deadline is involved. Here is an example of a potential situation in which a video production company is let down by its supplier and the business is stolen by a competitor. The teacher acts as both advisor and postman. I would allow at least 45 minutes for this activity, and it could be developed further if you wish to extend it by providing more cards with your own ideas. This is a fun exercise and introduces a lively element of business communication into the classroom. It is also a good opportunity to point out the difference between *apologise* (verb) and *apologies* (noun).

Circular correspondence

Phase 1
The following information is written out on cards and given to each group by the teacher. As they all get their cards at the same time, the students are not aware of the exact situation until they receive the incoming mail.

Card 1
Video Productions Ltd
Write to your supplier, Cameras Unlimited, asking for a delivery date for your new camera, which you have paid for in advance and require within the next three days for an important assignment.

Card 2
Cameras Unlimited
Write to Video Productions Ltd, apologising to them because, due to a strike in the docks, you have no idea when you will be able to deliver the new camera.

Card 3
Super Productions Ltd
Write to Video Productions, introducing yourselves as a new supplier with a special offer on the camera they require, which you can deliver immediately from stock.

Circular correspondence

Phase 2

Again, the students are given cards, guiding their response to the letters they have now received.

Card 1a

Video Productions Ltd

Write to Super Productions Ltd, telling them you will give them the order if they can deliver immediately. If they agree to this request, write to Cameras Unlimited cancelling your order and asking for a refund.

Card 2a

Cameras Unlimited

Follow up your first message to Video Productions explaining that you now unexpectedly have the camera, apologise again for the delay and ask them when they would like delivery.

Card 3a

Super Productions Ltd

When you get a response from Video Productions, thank them for their order and agree to arrange immediate delivery by motorcycle courier.

Researching reports

Reports are something which most business people will be required to write at some time in their careers. The grammar can become a little intense, and I have found that students respond more enthusiastically if you can make a visit to a local business or, say, the local shops, for a survey, and then come back to the classroom to write about it. Insist that the report has to be set out in a formal style, with the appropriate headings, eg *Subject*, *Procedure* and *Recommendations*. You could explain the differences between writing in the first person and making the report impersonal by using the passive:

Active: *I made a study of local retail outlets ...*

Passive: *A study of local retail outlets was made ...*

Video viewing

I also like to run background activities in my business English classes to make a closer link between the topic and the real world. This also has the advantage of moving away from purely grammar-based work. Of course, there is a wealth of material available on the internet, but I have found an excellent source of vocabulary to be television business news programmes. I usually video a programme excerpt of about ten or 12 minutes and then write a dozen questions based on points raised in the broadcast. My particular favourite is the BBC Business World news programme which is transmitted at 5.30 UK time each morning. You may be able to receive this if you are not in the UK but have a satellite dish. Initially, students find the broadcasts much too fast, (the news readers are trying to cram in as much as possible) especially in mixed-ability classes. However, I usually find some of the more advanced students can explain things to the others quite well. I put the students into pairs to answer the questions and I find after two or three sessions the whole class begin to tune their ears into the repeated words. They can pick up on quoted figures and things like percentages and market trends very quickly. A certain amount of graph language is required and can be pre-taught.

Investing wisely

Finally, to really liven things up and introduce a competitive element into the class (it is a business English class after all!), I give students a fictitious £100,000 to invest in the stock market at the beginning of each new course. I use the FTSE list of the top 200 shares (published in the *Sunday Times* business section) as my source of share prices and company names. Other lists are available on the internet, and you may like to find a listing for your nearest international stock exchange. Students are allowed to buy shares in a maximum of three companies (they are easier to follow that way) with their money and they track them and report on the values in our first lesson of the week. I quite often have trainee accountants in my classes, and they are very good at preparing spreadsheets on Excel, if you want to introduce this level of sophistication. An example is shown in the box below. ETp

Cotton, D, Falvey, D and Kent, S *Market Leader* Longman 2000

Powell, M *New Business Matters* LTP 2003



Charles Mercer first worked for a timber importer and later moved into sales and marketing in the DIY industry. He then retrained as an English teacher with Trinity College, London, UK and joined Studio School Cambridge. After 14 years with Studio, he is now semi-retired. He is the author of *New Business Matters Workbook*, published by Thomson Heinle.

charles@pearldrop.com

	Company	Buy	Sell	Quantity	Value	Week 1	Week 2	Total Week 2
Emiko	HSBC	879	885	34.12969	30000	30000	30205	101509
	Vodaphone	141	138	212.766	30000	30000	29362	
	Prudential	453	475	88.30022	40000	30000	41943	
Byoung	Land Securities	1400	1401	57.14286	80000	80000	80057	100835
	BP	508	538	19.68594	10000	10000	10591	
	Barclays	586	597	17.06485	10000	10000	10188	
Yoko	Alliance Trust	2728	2774	10.99707	30000	30000	30506	101510
	Rio Tinto	1533	1648	19.56947	30000	40000	32250	
	Tesco	321	311	124.6106	40000	40000	38754	
Vlad	British Land	896	869	55.180357	50000	30000	48493	100174
	Cable & Wireless	119	123	420.1681	50000	30000	51681	

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AWOL!

Tisa Rétfalvi-Schär

considers how best to manage absenteeism at the end of university language courses.

At the university where I teach English for Academic Purposes (EAP), language courses are timed to run parallel to the academic calendar. This means that the final lessons coincide with either the end of a semester or the end of an academic year. These are periods fraught with stress for most students as they juggle with studying for exams, finishing papers, writing up research and applying for holiday jobs or internships. During this time, many students choose not to attend 'soft skills' subjects, such as language courses, in order to give priority to their higher-stakes core subjects. While this may be an understandable trade off, it also presents EAP teachers in such a situation – as well those EAP learners who do manage to attend the final lessons – with several challenges.

On the one hand, dwindling attendance at any time presents the teacher with the logistical dilemma of planning for an unknown number of participants. Jonathan Sweeney's article in Issue 57 of ET*p* outlined this problem in relation to business English teachers, offering a number of practical solutions to deal with it. However, when absenteeism in language classes increases towards the final stages of a course, a number of other factors need to be considered.

The challenges of closure

In their review of the literature on group dynamics, Ehrman and Dörnyei demonstrate that group development is characterised by *general phases*, each one exhibiting *'common patterns and themes'* which have *'great practical implications for choosing appropriate interventions'*. For language learning settings, they classify four interconnected but discernible phases: group formation, transition, performing and dissolution. Indeed, Dörnyei and Murphey claim that since language learning groups tend to display a particularly high level of group development due to factors such as a (typically) limited size, a generally communicative focus, as well as an interpersonal nature, *'rounding up the group experiences appropriately'* is of the utmost importance. Dörnyei and Murphey put forward three compelling reasons for this:

- *An appropriate closure offers opportunities for a great deal of teaching/learning and motivating to take place that would be missed out on if we did not include some affirmation of what has been achieved.*
- *Leaving the group without proper closure on personal, emotional issues can cause considerable unprocessed distress in the group members.*
- *An inappropriate closure might leave students without any specific action plans as to how to carry on outside the group in the future.*

Dwindling attendance at any time presents the teacher with the logistical dilemma of planning for an unknown number of participants

Closing strategies

Concerned that waning attendance at the end of a course – the *dissolution* phase – has a detrimental effect on the dynamics of my EAP groups, I have devised a number of strategies to manage the situation more adequately. I hope that teachers in similar situations will find these strategies useful for coping with absenteeism at the end of their English courses.

Empathising with the students

First of all, I do my best to put myself in the students' shoes. Like them, I was once faced with the stresses of the end of a semester or an academic year. I can also appreciate that no matter how keen a learner is on bettering their English, there comes a time when they have to set priorities, and this might mean they

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relegate the last couple of EAP classes to a lower position on their list.

Engaging the students in the process

Having students reflect on and debate the possible causes and remedies for the above-mentioned situation provides plenty of stimulating and highly relevant material for an EAP syllabus. Integrating topics related to academic life not only helps students build their oral fluency and enlarge their vocabulary around the topic, it also encourages them to think more deeply about their time at university, even once they've left the classroom. Discussions about the stresses of academic life, for example, have led a student in one of my EAP classes to go home and think more deeply about the university system and how, as she put it, *'time spent on thinking is not rewarded enough'*.

Adjusting teaching and learning accordingly

The trend in higher education to set deadlines and to schedule exams at the end of a semester leaves students having to contend with multiple assignments and exam revision simultaneously. While I emphasise the need to work hard to make progress in my EAP classes, I also assure my students that I will do my best to counteract the imbalance of work demanded of them at the end of the semester or the year. I do this by assigning more work from the beginning to the middle of the semester and reducing the amount of new input as the semester progresses. I find this approach to course planning leaves plenty of time for important learning opportunities such as recycling and extended student contributions like presentations. From the perspective of teaching and learning, therefore, course closure becomes a fairly drawn out process, starting as early as the mid-point of the course.

As the semester nears its end, I become even more attuned to the dissolution phase of the group. At this stage, I believe it is vital to plan for the final few classes with the impending group dispersal in mind. What I do is to use the final two classes to create two types of endings:

1 a final instructed class to fulfil some of the personal and emotional needs of the group members (myself included, since I usually form a strong bond with my groups);

As the semester nears its end, I believe it is vital to plan for the final few classes with the impending group dispersal in mind

2 an 'official' last day where students choose a suitable day/time to meet me for an individualised feedback session.

This strategy appears to work best when students are made aware of the purpose behind these classes and given time to prepare for them.

1 Addressing the personal and the emotional

Each teacher will no doubt have a favourite last class farewell-type activity that could be used for the first of the final classes. My personal choice is an adaptation of an activity by Chris Sion called 'Quotable quotes'. It involves the students' and my bringing in several quotes, sayings, proverbs, and/or aphorisms, etc that are inspiring. During class, we share our choices with each other, explaining when we first heard or read them, what they mean to us, and in what sorts of situations they have proved inspirational. The activity fosters a positive attitude and a warm and sharing classroom atmosphere, and this seems to bode well during a particularly hectic and potentially emotional time in the group members' lives.

2 Individualising feedback sessions

The second and official last class is an opportunity to give each student a bit of personalised attention, to assess their performance, to obtain some feedback on the course, and to look at what lies ahead. Each student signs up for a 5–10-minute meeting sometime during the regular lesson slot. Those who can't find the time then arrange meetings at other times and on other days. Such a flexible setup allows even the most time-strapped student to find a way to attend the last class. In addition, it provides an opportune means to part ways by doing what Dörnyei and Murphey assert is a peculiar feature of humans, namely spending *'a great deal of time looking back, evaluating what they have done and trying to draw lessons about how they should do things next time'*.

★ ★ ★

A university language class arguably constitutes a unique aspect of a student's course load. On the one hand, such classes typically remain soft-skills options and relate tangentially – albeit importantly – to their major field of study. Unfortunately, when faced with increased pressure to deliver in their higher-stakes core subjects, students may choose not to attend their language classes. This tends to happen more often at the end of a semester or an academic year. On the other hand, an EAP classroom, similar to other types of language classrooms, but not usually like the lecture-style classes common to the university environment, is also likely to be very communicative and interactive in nature. Group dynamics tend to be fairly complex and even emotionally charged. Ending on a high note is thus crucial. By empathising with their students, engaging them in the dilemma, and adjusting teaching and learning accordingly, EAP teachers can take steps towards managing end-of-course absenteeism and bringing their courses to a personally and professionally satisfying close for all members of a group. ETp

Dörnyei, Z and Murphey, T *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom* CUP 2003

Ehrman, M E and Dörnyei, Z *Interpersonal Dynamics in Second Language Education: The Visible and Invisible Classroom* Sage 1998

Sion, C *Talking Business in Class: Speaking activities for professional students* Delta Publishing 2004

Sweeney, J 'Tales of the unexpected' *English Teaching Professional* 57 2008



Tisa Rétfalvi-Schär is a lecturer in EFL at the University of Fribourg/Freiburg Language Centre in Switzerland, where she teaches EAP courses to undergraduate and graduate students. She has an MSc in TESOL from Aston University, Birmingham, UK, and is particularly interested in group processes in the university language classroom.

tisa_retfalvi@hotmail.com

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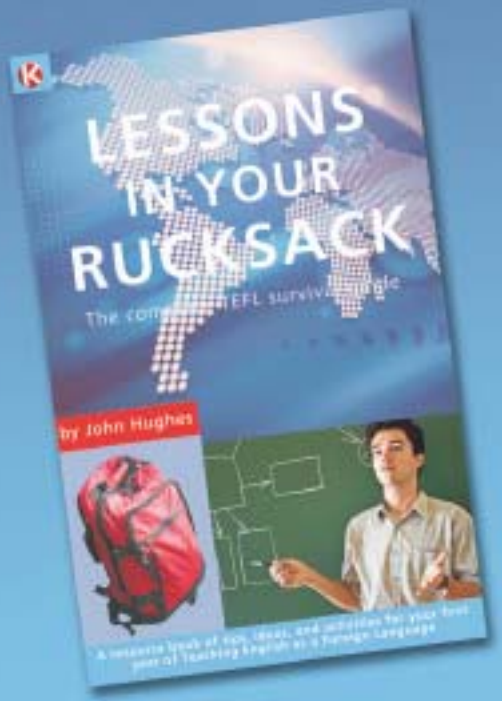
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Lessons in Your Rucksack



Activity corner

Jon Marks offers three thematically-linked communication activities with an element of innovation.

Playing with comparatives and superlatives

Comparative and superlative forms tend to be introduced at late elementary and pre-intermediate levels. The activities which follow are designed to be used as supplements to coursebook units and offer communication practice with these forms.

1 Comparative sentences

Time: 20–30 minutes

Format: Teams or pairs

Preparation: To play the game with two teams, make two copies of the handout at the top of page 38. To play with pairs, make one copy for each pair.

Method 1 (teams)

1 Put the class into two teams, A and B, and give a handout to each team. (If the teams are large, distribute extra copies so that everybody can see one.)

2 Ask the first member of Team A to make a comparative sentence about the first pair of items on the handout (for example, *Dogs are more intelligent than cats*). The first member of Team B then does the same, then the second member of Team A does the same, and so on.

3 If a team member is unable to come up with another sentence, or repeats a sentence, the other team gets a point and the game continues with the next pair of items, and so on.

4 The sentences generated should all be more or less true, or at least a reasonable matter of opinion. Act as referee and disallow any nonsensical ideas. Keep score on the board.

Method 2 (pairs)

1 Put the students into pairs, and give each pair a handout. The pairs then proceed as described above.

2 When one member of the pair cannot come up with another suitable sentence, they move on to the next two items. They can keep score if they wish.

2 Superlative sentences

Time: Open ended (minimum 20 minutes)

Format: Whole class or small groups

Preparation: To play the game with the whole class, copy and cut out the cards on page 38, making sufficient cards for each student to have one. If there are more than 12 students in the class, the cards can be duplicated as many times as required. Remove any cards which you think will be unsuitable for your particular class. To play in small groups, copy and cut up one set of cards for each group of four to six students, again removing any cards you think will be unsuitable.

Method 1 (whole class)

1 Give each student a card. Ask the students to stand and circulate, moving around the class and finding a partner to work with.

2 At each pairing, Student A asks the questions written on the card. Student B replies, ideally giving a fuller answer than the minimum information asked for. Then B asks their question.

3 When the dialogue is completed, A and B exchange cards. They then separate and find new partners to work with. The process can be repeated for as long as suits the purposes of the lesson. It doesn't matter if the same two students work with each other again, as long as they have different questions to ask.

4 Monitor and offer encouragement and assistance as necessary. If the class is at late elementary or early pre-intermediate level, answering may be quite a challenge. Look for communication accomplished, rather than grammatically perfect language.

Method 2 (small groups)

Put the students into groups of four to six. Give each group a pile of face-down cards. Student A takes a card, and then chooses another student in the group, asking them the questions on the card. Then Student B takes a card, repeats the process, and so on. Continue for as long as required for the purposes of the lesson. It doesn't matter if the group works through all the cards, because they can then be reused, provided that this time a different person answers each question. Monitor and assist as described above.

3 Comparatives and superlatives board game

Time: 15–20 minutes

Format: Small groups

Preparation: Make one copy of the game on page 39 for each group of 3 to 5 students. Each group will also need a dice and counters.

Method

1 Put the class into groups of three to five students and distribute the game boards, dice and counters.

2 Explain that each player must throw the dice and move their counter in a clockwise direction according to the number shown. They must make a sentence using the comparative or superlative form written on each square they land on. This sentence can be about the student's own life or it can be a fact, as in the examples shown in the middle. The sentence can be true or false. (If it is a fact, the player has to know if it is true or false.) The other players have to decide whether or not the statement is true. If they are wrong, the player who made the statement has another turn.



Jon Marks is an ELT writer and editor, based in Italy. Recent publications include the *Puzzle Time* series and *IELTS Resource Pack* (both DELTA Publishing) and three titles in A & C Black's *Check Your English Vocabulary* series. He is currently developing teenager courses for China, and also draws the *Langwich Scool* cartoon in ETp.

j_g_marks@hotmail.com

Comparative sentences

1	Cats	Dogs
2	Cars	Public transport
3	Doing sport	Playing computer games
4	Young people	Old people
5	Small shops	Big supermarkets
6	Studying alone	Going to lessons
7	Five-star hotels	Youth hostels
8	Expensive restaurants	Picnics
9	Going to the cinema	Watching TV
10	Women	Men

Superlative questions

Ask this question: In your opinion, what is the best time of year? **Then ask:** Why is it the best?	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the nicest part of this city? **Then ask:** Why is it the nicest?	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the easiest school subject? **Then ask:** Why is it the easiest?
Ask this question: Who is the oldest person you know? **Then say:** Tell me more about him or her.	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the most difficult job? **Then ask:** Why is it the most difficult?	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the most dangerous sport? **Then ask:** Why is it the most dangerous?
Ask this question: In your opinion, where is the best place to live in this country? **Then ask:** Why is it the best?	**Ask this question:** Who is the youngest person you know? **Then say:** Tell me more about him or her.	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the most difficult school subject? **Then ask:** Why is it the most difficult?
Ask this question: Who is the most intelligent person you know? **Then say:** Tell me about more him or her.	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the worst time of year? **Then ask:** Why is it the worst?	**Ask this question:** In your opinion, what is the easiest job? **Then ask:** Why is it the easiest?

The comparatives and superlatives game

True or false?





START	older	more expensive	the biggest	the youngest
shorter				better
the most difficult				longer
the smallest				the best
taller				hotter
the cheapest				more intelligent
faster				the happiest
the most interesting	the worst	worse	heavier	colder

PREPARING TO TEACH ...
Binomials

John Potts considers the ins and outs of collocation and finds some lifelong partners.

Ai Ann is **head and shoulders** above the rest of the class in maths.

Aii She's so logical – she always thinks through a problem **step by step**.

Bi Susan is **far and away** the best artist at school.

Bii **Sooner or later**, she's going to be famous!

Ci I can't tell you when I'll be finished – I have only a **rough and ready** idea.

Cii However, I'm making **slow but sure** progress!

D We stayed at a very nice **B & B** in Cornwall last summer.

▲ FORM

Binomials are pairs of words that form fixed and irreversible combinations: they are examples of extremely strong collocations.

Ai noun + conjunction (*and*) + noun

Aii noun + preposition + noun

Bi adverb + conjunction (*and*) + adverb

Bii adverb + conjunction (*or*) + adverb

Ci adjective + conjunction (*and*) + adjective

Cii adjective + conjunction (*but*) + adjective

D uses the initial letters for ***b****ed and* ***b****reakfast*.

The most common pattern is to combine the two words using the conjunction *and*. The conjunctions *but* and *or* are less common. Sometimes the 'linking word' is a preposition: other examples include *face to face*, *hand in hand* and *head over heels*.

Word order

The word order is fixed – you can't reverse the pattern (except, of course, where the two words are same, eg *little by little*, *face to face*, etc!).

Alliteration and/or rhyme

Very often there is an element of **alliteration** (similar sounds at the beginning of words) or of **rhyme** (when two words sound the same or very similar) – or of both.

For example, in **Ci** there is alliteration of the 'r' sound in *rough and ready*.

Synonyms and antonyms

Some binomials combine two words with similar meanings: *peace and quiet*, *first and foremost*. This is also a feature of legal English: *null and void*, *cease and desist*.

Others use contrasting words: *black and white*, *hit and miss*, *to and fro*, *sweet and sour*, *pros and cons*.

Repetition

Some binomials use the same word twice: *little by little*, *more and more*, *on and on*.

Trinomials

There are also some expressions that use three items:

She always looks so **cool, calm and collected**. (three adjectives)

He sold the business **lock, stock and barrel**. (three nouns)

I've been looking for this book **here, there and everywhere**. (three adverbs)

▲ MEANING

Sometimes the meaning is clear, eg in **Aii** *step by step*, and **Bii** *sooner or later*.

However, sometimes the meaning is more metaphorical, eg **Ai** *head and shoulders*.

And sometimes the meaning of individual words may be obscure, eg *lock, stock and barrel* or *spick and span*. Native speakers don't think about the words individually: they treat these as fixed idiomatic expressions that mean 'in its entirety' and 'very clean', respectively.

▲ USE

Many of the expressions tend to be used in informal contexts, often in spoken language. However, some are perfectly acceptable in more formal written and spoken contexts (eg *first and foremost*, *all in all*, *over and above*), while some, as mentioned above, are found in legal register (eg *null and void*, *cease and desist*).

PREPARING TO TEACH ... Binomials

SITUATIONS

Food and drink Food and eating are topics rich in binomials. Make separate word cards (eg *bread, knife, salt, cup, sweet, fish, pepper, bangers, sour, saucer, butter, fork, mash, chips*) to produce a matching activity: the learners have to match the pairs and put them in the correct order. There are several ways of doing this: using two decks of cards, or playing memory, or playing snap, or playing word bingo, etc. You can also use visuals and flashcards to good effect here.

When they have matched them, the students must use some of the binomials in a short conversation about (English) food, or in a restaurant roleplay. If appropriate, you can ask them to find equivalent expressions in their mother tongue: some may translate exactly, others not at all.

Body and soul Expressions with parts of the body often use binomials. One way of introducing them is to write (or record) a short anecdote or story that contains them. The students read (or listen to) the text, and then retell it using paraphrases for each binomial. To make this activity more interactive, use two different reading texts (A and B): the student As paraphrase their text to the student Bs, and vice versa. Here is a sample text:

My best friend is Ann. We love discussing books and films, though I don't always see eye to eye with her! We can have heart to heart discussions about almost everything, usually as we're walking arm in arm through the streets, window-shopping.

Again, you could establish which are translatable and which not.

Point by point Some binomials can be useful in discussions. Make cards for each binomial (eg *again and again*, *first and foremost*, *over and above*), and give a set to each student. They then form pairs (or 3s or 4s) for a discussion activity, during which they 'play' the cards whenever they use one of the binomials. The student who plays most cards wins.

Once again, you could check which are translatable and which not.

Odds and ends Some binomials are simply very useful in natural, colloquial English – they are *part and parcel* of the language. You can *pick and choose* which to incorporate into your lessons – they may occur *here and there* in a reading or listening text, or you could include them in a vocabulary activity, so that your students' language improves *little by little* – or even by *leaps and bounds*.



John Potts is a teacher and teacher trainer based in Zürich, Switzerland. He has written and co-written several adult coursebooks, and is a CELTA assessor. He is also a presenter for Cambridge ESOL Examinations.

johnpotts@swissonline.ch

Web references

The following web pages provide useful examples of binomials and/or potential teaching ideas:

www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode81/languagepoint.shtml
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode99/languagepoint.shtml
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siamese_twins_(English_language)

COMPETITION RESULTS

5 P	7 R	13 A	20 I	18 S	19 E		23 Q	11 U	19 E	19 E	16 N	18 S
13 A		22 W		11 U		2 C		5 P		15 X		14 L
18 S	24 H	13 A	6 M	5 P	1 O	1 O		18 S	24 H	13 A	4 K	19 E
26 T		7 R		5 P		11 U		19 E		6 M		3 D
7 R	13 A	3 D	20 I	1 O		16 N	1 O	26 T	24 H	20 I	16 N	8 G
9 Y				7 R		26 T				16 N		19 E
	12 B	11 U	26 T	26 T	19 E	7 R	21 F	14 L	20 I	19 E	18 S	
19 E		5 P				9 Y		13 A				2 C
16 N	19 E	7 R	10 V	1 O	11 U	18 S		17 Z	19 E	12 B	7 R	13 A
25 J		20 I		11 U		20 I		20 I		13 A		11 U
1 O	7 R	8 G	13 A	16 N		3 D	7 R	19 E	18 S	18 S	19 E	18 S
9 Y		24 H		2 C		19 E		18 S		20 I		19 E
18 S	19 E	26 T	26 T	19 E	19 E		18 S	26 T	13 A	16 N	3 D	18 S

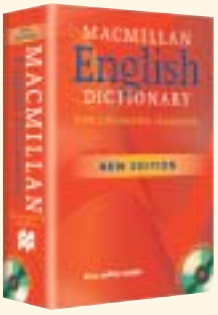
Congratulations to all those readers who successfully completed our Prize Crossword 33. The winners, who will each receive a copy of the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, are:

Agnes Howard, Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Alison Hyde, Dilla, Ethiopia
Henry Lara, Lymassol, Cyprus
Iris Lienhard, Gensingen, Switzerland
Damir Lovretic, Zagreb, Croatia
Varada Nikalje, New Delhi, India
Rachel Payne, Cádiz, Spain
Lukas Schlumpf, Untersiggenthal, Switzerland
Philippe Tanner, Bremgarten, Switzerland
Vera Zimmerman, Rekingen, Switzerland

1 O	2 C	3 D	4 K	5 P	6 M	7 R	8 G	9 Y	10 V	11 U	12 B	13 A
14 L	15 X	16 N	17 Z	18 S	19 E	20 I	21 F	22 W	23 Q	24 H	25 J	26 T

13 A		18 S	20 I	16 N	8 G	14 L	19 E		22 W	1 O	7 R	3 D		19 E	10 V	19 E
16 N		6 M	13 A	9 Y		12 B	19 E		13 A		18 S	5 P	13 A	7 R	4 K	
	1 O	21 F		20 I	16 N	19 E	15 X	26 T	20 I	16 N	8 G	11 U	20 I	18 S	24 H	13 A
12 B	14 L	19 E		26 T	24 H	1 O	11 U	8 G	24 H	26 T	.					

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*



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.

All the contributors to It Works in Practice in this issue of ET*p* will receive a copy of *Uncovering EAP* by Sam McCarter and Phil Jakes, published by Macmillan. Macmillan have kindly agreed to be sponsors of It Works in Practice for this year.



WONDERFUL WORDSEARCHES

The wordsearch or 'letter soup' is a perennial favourite in the language classroom. It is an easily adaptable activity and an excellent way of introducing or recycling lexis. However, just giving out photocopied worksheets for students to work through individually is rather boring. I have a few variations of my own that you might find interesting.

Wordsearch race

First, I divide the class into four groups and give each group a different coloured OHP or board pen. I then put up an OHT of the wordsearch on the board. When I give a definition, the students have to run to the board and circle the corresponding word. The first group to do so gets a point.

Wordsearch war

I divide the class into two teams, A and B. Each team gets an enlarged copy of the wordsearch. Team A locates a word in the wordsearch and defines it. Team B then has to find the word in their copy within 30 seconds. If they can do this, they win a point; if they can't, team A wins a point (but only if they provided an accurate definition). Then it is team B's turn to define a word. They carry on taking turns until all the words have been defined and found.

Wordsearch challenge

This activity works particularly well if you have an interactive whiteboard and you can use interactive wordsearch games which are available on the internet. It is a useful lead-in or revision exercise. Display an OHT of the wordsearch. Tell the students the lexical set or topic and how many words there are in the wordsearch. Set a strict time limit, using a timer to make it formal. Working as a whole class, the students try to find all the words within the allocated time. If they can't find all the words, the teacher wins. If they can, they win. The students then discuss the meanings of the words.

Wordsearch DIY

I put the students into pairs and give each pair a grid with 30 rows and 30 columns. I then ask them to choose ten words that they would like to revise and to write them randomly in the grid, putting only one letter in a square. They can write the words horizontally, vertically or diagonally, but cannot change direction in the middle of a word. Next, they fill the empty squares with random letters. At the bottom of the page they write meanings or clues. When they have finished, they can challenge another pair of students to find the words. Students also love to challenge their teacher, so be prepared for some tough wordsearches!

Madhawee Fernando
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Noughts and crosses without the noise!

Games such as 'Noughts and crosses' are great fun to play, but sometimes children (and even adults!) can get overexcited and quite noisy when playing them. Instead of getting my students to shout out their answer, I get them to whisper the answer to the person sitting next to them, who then whispers it to the person next to them, and so on. The last student calls out the answer. It's still fun and won't disturb your neighbours!

Elizabeth Michailidis
Patra, Greece



iStockphoto.com / © Spencer Gordon

Silent speaking

This tip may be useful for those teaching for the FCE, CAE and IELTS exams.

When it comes to pronunciation, many teachers find that trying to reduce heavy interference from the students' L1 can be a fruitless task – especially after they reach upper-intermediate level. You certainly can't change this overnight and, in the context of teaching exam courses, pronunciation is often ignored in place of more systematic learner training related to exam techniques and tactics. Because of this, I suggest work on the suprasegmental level of the speech act, rather than trying to change the already formed habits of the students' speech patterns. One technique that I use is 'silent conversation'.

The students work together in pairs and I give one student in each pair a handout with typical FCE Part One questions, such as *How long have you been studying English? Tell me about your family*, etc. I tell them that they must ask their partners these questions without uttering a sound, ie they must *mouth* the words. The partners must also reply in silence to each question that they think their partner has asked. They can then swap roles. I encourage those students who start writing things down to really focus on the mouth of the 'speaker'.

We then have a feedback session, and I ask the students to comment on how successfully they conveyed their questions and answers.

The feedback generally highlights problem words for individual students, eg Spanish-speaking students often fail to form the final consonant sounds. This technique even picks up on whether a student is using a strong form rather than a weak form of *have*. This makes it an extremely expedient and personalised way of teaching pronunciation. It also allows a lot of self-reflection and peer-teaching and introduces the notion of non-verbal communication as exasperated students, unable to speak, rely on non-verbal aids to get their messages across. These are all useful and transferable skills for the exam and beyond, and the technique provides a great introduction to aspects of exam teaching that are (relatively) easy to address.

Martin Warters
Hove, UK

Sounds irregular

To help students remember the past tenses of irregular verbs, ask them to memorise the following sentence:

One Sat(urday), Doug and Rose left the Red Fort and drove through the wood on the new road to the court.

These words sound like the irregular pasts: *won, sat, dug, rose, left, read, fought, drove, threw, would, knew, rode* and *caught*.

Simon Mumford
Izmir, Turkey

Over to you!

Here is an idea which I am sure you will like, as it requires no teacher preparation time and works well with any size group of students at pre-intermediate level and above.

- Agree with the students that in each class one person will be responsible for giving a talk on a subject of their choosing. The student will be chosen each week and will then have until the same class the following week to prepare their talk. Each talk will last at least two minutes (pre-intermediate) and should last no longer than five minutes (advanced).
- Before the talk, the rest of the class are asked to listen for various aspects of language. What they listen for will depend upon their level of proficiency, but can include how understandable the speech was, the range of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical correctness, etc. You can provide a form for the students to complete and then give to the speaker after the talk. This helps to focus the listeners' attention. I make a note of any language errors and focus on some of these in subsequent classes.
- At the end of the talk, all the students provide verbal feedback, ask questions and discuss the subject.

I use this technique with all my classes and have found it provides a good 15-minute closing activity for a 90-minute class. The students are motivated to do their best in front of their peers and it has certainly built up a sense of pride in their work and encouraged friendly cooperation in class.

If you want to take the activity further, you could suggest that any students who would like to write out their talk can give it to you to be marked as extra feedback.

This year, I have learnt about the Spanish education system, mountain biking, traditional food of the region, the state of the economy, Formula 1 racing, and so much more.

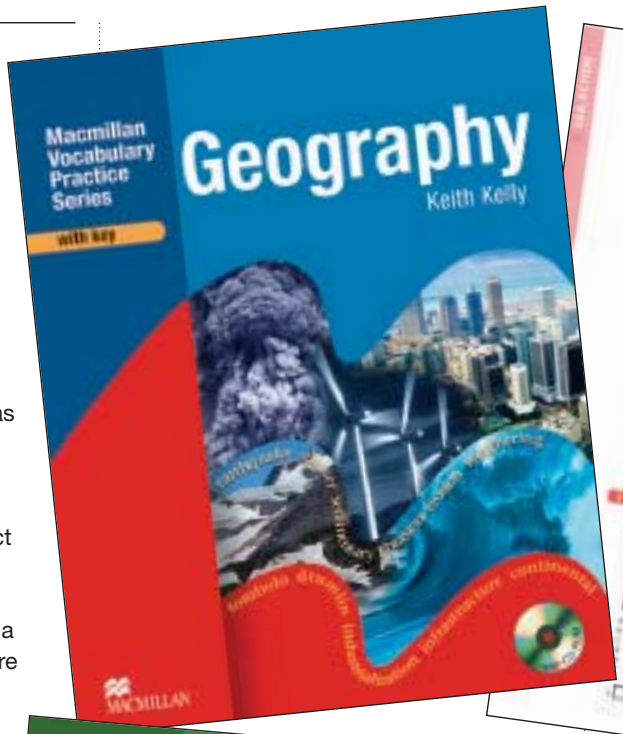
So relax, have fun and allow your students to take centre stage. It's amazing what you can learn!

Lianne Ross
Barcelona, Spain

Reviews

Macmillan Vocabulary Practice Series

by Keith Kelly
Macmillan 2009
Geography: 978-0-230-71976-7
Science: 978-0-53503-9







Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the practice by which other areas of the school curriculum, such as history, geography, maths, etc, are taught through the medium of English, was described in a presentation at this year's IATEFL conference as 'the way ahead for language teaching'. With the increased hours of contact with English that CLIL entails, it is hard to argue that the students' language skills will not improve as a result. For some, however, it is more difficult to see the advantages for hard-pressed teachers of other subjects, struggling to complete their syllabuses with the added handicap of having to do it in a foreign language. The worry is that with limited language at their disposal, students may get a 'dumbed-down' version of the syllabus. I have yet to hear CLIL hailed as 'the way ahead for geography teaching'. Be that as it may, it is good to see a series that makes a serious attempt to bridge the vocabulary gap for students involved in CLIL programmes and to enable them to tackle some quite sophisticated information. The new *Macmillan Vocabulary Practice Series* provides a very well-thought-out and helpful resource for such students and manages to be both informative and comprehensible. Students whose mother tongue is English would probably also find the books extremely useful. At present there are two books in the series, *Geography* and *Science*, both by Keith Kelly, which follow a clear and systematic formula. For each of the topic areas (18 for *Geography*, 28 for *Science*), there is first an extensive word list with definitions, example sentences and space for the students to add a translation if they wish. This leads into a 'Working with words' section, where the students complete spidergrams, label illustrations and match words and pictures, etc. This is followed by 'Working with sentences', where the students manipulate the target vocabulary at sentence level. Then, finally, 'Working with texts' puts the words in wider contexts and gives the students practice with longer chunks of discourse. An accompanying CD-ROM provides extra help with pronunciation, interactive exercises, animations and more diagrams.

My only reservation would be that the two-colour printing gives the books rather a monotonous feel and, with red the chosen second colour for the *Geography* title, a number of the illustrations of glacial valleys and the like have a slightly anatomical look!

Gloria Paynton
Middlecombe, UK

Language Learner Strategies

edited by Andrew D Cohen
and Ernesto Macaro
OUP 2008
978-0-19-442254-3

This book offers the reader a summary and discussion of the last 30 years of research into Language Learner Strategies (LLS). Aimed at the researcher or MA student, it is essential reading for all who are involved in research into LLS and related areas.

Language Learner Strategies is divided into two parts, the first of which discusses various issues, theories and frameworks relevant to the field. It begins by presenting the claims and critiques

Reviews

which have been made about LLS and describing how different researchers understand and use certain terminology. This is followed by a chapter comparing the viewpoints of psychological and sociological researchers, which attempts to reconcile these two perspectives. As well as chapters on context, research methods and intervention, there is a fascinating chapter on grammar strategies, an apparently forgotten and underrepresented area in research literature.

The second part consists of an in-depth review of the last 30 years of research in each strategy area. While some important papers will clearly have been left out, in some cases due to the language they were written in, each chapter provides a convincing summary of a great deal of important research. A systematic approach to reviewing has ensured that different positions are considered, thus keeping bias to a minimum and giving the reader an insight from different perspectives. Limitations and weaknesses of individual papers, and the field in general, are discussed and a future research agenda proposed.

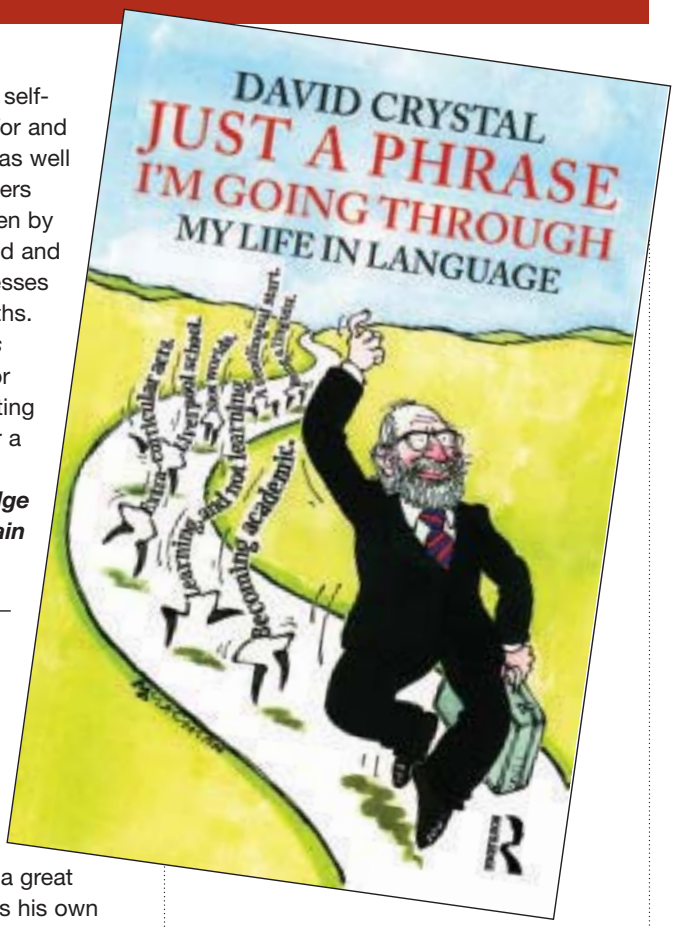


This book is wonderfully self-critical, with both optimism for and criticism of work in the field as well as debate between researchers with differing opinions. Written by 26 experts, it is well balanced and tries to demonstrate weaknesses in the field as well as strengths. *Language Learner Strategies* could be used as a model for researchers in any area wanting to review their field and offer a vision for the future.

Vaila Goodridge
Barcelona, Spain

Just a Phrase I'm Going Through

by David Crystal
Routledge 2009
0-415-48574-6



Anyone who has heard David Crystal giving a presentation will know what a great storyteller he is, and here it is his own story that he is telling: a reflection on his life that takes us from his childhood in Holyhead, Wales, to his current position at the forefront of the field of linguistics. The account of his multi-faceted career (he has been at various times an academic researcher, lecturer, broadcaster, editor and consultant), told in his characteristically modest but witty style, is punctuated by entertaining anecdotes and reflections on language and life.

The book is inspired by the question he is most frequently asked: *How did you become a linguist?* In the course of his answer, we gain insights into David Crystal's life, but also learn a lot about linguistics and the way languages work. Little grey boxes punctuate the text, describing the different roles played by a linguist: historian, lexicographer, doctor, musician, actor, reader, entrepreneur, quantity surveyor, even couturier; and the list goes on. The variety of things that David Crystal has been asked to do in the course of his career, from selling adjectives to a shoe shop in London to advising on speech therapy courses for children struggling with language development, demonstrates that there is nothing boring about linguistics or the life of a linguist.

Martin Richardson
London, UK

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GRAMMAR

The future's bright, the future's periphrastic

Edward de Chazal

celebrates the future and hopes his students will do the same.

The future's bright. The mobile phone advertisement slogan writer chooses the present tense – *is* – for immediacy, not one of the classic future forms: *the future* ***will be*** *bright, the future* ***is going to be*** *bright*, or, even less effectively, *the future* ***shall be*** *bright*. Once we start noticing, we can hear and read all around us not just the familiar forms, but a great many other forms being used to express future time. Journalists and academics are particularly creative, employing dozens of different future forms to express their desired meanings.

Future, what future?

To give a typical example, a 300-word front-page article in one of the free London newspapers contains no fewer than eight distinct forms (future forms in bold):

UK TROOPS **POISED TO LEAVE** IRAQ; thousands of British troops **are to leave** Iraq; the death toll **could increase**; those left behind **would become** more vulnerable to attack; the number of British troops **should be** significantly lower; when British troops **started to 'draw down'**, the insurgent violence **could intensify**; as we **move** towards handover, perversely, the number of attacks on us **may increase**; if troops **were withdrawn** immediately, the results **would be** 'catastrophic'.

And there we have it – to talk about the future, the journalist effortlessly comes up with two tenses (present and past), four modal verbs (*could*, *would*, *should*, *may*, but not *will*), and two longer expressions (*be poised to* + infinitive and *be to* + infinitive). Apart from the tenses, these are all *periphrastic* structures, ie they are made up of at least two words, including one or more auxiliary verbs, the main (lexical) verb and possibly other words, rather than one-word inflected forms which are common in other languages. Further examples in a classroom text I have used recently include *are likely to become*, *can somehow retain* and the magnificent eight-word sequence *are projected to die out and be replaced*. These structures provide rich pickings that enable the speaker or writer to express nicely subtle meanings such as degrees of certainty and various functions. Indeed, we can celebrate the fact that English does not have a future tense as a liberation, an invitation to use some of the dozens of forms available. What is striking is the very limited coverage many such forms are given in coursebooks and grammar books for both students and teachers.

> *Once we start noticing, we can hear and read all around us not just the familiar forms, but a great many other forms used to express future time*

In this article I will celebrate the richness of future time expressions in English, note the shortcomings of most published materials in this area, and suggest ways of involving students in noticing them more. In the process we will see that such expressions can be remarkably similar to another phenomenon of English currently attracting attention: tentative language.

Routes

English offers several routes to express future time. First, the modals are prominent: not just the familiar *will* and *shall*, but all the modals. Listen to a weather forecast and you will repeatedly

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hear expressions like: *later on it* ***should be*** *fine and sunny; there* ***might just be*** *some snow on higher ground, so watch out; you* ***can expect*** *temperatures of up to 18 degrees*, etc. Second, English allows us to view our world through aspect. Both the progressive (viewing something as being in progress, or continuous) and to a lesser extent the perfect (completed or 'perfected'), are used for future time. Third, we use a complex set of formulas and structures comprising adjectives (and even adverbs) plus two or more verbs.

Modal verbs are alternatives to tenses. They are outside the tense system. Put simply (if we don't go for an imperative, which by-passes the whole tense and aspect system), we can choose one of the tenses (present or past), or else a modal. Then, if we want to, we can add one or both the aspects, perfect and progressive. Many coursebooks talk about 'future progressive' and 'future perfect', even 'future perfect progressive', but in reality these are not tenses but modals plus either or both aspects. Misleadingly for students, they are invariably exemplified with *will*. Although, as Biber and his colleagues tell us, this is the most frequent modal verb (*shall* is the least), in between come all the others. They work in the same way: *we* ***should have finished*** *by then; you* ***must be writing up*** *before the end of the month*. It is not the modal forms but the context which tells us we are talking about the future. Conversely, *will* can express present time: *she'll be sitting in the Champs Élysées by now*. Grammatically, in the previous three examples it is not the verb structure itself but the adverbial which gives us the information on when the event takes place, and even this clue can be missed out if the context, time-wise, is clear.

Prisms

Just as all the modals can refer to present time, and for that matter past time, given the right aspect add-on, they can all refer to the future. Adding an aspect to a modal works in much the same way as adding one to a tense, only with modals we are viewing the propositions through the prism of modality. We are expressing all the usual modal meanings of certainty, obligation, etc, and also functions such as suggesting and warning: *You're* ***going to*** *Turkey this summer? You* ***must make sure*** *you go to Cappadocia – it's amazing. And you* ***ought to*** *make time for the Hittite cities, too. Obviously you* ***should go*** *to Ephesus, too, of course, oh, and* ***keep*** *an eye out for carpet sellers – you* ***could be persuaded*** *to part with more than you intended …* When is the Turkey trip? In the future, of course.

Periphrastic verb structures

1 auxiliary – modal	2 lexical stative support	3 adjective + *to*; formulaic prepositional phrase (*on … of*)	4 lexical head
may *might* *must* *could* *can* *shall* *should* *ought to* *will* *would*	*be* *appear* *look* *seem*	*about to* *bound to* *likely to* *unlikely to* *sure to* *set to* *certain to* *due to* *poised to* *destined to* *expected to* *predicted to* *on the point of* *on the verge of* *on the brink of*	*end* *ending*

Systems

We saw with the Iraq article that modal verbs, while central, are only part of the future time expression narrative. A startling number of other periphrastic forms also come into play. Again, noticing is key. Here are a few examples I have come across recently: *mankind* ***would seem unlikely to last*** *for very long; I can't believe that the business I've spent my life with* ***could be about to disappear****; commodity prices* ***are set to increase****; such change* ***seems almost certain to happen****.* What they have in common is structural complexity as well as subtlety of meaning. The writers draw on several systems available in English to express their desired nuance.

> *Just as all the modals can refer to present time, and for that matter past time, they can all refer to the future*

What are these systems? Future forms can contain half a dozen words, but normally they end with the lexical verb which functions as head of the verb phrase, either in the infinitive or else the *-ed*/*-ing* form. From the beginning, we can have some or all of: a modal verb; a lexical stative support verb such as *seem*; and a longer structure. The chart above represents this.

This scheme may look daunting, but as a route through it, following our grammatical subject we can choose from the following combinations: 1 + 4; 2 + 3 + 4; 1 + 2 + 3 + 4. Try it. Some options are much more frequent than others, and not all are possible. Not included in the chart are the familiar *going to* form or structures involving aspects following modals or state verbs: *might be working, looks likely to have succeeded*. In newspaper headlines, the auxiliary *be* is often omitted. Despite similar forms, the time reference may not necessarily be future: *She* ***seems to have finished***. As a final twist, the speaker or writer can indicate distance by opting for the passive voice, particularly with *it* or *there*: *it* ***is not expected*** *to last long*. These more detached structures are common in academic writing.

To complicate matters further, we can throw in a little adverbial, either before the adjective or the lexical head:

The future's bright, the future's periphrastic

*it **would appear quite certain to fail**; he **should have completely finished** by then*. Frequently-used adverbials include those expressing stance and probability, such as *presumably*, *possibly* and *by any chance*. While adverbials might not be strictly speaking part of the verb phrase grammatically, they are embedded in it and the whole structure has a distinct phonological identity. The adverbial is grammatically optional, but of course adds to the overall meaning.

Tentative language

As we have seen, much of the language used in periphrastic structures is drawn from the modal verbs and semi-modals, lexical supporting verbs like *look*, a number of adjectives (*likely*, *set*), certain adverbials, plus the option of the passive voice. This pool of language is essentially that of tentative language. Such language has come to particular prominence since the prevalence of corpora. Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy's corpus-based *Cambridge Grammar of English* offers a very useful description of tentative language and hedging expressions. Although Carter and McCarthy discuss predictions and assertions, this section is not explicitly connected to their material on future time. I would argue that tentative language is used as much to speculate about the future as it is for the present or past.

In some cases, we cannot say with certainty that the structure in question is actually referring to the future. The humble *will* illustrates this point. When we say *I will do it*, the meaning can be paraphrased as *it is my will to do it*, or *I intend to do it*. In other words, the whole expression is rooted in the present; it is about how we view the future now. That the expected action is to take place in the future is almost secondary. The preferred semantic focus is from the perspective of the present, reflected in many language choices. This phenomenon explains why English has evolved without a future tense.

Just as the coursebooks tell us, the most frequent types of future meaning are to do with plans, intentions, degrees of certainty, predictions and the like. It makes sense to focus on meaning rather than time. The future is unknown. How we express future time in English is not via a verb inflection or tense but by means of a rich melting-pot of language, inseparable from the language of speculation, tentativeness, modality and a host of familiar functions. To express ourselves effectively and with the required degree of subtlety, we prefer to use sequences of words – periphrasis – not just one word. Indeed, the single, one-word option is a tense: the present simple for, say, timetabled events (over which we have no control and therefore no reason to evaluate and offer a stance) and even the past simple, which follows particular structures like *it's about time we **went***. When? In five minutes maybe, in the future anyway: a past tense structure with future time reference.

How we express future time in English is not via a verb inflection or tense but by means of a rich melting-pot of language

Function, meaning, form

The examples so far show that function and meaning are inseparable from the choice of form. The connectedness of function, meaning and form needs to be emphasised. Meaning is a logical and very human starting point and this leads us to the choice of form. As we have seen, there is a huge choice of forms available. Equally, though, form can be our starting point: *I'm about to flake out.* Like it? Use it!

One further important point needs emphasising. Future time expressions are one of a number of areas of English where quite a gulf exists between receptive and productive use. Many of the forms may only ever be encountered receptively. Also, different genres exhibit different forms. Both journalistic and academic writing are characterised by periphrastic structures, the former having a more dramatic flavour and the latter being rich in speculative, tentative language and hedges.

Know, want, learn

If we put ourselves in the place of our students, we come across three main sources of input: published materials for learning English, including coursebooks, exam materials and student-focused language reference books; teachers, peers, friends and anyone we interact with; and the media and texts of the wider world – from journalistic texts through advertisements and broadcasts to specialist texts in areas of personal interest such as business, culture or academic studies, whether paper-based or in electronic form. These sources constitute our input, but there is a mismatch. The published materials oriented towards students do not reflect what is out there in the media. Fortunately, some pedagogical activities can soon put this right.

A good starting point is a KWL task: What do I *know*? What do I *want* to know? What have I *learnt*? I ask my students to write down as many future forms as they can. Some barely get beyond *will*; most trot out the coursebook classics. Would they like to learn more? The searches suggested in the following paragraphs work well. The round-up stage invariably sees students armed with a whole lot more possible future forms to look out for and start using, particularly in writing. They are surprised at the number and the richness.

Try searching through media texts online with your students or trainees. Have a competition, use a search engine, such as *Google*, to see which is more frequent, *seem unlikely to* or *seem likely to* (the latter, by far). Keep strings of words together by using quotation marks. Be creative and think of novel forms: *could be about to; seems on the verge of*. Are they ever used? (Yes.) Find 20 examples of *might be*: are any used for the future? (Yes.) Alternatively, get together some journalistic texts which are speculating on the future: how many different forms can your students identify? Ask them to find further examples. How many forms are used altogether? (Amazingly, over 100.) Look more closely and check that they are all definitely used with the future in mind.

Another interesting activity is to trace the use of future forms by one writer or

The shortcomings of the published materials send a powerful message that students can be confident of the validity of their own instincts, when guided and checked

particular text over a period of time. I have given my students texts by the same journalist in the annual *Economist* publication 'The World in [2009]'. We have built up a list of 18 distinct forms, many never described in the grammar books, including: *ought to guarantee*, *is set for*, *looks to lie*, *seems unlikely to emerge*, *will be poised to resume*, *would probably be used to pressure*, *is far from certain of being*, and the imperatives *expect* and *do not expect*. Among these we encounter variations in aspect, negative forms, insertion of adverbials and various adjectives, and imperatives.

Once you have assembled lots of examples (one of my students found 24 different forms in half an hour), go through the coursebooks and grammar books in your school and see how many are actually referred to. I systematically went through 16 grammar books. The shortcomings of the published materials send a powerful message that students can be confident of the validity of their own instincts, when guided and checked. In all activities it is extremely beneficial for students to discuss nuances of meanings.

Battle of wills

The 16 books I examined give a total of 21 possible forms for future meaning. However, many forms are not mentioned in any of the books – for example, *should* – while, remarkably, only one form appears in every single book: *will*. Bizarrely, several books even omit the present progressive. As for coursebooks, the picture is remarkably consistent, with around eight forms typically covered at intermediate level and above. A favourite exercise contrasts *will*, *going to* and the present progressive. Look for *should*, *is set to* and *may be about to* and you will be disappointed.

Since this little study, I am gratified to report that the latest addition to my shelf, Carter and McCarthy's *Cambridge Grammar of English*, goes a long way to redressing the balance. It includes items rarely found in other books: *may*, *might*, *must*, *can*, *could*, *on the point of*, *be on the verge of*, *be due to*, *be certain to*, *be sure to*, *be likely to*, *be supposed to*, *is obliged to*. On the grounds of relative rarity, they leave out *ought to*. Most of these are given little prominence in the book, but after decades of focus on the traditional forms, can we expect the next generation of coursebooks and student grammars to be more realistic and adventurous?

By involving our students in these kinds of activities, we encourage heuristic learning and critical evaluation of reference materials. We assist the students' reading. Most of all, we can demonstrate that the choice out there is far richer than most people would imagine. With such a pool of language, we should now be ready to wean our students off their likely overuse of *will*. In this electronic age, the evidence for alternative, more subtle forms is readily available.

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In short, future time expressions in English are exceptionally rich and varied. Complex structures are used all the time. New ones can be created, even if a quick search reveals that lots of other people got there first! You can demonstrate that the number of future forms in English is in fact over 100. From the student perspective, and ours as teachers, the whole language area is inexplicably under-described. We can change this. The future's periphrastic. ETp

Biber, D, Johansson, S, Leech, G, Conrad, S and Finegan, E *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* Longman 1999

Carter, R and McCarthy, M *Cambridge Grammar of English* CUP 2006



Edward de Chazal has taught and examined in many countries since 1987, including Turkey and Kuwait. He currently teaches EAP at University College London Language Centre, UK. A regular presenter at IATEFL, he co-authored *The Business Advanced Student's Book*, recently published by Macmillan.

e.dechazal@ucl.ac.uk

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So many jobs, so little time

Amy Lightfoot goes freelance.

Going it alone can be a daunting prospect – trading in a comfortable job for the uncertainty of not knowing where your next pay cheque will come from is always a bit scary. However, sometimes that comfortable job becomes just a bit too comfortable and everyday teaching can start to feel like being on a treadmill. For well-qualified teachers with a range of classroom experience, the flexibility and variety that a freelance career offers can often be a much-needed breath of fresh air.

I decided to go freelance because I liked the idea of being able to work on a variety of projects and it suited my circumstances as the mother of two young children. Initially, I planned just to look for work writing materials, but the more research I did, the more I realised that there are many other opportunities available to someone with English language teaching skills. In this article, I would like to share the possibilities I have discovered in the hope that it will help anyone planning a similar journey.

Teaching

Firstly, it is important not to disregard teaching, even if your main reason for going freelance is to get out of the classroom. Success in all of the other freelance areas depends on your understanding of the learning process and student needs – it is extremely important to stay in touch with what it's like to be on the front line.

Supply teaching

Language schools and colleges are often interested in people who can do supply or cover teaching at short notice. If you have experience teaching all ages and levels, along with exam and business English classes, you'll be considered very useful. The disadvantage is that you'll need to be flexible and able to fit odd hours here and there around your other commitments.

In-company training

Many organisations, including those in English-speaking countries, want to develop their employees' English skills. If you have a solid business English background and can offer training in language as well as soft skills, such as chairing meetings or giving presentations, you have a good chance of finding work. Think carefully about what specific training you can offer and approach the training or human resources departments of local offices.

Teaching online

Online teaching is a growing sector of English language teaching and one that is forecast to expand indefinitely. Setting yourself up as an online teacher is straightforward – there are numerous sites where you can register and advertise your services. However, online teaching is quite a different experience from classroom teaching and it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages. It is a good idea to consider doing a short course first on how to teach online. As it is unregulated, a major difficulty will be distinguishing yourself from unqualified teachers wanting to make a bit of extra cash with conversation lessons. There also seems to be quite stiff competition to get teaching hours with established and reputable online schools, although it's always worth sending in your CV.

Summer schools

Summer courses can last anywhere from two weeks to four months during the summer season and the work can be exhausting but lucrative – a good burst of activity and income to offset leaner times. While there are plenty of opportunities for less qualified and less experienced teachers who are willing to do extracurricular activities alongside teaching, there are also an increasing number of challenging jobs available for highly skilled teachers. These include Assistant Director of Studies and Director of Studies positions and teachers of English for Academic Purposes on university pre-sessional courses.

Voluntary work

Some colleges and local councils offer free classes for groups such as refugees or the unemployed. Offering your services to teach these classes can be a good idea for people who want to concentrate on other areas but would like one or two regular classes each week to stay connected to the classroom (and perhaps try out new ideas for materials).

Teacher training

Teacher training can be one of the most rewarding areas to freelance in and is excellent for providing networking opportunities with other teachers. However, it can be difficult to get work as a freelance teacher trainer without substantial previous experience. If you are considering going freelance and have not previously done any teacher training, it is a good idea to find out if you can offer some sessions for teachers in your current institute or school and build up your skills.

Certificate and Diploma course training

There are a wide variety of teacher training courses, both face-to-face and online, some more reputable than others. Some training institutes will hire anyone with proven experience in teacher training to deliver their courses

on a freelance basis. Courses such as the CELTA, Trinity TESOLCert and DELTA, however, have much more stringent criteria and training – full details of which can be found on their respective websites.

In-house training

Within language schools and colleges, teacher development sessions often tend to be delivered by the same people over and over again. If there is a training budget, employing a 'guest trainer' to do one or more sessions for the teachers may be a welcome relief. It's always a good idea to suggest some possible topics you could cover, but ultimately the decision must be based on the teachers' needs in order for the sessions to be successful.

Consultancy work

A few organisations, including the British Council and VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas) in the UK, maintain databases of individuals who can offer consultancy on short-term ELT projects around the world.

Examining

The exams available vary from country to country, but examiners working for international ones such as IELTS and the Cambridge suite must go through a rigorous process in order to become certified. In some places they are crying out for examiners, while in others they are over-subscribed.

Marking

To find out how to become an examiner for any particular exam it is best to contact the administrators of centres offering the exams in your country. You should expect to attend between one and four days of unpaid training, and you may also need to commit to marking a certain number of exams within a given time period.

Item-writing

For security reasons, exams are constantly being rewritten and it is possible to get work writing the questions. You will also need to undergo training for this, which is usually unpaid. For item-writing work, check the central websites of the exams you are familiar with and enquire at their headquarters, rather than at centres offering the exams.

Writing materials

Many publishing houses use only established writers, and future publishing is planned several years in advance. For this reason, it is rare to approach a publisher with an idea for a coursebook and have your proposal accepted with open arms. However, it is often possible to get work writing the supplementary materials for ongoing or future coursebook projects.

Online and digital

This is a growing area, and opportunities range from publishing your own blog (which, while unpaid, can be useful for your own publicity) to writing methodology articles or teaching materials for websites like *onestopenglish.com* or the British Council and BBC's *teachingenglish.org.uk* site. Increasingly, traditional publishers are creating new content for their websites and CD-ROMs as a wraparound for new and existing coursebooks, and the amount of writing work available has, therefore, increased.

Print

There are a lot of ELT publishers out there – there's no need to focus only on the big names. Many of them are often looking for new writers, usually to write workbook exercises or perhaps to update current editions. This kind of work can be a great stepping stone to further commissions or larger projects.

Editorial work

If you are looking to do something a little bit different, but which is still related to English language teaching, undertaking training in one of the following three areas might give you just the string to add to your bow. They are all an important part of the production of published ELT materials, and skills in these would complement any writing work you may do, as well as providing another source of income.

Proofreading

Proofreading isn't something you can undertake without proper training and, while there are plenty of courses available, this is probably the area with the most competition. It is still a useful skill to have, however, and complements both of the following editorial skills.

Copyediting

Copyeditors or subeditors go through the material and check it for errors, as well as ensuring that it matches the 'house style'. If you enjoy working on the overall look and feel of the materials you create (as well as the content), this could be an area to look into. Again, you will need training.

Indexing

This is a relatively unknown part of the publishing process but an extremely important one – how often do you refer to the index of a book when looking for an activity or other information? In the UK, becoming an accredited indexer is a long process, but taster courses are a good way of assessing whether it's for you.

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As you can see, there really is a wide range of work available to the entrepreneurial freelancer – and potential for some exciting projects. To be successful, it is important to maintain links to the classroom and think carefully about your own development. Attending conferences, workshops and short courses, along with becoming an active member of a professional body, will help you to make useful contacts while ensuring that you keep your skills and knowledge up to date. ETp

Useful links

www.britishcouncil.org/development-register-as-a-consultant.htm (becoming a British Council consultant)

www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/exams-info/faqs/celta-trainers.html#1 (becoming a CELTA trainer)

www.cambridgeesol.org/what-we-do/who/working.html (becoming an examiner for Cambridge ESOL exams)

www.sfep.org.uk (information about proofreading and copyediting courses)

www.indexers.org.uk (information about indexing courses)



Amy Lightfoot has a DELTA and an MA (ELT). She has worked as a teacher and trainer for International House and the British Council in the UK, India, Afghanistan and Bhutan. She is now working freelance in Somerset, England.

mail@amylightfoot.co.uk

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Wouldn't it be lovely?

Sandee Thompson shares her secrets for staffroom harmony.

Enough cannot be said in praise of a harmonious teachers' room. I am sure we have all worked with people who were acrimonious or who made the staffroom a difficult place to be at one time or another. But supposing that you could work in an environment where everyone got along, people went out of their way to assist their colleagues and everyone had lives outside of the school – healthy, separate lives. Wouldn't that be lovely?

I would like to think that we would all answer yes to this question. In the perfect world, the world of rose-tinted spectacles, we would be happy to help each other out where we could, both for altruistic reasons and because we felt we were part of a team. But is this really such an unattainable ideal?

Paradise found

At the school I work in, we have created just such a haven in our teachers' room. Achieving this has not always been easy for some and is not always possible for others, depending on the ever-changing life situations of the individuals involved, but the feeling that this place is special is felt by all who enter the room. CELTA trainees mention it in their journals and end-of-course evaluations, visitors comment whenever they are given a tour, and new teachers relax into it by the end of their very first day.

Those of us who have worked there for an extended period of time assume it results from a few simple things: respect for others, a desire to create an environment we want to work in, the ability not to take ourselves too seriously and a great love of laughter. We also need to give credit to the way in which things are organised and the fact that mutual support is interlaced in everything we do, from mentoring new teachers and creating workshops for each other, to sitting together to eat lunch and going on school trips together.

I like to think, and say, that this is just as it should be – treating colleagues well should simply come naturally – but I am told that that is not always the case. So, if your teachers' room is not as collegial or as comfortable as you would hope, here are a few suggestions that might help. They have certainly worked for us.

Inside the teachers' room

Create a spot for socialising.

At our school, teachers have individual desks but we also have a communal area with a large, round table that is nestled among our resource materials and bookshelves. During coffee breaks, this table is generally strewn with books as people search for that perfect activity to round off a lesson. However, at lunch, the books are gone and it is jam-packed with teachers munching away, sharing recipes, joking, discussing local or international news or some pedagogical article someone has dredged up, and if someone has done some baking or gone apple-picking, the remnants or results are usually left on the table with a 'HELP YOURSELF!' note attached. About 15 minutes before classes start up again, people pack up their things and return to their desks, and the communal table becomes a group workspace once more. But for those 45 minutes, it is a place to socialise.

Mutual support is interlaced in everything we do, from mentoring new teachers and creating workshops, to sitting together to eat lunch

Plan a few activities together that take place on the premises.

Doing things together as colleagues on the school premises can help make the workspace more friendly. For example, my fellow teachers love to cook so we have periodic 'Potluck Fridays' after the students have left the building. Everyone brings along a dish to share. Sometimes we use national holidays as a reason to have one (Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc) and the food is themed accordingly, but at other times we simply put up a notice on the whiteboard and get the ball rolling. It is a great opportunity to touch base with each other, laugh and build camaraderie.

Participate in in-house workshops.

Workshops are another terrific way to get to know each other on a deeper level as well as to share ideas. By working with different people from your institution, you can learn more about them and may discover that you have a lot in common. You can also learn new things that help you branch out as an individual and as a

teacher. In my school, we do pedagogical workshops on grammar, using different frameworks and the like, but we also do personal growth workshops, with titles like *'Discovering your learning style'*, *'Getting organised'*, etc. These workshops help us to understand each other better, which is even more conducive to a harmonious workspace!

Celebrate victories and milestones.

Everyone on our teaching staff gets a birthday cake. We don't need to know in what year you were born, but the day is honoured and if we know your favourite type of cake, you will be sure to be eating it on that day. It is difficult to celebrate the birthdays of those who are shy or not into the whole birthday scene, so those people receive an individual cupcake on their desk or a card in their mailbox rather than having to live through a big to-do like the rest of us! Accomplishments like finishing a Masters degree, getting married, having something published or buying a house are also acknowledged with flowers, a card, a cake or a big message on the communal whiteboard.

Seeing your colleagues doing something that is fun, outrageous or challenging can bring you closer together

Outside the teachers' room

Participate in your school's social activities for students and get to know your colleagues as a bonus.

Seeing your colleagues doing something that is fun, outrageous or challenging can bring you closer together. I have participated in school activities as a driver and chaperone for 15 years now, and I am still learning things about the colleagues I do these trips with! In fact, these days, it is really the only time we have to catch up on each other's lives. Whether we are floating down a river in inner tubes, hurling mud at each other after a rafting adventure or travelling by bus to visit a museum, there always seems to be more time to enquire about someone's family than there is during a regular school day when we are all running in different directions. For me, school trips are a time to catch up with my colleagues, as well as get to know the students better. It really is a win–win situation!

Support your colleagues' outside endeavours.

We are a school full of musicians and singers, which contributes to the noise level, I suspect, so many of us go out and support each other in the local 'open mike' scene. Others are more politically and community minded and regularly keep us up-to-date through email on events going on in the community.

Do the odd thing together not related to school.

We are all busy people but it is nice to get together with colleagues every once in a while and not discuss our classes, students, university coursework or school politics. A few of the people I work with go out for manicures and pedicures every second Thursday; two others ballroom dance together and I have just been invited to join a women's book club! These activities give us something to talk about other than teaching, which, as great as it is, should not be the only topic around the table. Six women have joined the gym next door to the school and we now encourage each other to go to exercise classes there. It is always so much easier to stick to your goals when you have others to share them with, and these are very simple things to do.

Volunteer for a special project together that will help your community in some way, or support your colleagues while they do one.

Helping out in your community not only serves an altruistic purpose, but also helps build team spirit. For example, every year, we do a food drive, collecting and delivering donations of food and/or money to our local food bank, and last year we provided English lessons for a Vietnamese orphan who was in our community for medical care, and for his caregiver as well. This exposed our student population to the troubles of others and also opened up the eyes of our staff members. One of our teachers volunteers at the local Ronald Macdonald House, which provides support for families whose children are in hospital fighting cancer. Another teacher volunteers with a local youth group and others do workshops at the library. If someone's child wants to be sponsored for some charity event, we pass their sponsor sheet around and check to see how they did once the event is over.

It is nice to get together with colleagues every once in a while and not discuss our classes, students, university coursework or school politics

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Again, none of this is complicated or difficult to do, and I am not encouraging people to be in each other's pockets all the time. However, enjoying the company of those you spend a quarter of your week with is worth it, even if it sometimes requires a bit of time and effort. All these simple ideas work wonders and can make your workspace a joyful environment to be in on a day-to-day basis. ETp



Sandee Thompson is the Director of Studies, CELTA tutor and IELTS examiner trainer at a private language school in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She has taught teachers in Canada, Korea, El Salvador and Vietnam. Her interests include task-based learning, learning styles and strategies, teacher training and classroom-based research.

sandee_t@yahoo.com

SCRAPBOOK

GEMS, TITBITS, PUZZLES, FOIBLES, QUIRKS, BITS & PIECES, QUOTATIONS, SNIPPETS, ODDS & ENDS, WHAT YOU WILL

I name this ship ...

How do ships get their names? It seems that it differs from country to country. The UK Navy seems to favour names intended to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy, such as *Dreadnought*, *Invincible* and *Fearless*. In Japan, however, more romantic names, such as *Kasumi* (mist of flowers) and *Shiranuhi* (shining foam) have been chosen for fighting ships. The US Navy is rather more systematic and decrees that ships be named according to fixed criteria. Here are some examples:

- Aircraft carriers – names of famous battles, people associated with aviation and former US ships
- Ammunition ships – names of volcanoes and names which suggest fire and explosions
- Battleships – names of US states
- Cruisers – names of US cities
- Harbour tugs – names of famous Native American chiefs or trees
- Hospital ships – names which suggest kindness
- Landing ships – names of places of historical interest
- Submarines – names of fish or other sea creatures

However, the sailors who serve on these ships often call them by completely different names. The *USS Missouri*, for example, is commonly referred to as the *Misery*. The British battlecruisers *Furious*, *Courageous* and *Glorious* were nicknamed *Spurious*, *Outrageous* and *Uproarious* by their crews.

Dead in the water

The Northwest Passage is a sea route which connects the North Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Ice prevents ships from using it for most of the year, but for centuries European explorers looked for a way through, believing it could be a useful trade route to Asia. Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen is credited with navigating it first in 1903. However, it was actually first negotiated by the British ship *Octavius* some time around August 1775. At that time her crew had probably been dead for 13 years. The ship froze in the ice off Alaska in November 1762 with no supplies to last the winter. Year by year, as the ice melted and then froze again, the ghost ship gradually sailed eastwards until the dead explorers finally reached their destination.

Sounds a bit fishy

Where do shellfish go to borrow money?
To the prawn broker.

Where do fish wash?
In a river basin.

Why did the whale cross the road?
To get to the other tide.

Where do little fishes go every morning?
To plaice school.

What fish goes up the river at 100 mph?
A motor pike.

What do you get from a bad-tempered shark?
As far away as possible.

What did the sardine call the submarine?
A can of people.

What's the difference between a fish and a piano?
You can't tuna fish.

What do you call a fish with no eyes?
Fsh.

Where do you find a down-and-out octopus?
On squid row.

What kind of fish will help you hear better?
A herring aid.

How do fish go into business?
They start on a small scale.

What's the coldest fish in the sea?
A blue whale.



More in Issue 64

Fish **fishing** for fish

There are several types of fish that use techniques similar to human anglers when they go in search of prey.

One example is the deep-sea angler fish, which catches other fish with a natural fishing pole that grows out of its head. This pole is actually the first ray of the creature's dorsal fin. At the end is a phosphorescent blob, which acts like bait, attracting other fish to its light. Before they have a chance to snap at the bait, the angler fish opens its mouth, creates a suction that pulls them in and swallows them.

The Pacific frogfish has barbed strands coming out of its head that look like swimming worms. When other fish go to bite them, they are caught on the barbs and then eaten by the frogfish.

The goose fish grows to four feet long and lives camouflaged on the ocean floor, its dorsal fin fishing rod protruding from its head to attract prey. This fish will eat almost anything it can close its jaws on, including diving birds. One specimen was found to have seven birds in its stomach.

Singing **sand**

The sandy beach of the Bay of Laig on the tiny island of Eigg, off the west coast of Scotland, resembles most other beaches throughout the world, but actually it is quite different. When touched or walked upon, the sand emits musical sounds. It appears to sing. And it's not just a single note; when you draw your hand slowly through the sand, the sounds range from soprano to bass.

Why it sings is a mystery that has been investigated repeatedly. Scientists have found that tiny grains of polished quartz have the ability to transfer vibrations and create an unbroken sound. However, there must be no dust or foreign matter present. In the laboratory, even a pinch of flour will stop the transference of vibrations.

Fishy philosophy

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

OR

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you've got the whole weekend to yourself.



Be **careful** what you **wish** for!

Three men were fishing in the sea when they came upon a mermaid. The mermaid offered them one wish each, so the first fisherman said, 'Double my IQ.' The mermaid did it, and to his surprise he started reciting Shakespeare.

Seeing this, the second fisherman said, 'Triple my IQ.' Sure enough, the mermaid did it and amazingly he started solving maths problems he didn't even know existed.

The third fisherman was so impressed he asked the mermaid to quadruple his IQ and the mermaid said 'Are you sure about this? It will change your whole life!' The fisherman said yes, so the mermaid turned him into a fish.

Sea story

A young boy and his doting grandmother were walking along the seashore when a huge wave appeared out of nowhere, sweeping the child out to sea. The horrified woman fell to her knees, raised her eyes to the heavens and begged God to return her beloved grandson. Suddenly, another wave reared up and deposited the stunned child on the sand. The grandmother looked the boy over carefully. He was fine.

But then she stared up angrily toward the heavens. 'When we came,' she snapped indignantly, 'he had a hat!'

Be **careful** what you **buy**!

An American shipping company had just had a new ship built. It was to be the pride of the fleet, and something special was needed to decorate the captain's saloon, a large living room and office where the vessel's business and entertaining would take place.

Someone suggested that a set of nautical prints would lend a nice touch. He knew of a shop in London that specialised in such things, and the prints were duly ordered and hung in the saloon.

It was not until the trial run of the vessel, when both the builder's and the owner's representatives were aboard, that someone looked closely at the prints. Each was of an American ship being captured by, or surrendering to, a British warship during the War of 1812.

iStockphoto.com / © Eric Isselée, Roberto Adrian

Game on!

Hayo Reinders finds a fun way to teach writing.

Most written communication now takes place electronically, and this is having a significant effect on the types of writing our students produce. Marc Prensky estimates that by the age of 21, learners will have sent over 250,000 instant messages and emails. Clearly, our students love to communicate through writing! Of course, our job is to improve the quality of that writing and to expand their written communication to include different text types. For me, one obvious starting point is to take the writing my students do for fun and to build on that in class. For this reason I have used text messaging and *Facebook* to encourage social writing. I have also found that videogames offer potential to motivate students to write a wide range of text types. Considering that according to Prensky's estimates, by the age of 21, the average student has also spent about 10,000 hours playing videogames, there is ample opportunity for teachers to use these games to link classroom learning with out-of-class activities.

Practical games

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the pedagogical benefits of computer games. James Paul Gee, for instance, identified 36 learning principles in many of the games he investigated. For example, the 'Active, Critical Learning Principle' stipulates that *'all aspects of the learning environment (including the ways in which the semiotic domain is designed and presented) are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive, learning'*. In other words, computer games *engage* learners and get them involved in the tasks at hand. A second principle is the 'Regime of Competence Principle', where *'the learner gets ample opportunity to operate within, but at the outer edge of, his or her resources, so that at those points things are felt as challenging but not "undoable"'*. You may recognise this as being similar to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. If you have ever played a computer game yourself, you will have noticed that if you fail at a task, the game adapts to your level until you succeed. Similarly, if you succeed too quickly or too easily, new challenges appear. Computers are very good at providing this type of adaptive environment. Surely these are principles many of us strive to implement ourselves in the classroom.

Games in general also have a number of characteristics that make them potentially useful for the teaching of writing. According to Prensky, games have the following features:

1 rules;
2 goals and objectives;
3 outcome and feedback;
4 conflict, competition, challenge and opposition;
5 interaction;
6 the representation of a story.

These elements are similar to those in the writing process, where the interaction is usually defined by shared rules and where successful writers have clear goals in the communication they engage in. The representation of a story or the resolution of a conflict generally results in some type of response: a form of feedback. Teachers can use these parallels to draw on in the teaching of writing.

Practical ideas

Here I will briefly discuss seven ideas for the teaching of writing using the computer. Most of these do not require more than basic computer skills from you or your students.

1 Investigate characters and story lines.

One of the easiest options is to ask your students to investigate the characters in the games they play and to identify the story lines in them. Many games have extremely extensive plots and subplots. Here is a description of the plot of one game (taken from Wikipedia):

'I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream' is a computer adventure game based upon Harlan Ellison's short story of the same name. It is about an evil computer named AM that has destroyed all of humanity except for five people he has been keeping alive and torturing for the past 109 years. Each survivor has a fatal flaw in his or her character, and, in an attempt to crush their spirits, AM has constructed a metaphorical adventure for each that preys upon their weaknesses. To succeed in the game, the player must make ethical choices to prove to the evil computer that humans are better than machines because they have the ability to redeem themselves.

Asking students to identify how such a story unfolds, who the characters are and how they relate to other characters is a good way to focus their attention on the underlying principles both writers and game developers use to construct their stories. You will probably find that your learners have a lot to say about the games they play.

2 Use your learners' online characters.

Another option involving little or no technical skill on your part is to ask your students to describe their online characters. Most games let you 'create' your own character. This involves choosing your gender, race and style, but also your behaviour (Will you play the good or the bad character?). Ask your students to read the descriptions of each other's characters or let them

present their characters to the class using a projector or on a printout. Then ask them to discuss their choices. A fun activity could be to shuffle the printouts of the different characters and hand them out. The students then have to guess which character belongs to whom (but be careful this doesn't get out of hand as it can get very personal).

In the example in the previous section, you could ask the students to explain their 'ethical choices'. Why did they do what they did? How did this affect the other characters in the game? With hindsight, would they have done things differently? Similarly, you could ask students to discuss the rights or wrongs of violent computer games and the characters' actions in them. A popular game such as *Grand Theft Auto IV* would be a good candidate for this.

Another good game to use for this purpose is *The Sims* (*www.thesims.com*), though this is not free.

This activity can also be done with online environments like Second Life (*www.secondlife.com*), which has the advantage that basic membership is free, Active Worlds (*www.activeworlds.com*), which offers lower prices for educational institutions through its 'Active Worlds Educational Universe', or Moove, which is free (*www.moove.com*).

3 Use screenshots for discussion.

A screenshot is simply a picture of whatever is showing on your computer screen. Most computer keyboards have a key labelled 'Prt Sc', usually near the top right-hand side of the keyboard. Press this and then open a word processor. Right-click and choose 'Paste'. You will now see your screenshot. You can use such screenshots as a starting point for a discussion in class. An ambiguous image is best (Is the character trying to help the victim or will he abandon him?). If you do not have access to games yourself, ask your students to bring their own screenshots. Then ask them to describe the scene and predict what will happen next and why. You could ask them to write out a possible dialogue. Another use for screenshots is to ask students to summarise a computer game with the help of a number of screenshots from key moments in it. I have found that, especially with reluctant writers, the use of the visuals makes it easier for them to get started.

4 Get playing!

Some games are more language-rich than others. There are some educational games which are specifically designed for use in the classroom, but often students don't find them as interesting as non-educational games. Nevertheless, some non-educational games are suited to language learning.

One interesting example is *Ace Attorney*. This is about a young lawyer who investigates crime and prosecutes offenders. Successful players build a strong case and try to deliver the strongest arguments. Students could play this game and write out their choices, their arguments and eventually the whole case. Different teams could play each other, both on the computer and offline, in writing.

Social games like *The Sims* also involve a lot of opportunities for communication. There are numerous smaller games that can be useful, too. One example is *Mystery of Time and Space* (*www.albartus.com/motasl*), in which players have to play detectives, solve riddles and puzzles, find and use objects, escape from locked rooms, find hidden passages and examine everything to unlock the doors of the mystery of time and space. Some other games can be found at *www.languagegames.org*.

5 Encourage communication in online roleplaying games.

The term *MMORPG* stands for 'massively multiplayer online roleplaying game'. These games are played by hundreds and sometimes up to hundreds of thousands of people online. They often involve fantasy worlds and elaborate character development. Success in playing the game depends on participants' ability to plan ahead and to use strategies – crucially with the help of others. This involves communication via chat (frequently written but also spoken) and thus offers an opportunity to practise quite extensive forms of transactional writing, which is highly 'situated': where the communication is related to the participants' here and now and is authentic in that context. Many students play these games in their first language but are quite happy to play in English – and they are often thankful for help as it will allow them to play with more people. You could ask your students to print out their chat conversations and then exploit them in class to focus on the language used. Alternatively, you could participate in the game yourself and join in the chat communication and perhaps help scaffold the conversations. This can also help you identify any difficulties your students are having. The most popular MMORPG is *World of Warcraft*, which has a very extensive plot. A free alternative, albeit more suitable for younger learners, is Disney's *Toon Town* (*http://play.toontown.com*). This has the advantage that it was designed with children and families in mind and is thus more likely to be free of unwanted language.

6 Provide language support around games.

Another, relatively straightforward, option is to provide help with the games that your students already play. One interesting project was carried out at King Mongkut University in Thailand. Teachers there discovered that many students played the game *Football Championship Manager*. They also found that a lot of the students had difficulty understanding the vocabulary in the game. They decided, therefore, to create a simple support website where the students could look up the words, read English descriptions, Thai descriptions and see pictures. This was simple, yet very effective. You could, of course, choose to focus on any aspect of the language. For example, students may want help with more communicative aspects of games, such as addressing strangers through chat, or the language for planning and strategising (excellent for practising the future tense, conditionals, etc) in MMORPGs.

7 Create games with or for your students.

This sounds more daunting than it really is. A number of programs have been written that allow students to create computer games themselves. One interesting project is 'Scratch' (*http://scratch.mit.edu/*), designed for children of eight years and older. This free software lets students create environments, characters and animations, using a simplified programming language. There are templates that they can start with and adapt, and they can also create things from scratch. The main aims are to help students develop thinking skills and the ability to use technology productively,

Game on!

and also to teach them to develop and follow through a plan. In the language classroom, you can ask your students to write summaries of their games or advertisements for them, or they could produce a manual with information on how to play. You will probably also find that creating the games in class will give ample opportunity for spoken interaction of quite a complex nature.

A similar option, and one very popular with teenagers, is a form of storytelling called *Machinima* (see *www.machinima.org*). A contraction of *machine* and *cinema*, *Machinima* is the telling of a story based on games graphics. So, for example, if a student likes a particular game, they can use the characters and scenes from that game and 'mod' (modify) them in order to tell their own story. Modding involves using software to change an existing game or aspect of a game (such as a character) in some way. A word of warning: just as some games can be violent, so the graphics students derive from those games can be unsuitable for use in class. You will probably have to set some clear boundaries here.

A final suggestion is to use *Gamics* (see *www.gamics.com*). A contraction of *games* and *comics*, *Gamics* are similar to *Machinima*, except they involve still images. Students use images from their favourite cartoons to create their own.

Practical considerations

There are a number of drawbacks to using computer games. Not everyone in class may be used to playing them and some students may not have access to computers or game consoles. Perhaps you can ask your system administrator to make one of the (free) online games mentioned above available on one or more of the workstations in your school (perhaps at restricted times).

Another potential pitfall is that although playing games can be exciting, entertainment in itself does not *necessarily* lead to effective learning. You will have to set clear goals for yourself and articulate these to your learners so they know what is expected of them. Similarly, you will have to set rules for what games can be played and when. Some games may not be suitable for use in class. This will also be a concern for parents and administrators. Talk to them and explain your aims and the intended learning outcomes. Explain how you will protect the students from inappropriate content.

One practical issue is the cost. Many schools now have computer facilities available to students, so the main expenditure will be on software. I have recommended several free programs to keep the cost down. Many students will have access to computer games at home and you could ask them to use these (and perhaps share them with students who don't), for example by bringing screenshots to class as suggested earlier.

Of course, many of the ideas outlined here do not necessarily require the use of a computer. Various forms of roleplay and some traditional games involve opportunities for practice similar to those offered by computer games. However, with the many free computer games available nowadays and the advantages they offer, it may be worthwhile to experiment.

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At times exasperating, at times exhilarating, computer games are almost never boring, and you are likely to see strong student involvement. Your challenge will be to channel that involvement in ways that actually benefit the development of writing skills. Oh, and to have as much fun in the process as possible. Game on! ETp

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Hayo Reinders is Adjunct Professor at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands and Director of Innovation in Teaching, an educational consultancy. He is co-author of *The International Student Handbook*, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

info@innovationinteaching.org

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Five things you always wanted to know about blogs (but were 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 looks at blogs and how they might be relevant to language teaching.

1 What exactly is a blog?

Blogs have been around since the late 1980s – they were one of the earliest and easiest ways to get published on the internet, and they are still an extremely popular tool for self-publishing. *Blog* is short for *web log*, and is an online journal of sorts, usually kept by individuals, and regularly updated with 'posts' which appear on a webpage in reverse chronological order (so with the latest post at the top of the page). Blogs have spawned a wealth of very nice blog-related words, such as *blogger* (the person who *blogs*), the *blogosphere* (the collection of blogs and bloggers worldwide), *blogroll* (your list of favourite blogs, linked to from your own blog) and *blog-fade* (when one gets tired of one's own blog). Blogs can be kept on almost any topic you care to mention, and you'll find blogs on politics, art, people's personal lives, travel, and so on. There are also many blogs related to teachers and teaching.

2 How can I use blogs in my teaching?

Although blogs, like the internet itself, have been called 'vanity publishing gone mad', there are several types of blogs you can use in your teaching; blogs used in education are known as *edublogs*. You can set up your own blog for your learners to read, in which you provide them with summaries of lessons, extra links and homework, for example – this is a *teacher blog*. You can also set up one blog for an entire class to contribute to – a *class blog*. You can have a class blog in which students report on books that they are reading out of class, for example, or to which they contribute short written pieces on a certain topic. Another option is for each of your learners to have their own blog – a *student blog*. One of the nice features of blogs, which helps make them more interactive, is the 'comment' function, by which learners can leave comments on each other's blog posts.

3 So a blog is best for writing practice?

Blogs certainly lend themselves well to short pieces of writing, but you can also add pictures and embed videos into blog posts, which can make for a much richer visual and multi-media experience. You can also integrate all sort of 'widgets' (or little gadgets) into your blog, such as a Twitter feed (see ET*p* Issue 60), mouse-over translation tools (if you point your mouse at a word, you are supplied with a translation) and a calendar, and you could also have a class blogroll in a sidebar.

Blogs can also be used for reading practice. You can easily find already-published blogs on topics of interest for your learners to subscribe to and read.

4 How can I 'subscribe' to a blog?

There is a clever little application called *RSS* (short for *Really Simple Syndication*), which allows you to subscribe to blogs online. Let's imagine that you want to read and follow five blogs regularly. Instead of going along to each of those five blogs every day to see if anything new has been posted, you can use an RSS reader or 'feed', which goes along to the blog page for you, and if there is a new post, it automatically lists the new blog post in your RSS reader on your computer screen. This can save you a lot of time, as there is no need for you to go along to each individual blog page – the information comes straight to *you*. You can either download and install an RSS reader on your computer (for example, Sharp Reader), or you can use an online RSS reader (like Google Reader). The advantage of using an online RSS reader is that you can access it from any computer, whereas a downloaded RSS reader sits on the computer you have installed it on, and can only be accessed on that computer.

5 I'd love to write my own blog. How do I get started?

The easiest way into blogging is to set up a personal blog for yourself, for example about a recent interesting holiday or trip, or a blog about yourself, your family and your interests and hobbies. This gives purpose to your blog, and you can share photos and experiences with family and friends – and then later with your students! Setting up your own blog helps you to learn to use the software; *Blogger* (*www.blogger.com*) is one of the easiest and most intuitive free blog sites to use. Once you've figured out how to post to your own blog, how to add photos, and – if you're feeling adventurous – how to embed a video, you'll be ready to set up a class blog, or to help your students set up their own individual student blogs. There are many examples of blogs by English teachers and students around the world, and you'll find a list of selected resources, free blogging tools and EFL-related sample blogs at *www.theconsultants-e.com/courses/blogs/resources.asp*.



Nicky Hockly has been involved in EFL teaching and teacher training since 1987. She is Director of Pedagogy of The Consultants-E, an online training and development consultancy. Nicky is co-author of *How to Teach English with Technology*, published by Longman, which won the 2007 Ben Warren Prize.

Contact Nicky at **nicky.hockly@theconsultants-e.com** and let her know of any other ICT areas you'd like her to explore in this series.

Webwatcher

Russell Stannard reinvents himself as a movie director.

Teachers have busy lives and one of the most important aspects of technology is that it is easy, quick and can solve a problem or help us enhance our teaching. So I was glad to come across **www.xtranormal.com**, an excellent text-to-speech dialogue-building site that allows you to make short animated movies incorporating different gestures and expressions. I first came across it on Nik Peachey's excellent blog: **http://nikpeachey.blogspot.com** and it is great fun and easy to use.

How you can create a movie

Using this site, it is pretty simple to create a movie. You don't actually have to sign up unless you are planning to save the movie you make. To begin, click on 'Get started' and you will be asked to choose the number of characters you want, either one or two. Let's say here that you choose two.

1 Design the scene

You will now be taken to another screen. You will see four small buttons near the bottom of the page under the heading 'Design the scene'. Use these to select the scenery, the background music and your characters (there will be one or two buttons for this, depending on how many characters you chose). Click on the buttons and you will be offered choices for each element (you can even choose the accents of the characters). Your choices appear in the screen to the right. When you have finished, click on 'Apply'. Your choices will disappear from the screen and you can start writing the script.

2 Write the script

At the top of the page, under 'Write the script', you will see two character icons (or one if you chose to create a monologue). Click on one of them and start writing your dialogue. When you want to change the character who is talking, just click on the '+' button: the next character will automatically be selected and you can continue the dialogue.

Once you have finished, you can play it back by simply clicking the 'Action' button on the right below the movie window. This will render your video (convert it from a graphics file to a video display) and then, after a while, you can click on the 'Play' arrow underneath the movie screen to watch it. (Whenever you have 3D objects, you usually need to render the movies before you play them, as creating them requires a lot of processing.)

3 Direct the action

Now the fun starts. On the left of the dialogue you have various buttons which allow you to add hand gestures, looks, pauses and sound effects. They are under the title 'Direct the action'. Just choose the thing you want, then drag it and drop it next to the word where you want it to start working. A dialogue box will open with drop-down menus and you can make your choice (from a selection of movements, gestures, etc). Once you have finished, click on 'Action'. Your movie will then be rendered and you can play it. If you are happy with it, click on 'It's a wrap!' and your movie will be saved. To save your movies, you have to sign up to the site (a basic account is free). If you haven't already signed up, you will be taken to a registration screen (your movie will not be lost while you complete the formalities). If you wish, you can load your finished movies onto *YouTube*.

Here are a few examples to watch, which will give you an idea of the sort of movies and dialogues you can create.

A dancing competition:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmu1OKw324o&feature=channel
The news:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnnixup4bKQ&feature=related
An odd dialogue:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNCPUXOgGdc&feature=channel

How you can use this site

1 The most obvious procedure would simply be to get your students to choose two characters and to write a dialogue between them on a given topic. You could do some preparation work with vocabulary and have a brainstorming session to generate ideas.
2 You could also tell the students to choose a single character and have them write news items for that person to read out. This could be news about the school, the class, the country or even international news. Again, it would need some preparation with vocabulary and ideas, but then the students could write the monologue, add gestures, camera angles and expressions, etc.
3 A similar idea would be to get the students to make their character tell a story or talk about a holiday or recent event.
4 One of the characters the students choose could be a famous person. They could then make the other character a reporter and write an interview.
5 Your students could make a movie which re-creates a scene from a film or TV programme.
6 You could make your *own* movie to create a context and dialogue for highlighting target language items.
7 You could create a movie with the message you want to send to your students, and then email the link to them so that they can watch it.
8 Nik Peachey suggests that you use the 'Remix' button. This allows you to take a movie that has already been created and edit it. One idea would be to make a monologue or dialogue with mistakes in it and get the students to edit the movie and correct the mistakes.

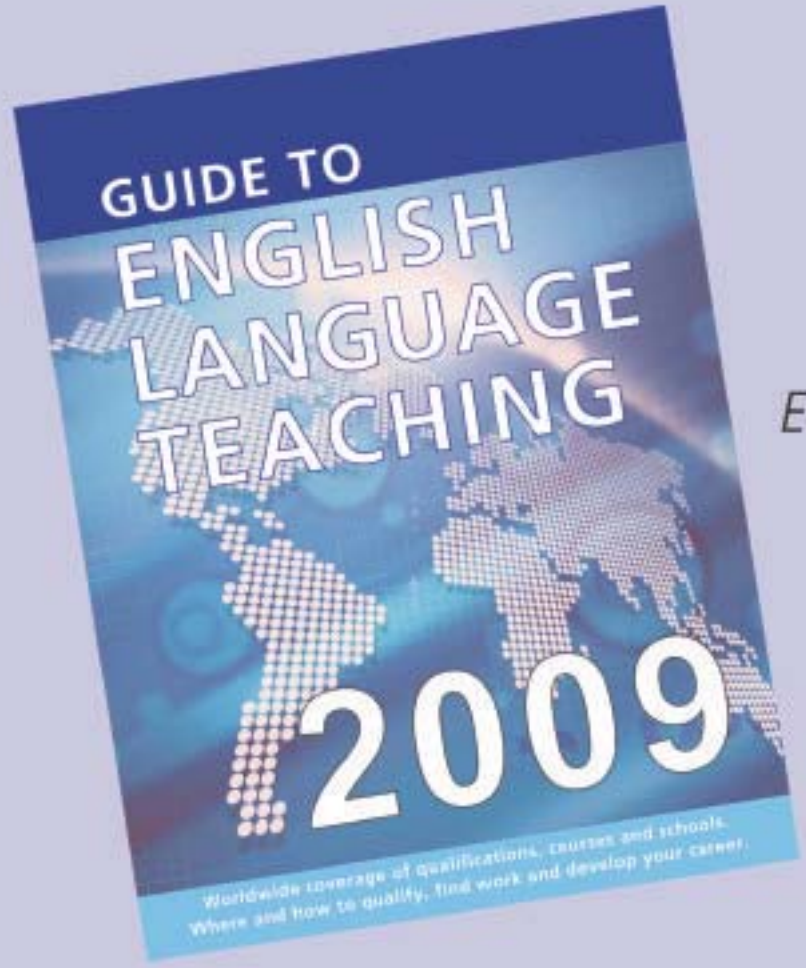
I have produced some free videos to guide you through using this site. You can find them at: **www.harbornecomputers.co.uk/~teachertraining/xtra/index.html**.
There is also a simple set of help videos on *YouTube*, made by Nik Peachey at: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtjQIztrA2A**.



Russell Stannard is a principal lecturer at the University of Westminster, UK, where he teaches using technology on multimedia and TESOL courses. He also runs www.teachertrainingvideos.com, a website that trains English teachers to use technology, which has won a Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Initiatives in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

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

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In this column Rose Senior explains why certain teaching techniques and class management strategies are effective, and identifies specific issues that can assist all language teachers in improving the quality of their teaching.

Questioning 1

Asking questions is something that most teachers do on a regular basis during class – with some teachers asking more than 100 questions during the course of a single lesson! However, we don't always ask questions as effectively as we might. This article will identify some common pitfalls and suggest ways in which we can improve our questioning skills.

Many of us slip into poor questioning habits without realising we are doing so. Unfortunately, unless we have access to a video-recording of ourselves in action – or find a colleague willing to sit in on a lesson and give us constructive feedback – we may continue for many years framing questions in such a way that our students become less willing, rather than more willing, to respond to them. Students often give clear behavioural clues signalling their reluctance to answer questions: staring straight ahead with a blank expression on their faces, sheltering behind a propped-up file or the head of the person in front, examining a dictionary with head lowered, and so on. As we know from our own school days, if we don't want to be picked on to answer a question, the key tactic to remember is: avoid catching the teacher's eye.

Students can experience high levels of anxiety when singled out by their teachers to answer questions because of the lingering fear of responding inappropriately and appearing foolish in front of their friends. Reasons for inappropriate responses include:

- failing to understand the question;
- not being able to think of the required answer quickly enough or at all;
- getting the answer wrong;
- stumbling over words and/or pronouncing them incorrectly;
- providing an answer that the teacher fails to understand or give credit for.

The nerve-wracking nature of the situation is compounded by the ever-present possibility that the class will find the response amusing. Fortunately, few teachers these days deliberately ridicule students who fail to provide correct answers – a practice that my husband remembers vividly from his school days in England.

There are a number of pitfalls that teachers should avoid when asking questions in class. Those who lack confidence may address a general question to the class and then, before anyone has time to respond, jump in and answer the question themselves. They may even have a student repeat their own answer and then praise them for answering the question correctly! Because they want to maintain a fast pace in lessons, or because they are fearful of silence, many teachers fail to give their students sufficient 'wait time' to think about their responses and formulate them in correct English. As a result, they may underestimate their students' knowledge of English. This is often the case in classes containing students from conformist educational cultures where self-expression is not routinely expected.

> Some teachers use tricky questions like rockets or missiles

Some teachers use tricky questions like rockets or missiles, firing them at misbehaving students with a view to pulling them into line. Although temporarily effective from a class-management point of view (because the student is temporarily quietened), such strategies are unlikely to promote a positive attitude to learning in the student concerned.

> Some students talk of feeling invisible in their classes

Sometimes teachers select particular individuals to answer questions on a regular basis. These typically include:

- those who are seated in the 'action zone' (the central seats in the first few rows);
- those who are likely to supply the correct answer (who are probably also seated at the front of the class);
- those whose body language indicates keenness to answer the question;
- those whose names the teacher knows (usually students at either end of the ability spectrum).

It follows that many low-profile students may never be given the opportunity to answer questions in class – even though they would like to do so; some even talk of feeling invisible.

In order to encourage students to answer questions more readily, it is important to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere in which the students know that their attempts to answer questions will be valued and responded to in a considerate manner. They need to know that their teacher will not put them into a difficult situation, for example by singling them out to answer a question that is clearly beyond their capabilities. Consistency is the key: the students must know that their teacher will always treat their answers with respect and will always give feedback in a sensitive manner.

If they wish their students to answer questions more readily, teachers must also establish and maintain appropriate question and answer routines. Students need to know what is expected of them: whether or not they should raise their hands when ready to answer; whether they need to stand when speaking; whether they can call out answers without being specifically addressed; whether it is acceptable to chant answers in unison with others; whether it is permitted (or indeed actively encouraged) to consult with peers before formulating answers; whether questions are likely to be asked randomly or will always be asked in a set order round the class. They also need to have some idea of the likelihood of being required to answer questions. If they know that they are highly unlikely ever to be asked a question, they may relax and not attempt to prepare any answers.

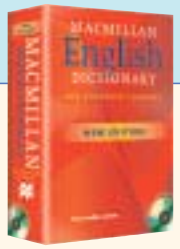
In the next article I will discuss how teachers can broaden their range of questioning techniques and, by so doing, increase the level of student participation in their lessons. ETp

Dr Rose

Rose Senior is a conference presenter and teacher educator. She is the author of *The Experience of Language Teaching*, published by CUP.

rsenior@iinet.net.au

Prize crossword 36



ET*p* presents the thirty-sixth in our series of prize crosswords. Try it … and maybe win a prize! Once you have done it successfully, let your students have a go.

Send your entry (not forgetting to include your full name, postal address and telephone number) to Prize crossword 36, English Teaching *professional*, Keyways Publishing, PO Box 100, Chichester, West Sussex, PO18 8HD, UK. Ten correct entries will be drawn from a hat on 10 September 2009 and the senders will each receive a copy of the second edition of the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, applauded for its unique red star system showing the frequency of the 7,500 most common words in English.

15	■	■	18	■	22	■	17	15	20	4	17	24
3	15	2	25	18	20	12	■	9	■	■	25	■
15	■	■	26	■	20	■	■	9 P	■	■	4	■
10	■	■	18	■	18	25	5	4 E	14	24	4	23
4	16	22	24	18	14	■	■	15 A	■	■	10	■
23	■	■	18	■	18	3	9	8	22	26	4	23
■	1	■	25	■	15	■	22	■	8	■	23	■
11	21	25	2	15	19	22	6	■	14	■	■	24
■	15	■	■	9	■	■	4	14	13	22	4	17
17	14	21	19	9	24	22	8	■	15	■	■	13
■	7	■	■	19	■	■	20	■	8	■	■	18
■	4	■	■	4	■	3	21	23	23	18	4	8
15	23	26	18	17	4	■	19	■	17	■	■	24

1	2	3	4 E	5	6	7	8	9 P	10	11	12	13
14	15 A	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

To solve the puzzle, find which letter each number represents. You can keep a record in the boxes above. The definitions of the words in the puzzle are given, but not in the right order. When you have finished, you will be able to read the quotation.

13	22	6	■	4	26	4	8	12	■	20	22	22	19	■
14	15	25	■	9	19	15	12	■	21	9	22	25	■	24
13	4	■	6	22	8	23	!	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

VERY FREQUENT WORDS

*** Able to influence or control what people do or think
*** Done or decided by a government or by people in authority
*** Give your opinion to someone about the best thing to do
*** Least likely to cause damage, injury or harm
*** Made better
*** Seem, arrive or become visible

FREQUENT WORDS

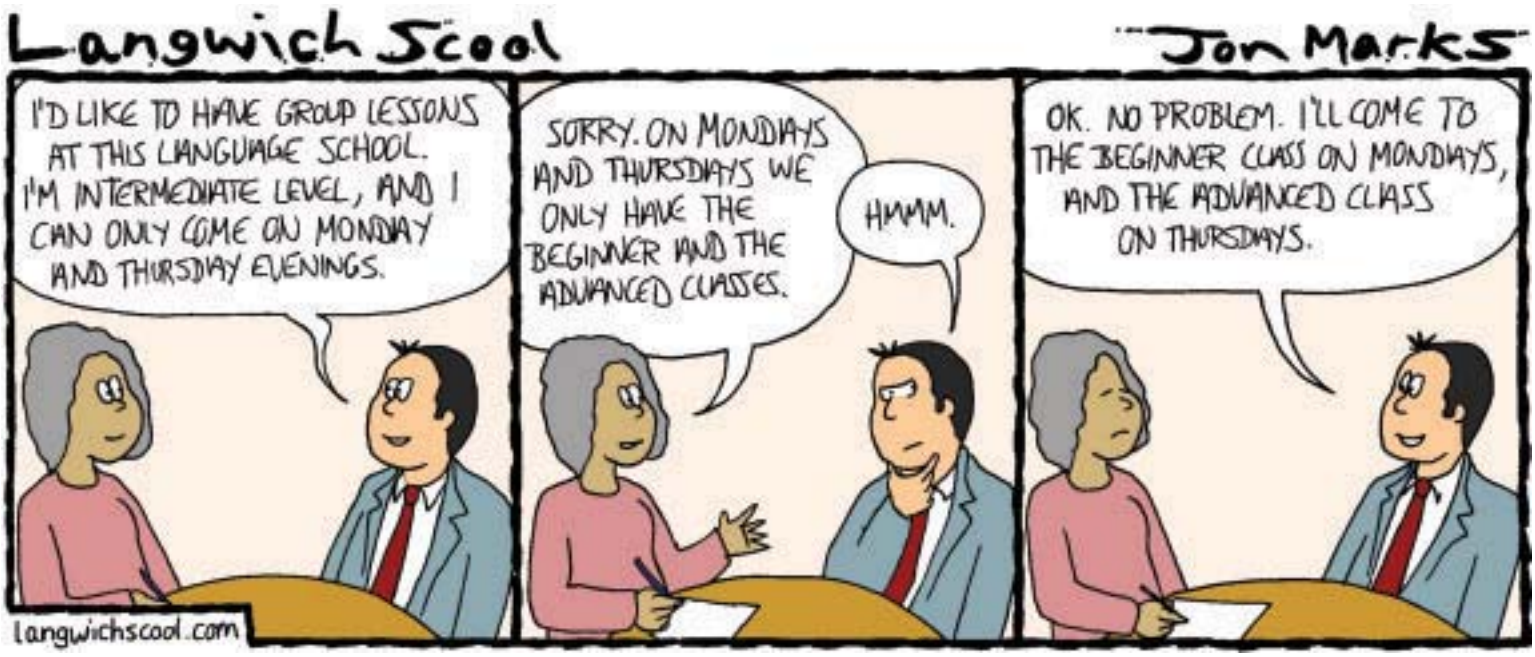
** Hard round fruit that are white inside and have green, yellow or red skin

FAIRLY FREQUENT WORDS

* A house that is all on one level
* A soft top with short sleeves and no collar
* Covered with more very soft, wet earth
* Interesting because of being unfamiliar, or from a distant country
* Noises that are repeated because the sound hits a surface and returns
* Put into the body through the skin using a needle and a syringe

LESS FREQUENT WORDS

– An artist who shapes things like stone, metal or wood
– Areas of land where fruit trees are grown
– Attractive, making you want to try it
– Blew air out through the nose in a sudden, uncontrolled way
– Made a noise like a duck
– Make something appear bigger than it really is
– Very surprised



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