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Nik Peachey

One is a lovely number
Emily Edwards

Less is more
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Challenging our own authority
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Editorial

In this issue, Alan Maley recommends some inspirational books in which teachers recount their experiences, often of educational contexts which might seem overwhelmingly adverse but where they managed to overcome the difficulties and make a real difference to the lives and achievements of their students, often by sheer force of personality.

And it is the personality of the teacher that occupies Phillip Brown. He argues that personality is the key to classroom success and that the teacher's ability to talk to the students, get things across and inspire them is far more important than the formal requirements and expectations laid down by teaching authorities.

At a purely linguistic level, John Potts asserts that the teachers' own idiolects, the language choices they make which mark them out as individuals, plays an important part in the development of their students' language ability. He makes a conscious effort to vary his own idiolect to give his students exposure to as large a 'language bath' as possible, and notices which of his favourite expressions his students adopt and start to use themselves.

Whilst one of the successful head teachers described by Phillip Brown had little time for qualifications and references of any kind, most of us would agree that some form of training is a good idea before teachers are set loose in the classroom. Nowadays, teacher training and professional development take many forms. In our main feature, Nik Peachey describes some of the options already available for online teacher development and, continuing our series on what people actually do on a daily basis in some of the jobs in our profession, Chia Suan Chong outlines the life of a CELTA tutor. I am grateful to Phil Wade for suggesting that we continue this series after the first article by Sasha Wajnryb on the life of the DOS in Issue 80 and for assembling some volunteer contributors. Phil's own article in this issue is on the importance of getting to know the students and finding out what they really want and need from their lessons.



Helena Gomm
Editor
helena.gomm@pavpub.com

ENGLISH TEACHING *professional*

Rayford House, School Road, Hove BN3 5HX, UK

Tel: **+44 (0)1273 434943** ***Email:*** **admin@pavpub.com**
Fax: **+44 (0)1273 227308** ***Web:*** **www.etprofessional.com**

Editor: Helena Gomm

Editorial Consultant: Mike Burghall

Editorial Director: Peter Collin

Designer: Christine Cox

Advertising Sales Manager:
Carole Blanchett, Mainline Media
Tel: 01536 747333
Fax: 01536 746565
Email: carole.blanchett@mainlinemedia.co.uk

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MAIN FEATURE

Teacher development online

Nik Peachey sees the future for teacher training.

I have been involved in teacher training for almost 15 years now, and those 15 years have seen an enormous shift in our profession, as in most others. The catalyst for this shift has, of course, been digital technology – and more specifically, the communication possibilities offered by the internet. At its best, the application of new technologies has enabled teachers from around the globe to connect, communicate and exchange ideas and materials at a rate that has never been possible before and, in my role as a teacher trainer and course developer, I am becoming increasingly convinced that not only has the considered application of new technologies made the delivery of online training courses cheaper and more accessible for teachers, but I genuinely believe we have now reached a point where online teacher development has become a more effective means of developing teachers than face-to-face training.

Overcoming isolation

In our 'traditional' context as teachers, we lead a very isolated existence, despite the fact that we spend most of our working lives surrounded by students. Many teachers are rarely, if ever, observed, and the purpose of this observation is most often quality control rather than development. Many teachers work in staffrooms where there is little support or exchange of ideas and where colleagues either teach other subjects or prefer to spend as little time as possible actually in the building. For new or aspiring teachers, this malaise can soon become infectious, with teachers choosing to take the easy ground and repeat the same tried and tested lessons over again.

The arrival of the internet – and especially Web 2.0-type applications which support user-created content and social networking – has enabled enthusiastic teachers to bridge that isolation and reach out to a myriad of individuals with diverse experiences and opinions, drawing on the creativity and generosity of their peers to nourish their teaching experience. Many teachers have been encouraged to grow in ways that would just not have been possible ten, or even five, years ago.

We have now reached a point where online teacher development has become a more effective means of developing teachers than face-to-face training

Conferences

For decades now, the prime and preferred method of professional development has been the conference. For many teachers, this is a chance to regenerate, renew old acquaintances and make new friends. The continuing growth and popularity of conferences like IATEFL and TESOL can bear witness to this. As part of the team that works on delivering the IATEFL online experience, I know that there were some initial misgivings that the online offer could potentially undermine the physical event. However, on the contrary, it seems to have had the opposite effect: making so much of the conference available online has only fuelled teachers' desire to attend the event in person. Recent research I carried out into the preferred methods of professional development of over 125 teachers supported this assumption, with conferences still coming out at the top of the list. Not surprisingly, though, the next three places were all taken by web-supported methods of development, these being webinars, *Twitter* and online courses.

Webinars

Web-based seminars, or webinars as they are known, have become increasingly popular over the last few years. Improvements in connection speeds, coupled with better PC sound quality and the availability of a number of free or low-cost platforms, have made these a genuinely viable alternative to attending a face-to-face conference. In fact, some cash-strapped teachers' associations have organised complete two- and three-day events using virtual platforms rather than going to the huge expense of hiring a physical venue, arranging hotels and flying in speakers.

Webinars

If you want to try to present your own webinar, try one of these free or low-cost platforms:

- *www.bigmarker.com/*
- *www.wiziq.com/*
- *http://bigbluebutton.com/*

You can also find a collection of recorded webinars at *www.cambridgeenglishteacher.org/webinar-resources.*

Among the advantages of webinars, cited by the subjects of my research, is the convenience. You can attend a webinar without even leaving home, let alone having to pay the cost of travel and hotels. As most webinar presentations are recorded and archived, you can even watch them when you want to and with whom you want to. Many teachers arrange to meet and watch webinar recordings together so that they can discuss them afterwards.

Twitter

Twitter, the online micro-blogging platform that has taken the world by storm, is now almost as ubiquitous in our lives as the omnipresent *Facebook*. However, can you really learn anything about teaching from a message of only 140 characters (the maximum permitted in a 'tweet')? Well, it seems that many teachers believe that you can – and they do. *Twitter* can, however, do much more than allow teachers to share experiences in short messages. It also enables them to exchange links to online materials such as blog articles, journals, videos and teaching materials from all around the world. At its worst, though, *Twitter* is like millions of people standing in a huge room all shouting at once! The secret of getting the best from it is knowing *how* to listen and *who* to listen to.

The best way to 'listen' or to find useful information is to search *Twitter* using hashtags. A hashtag is a short key word or acronym preceded by a hash symbol: #. A number of these are commonly used by English language teachers, for example #elt, #esl, #efl or – for those interested in educational technology – #edtech. A search using #edchat or #eltchat will locate information being shared during some of the many synchronous live weekly discussions organised by ad-hoc groups of teachers from around the world. You don't have to 'follow' anyone to search *Twitter* using hashtags, but doing this will probably help you to locate the useful people to follow.

Actually reading a tweet, once you find one, can be a little confusing for the uninitiated. Tweets often look a little like sms text messages, with lots of abbreviations and strange symbols like @ followed by a name, which usually refers to the person who is the source of the information. The best thing to look for in these tweets is a link. Links in *Twitter* are often shortened (to save on those valuable 140 characters) and start with *bit.ly* or *vsb.li* instead of the usual *http*. These links are where the real information lies, and it is this exchange of information that I have found most valuable in *Twitter*. I don't want to hear what someone had for lunch or which airport they are in – people who share this kind of information rarely use hashtags – what I look for are the links to blogs, new online teaching tools, interesting videos, video tutorials or journal articles. This is where the real development is, and where I learn the most.



Twitter

Some of the people you might like to start by following are:

- *http://twitter.com/ozge*
- *http://twitter.com/SeanBanville*
- *http://twitter.com/esolcourses*
- *http://twitter.com/russell1955*
- *http://twitter.com/harmerj*
- *http://twitter.com/NikPeachey*
- *https://twitter.com/brad5patterson*
- *https://twitter.com/barbsaka*
- *https://twitter.com/missnoor28*
- *https://twitter.com/Larryferlazzo*

Following the right people can also help. When you follow someone, you receive into your *Twitter* page all the information they share. If you follow a lot of people, this could mean a constant flow of information. My advice is not to try to read everything: just take a little time out of each day to browse the information stream which *Twitter* provides and find a couple of interesting things to read.

Online courses

According to my research, online courses seem to be becoming increasingly popular and, as I said at the beginning of this article, I believe that these can now not only be much cheaper, but also be more effective, than their face-to-face classroom equivalents, especially for in-service and continuing development.

Unlike most of the face-to-face courses I have worked on (which most often had, by necessity, to be delivered out of context and intensively), online courses can be delivered over a longer period of time, and teachers can study a little each week and try out the ideas they are learning in their own classroom context with their own students.

Real change and development in the way we teach takes time and needs to be a continuous process. Short bursts of intensive learning usually have big short-term effects, but those effects tend to be more superficial and, away from the rarified and supportive air of the intensive classroom, many good intentions become lost; momentum for change can soon wind down. Well-designed online courses can help teachers to build on and develop their motivation, and can support them while they explore new ideas within the real context in which they work.

Of course, many online teacher development courses are *not* well designed. In the past, exaggerated claims and undeserved hype have led to a lot of disillusionment over online learning, and drop-out rates on online courses have been notoriously high.

Teacher development online

When developing the Bell Blended Learning in ELT course, I carried out detailed research into almost 800 teachers' experiences of online learning. What emerged from that research was that teachers were looking for a number of things. Primary among these was the desire to learn in an online environment that was geared towards socialisation and sharing.

Teachers want to interact with each other, not with a computer. The learning environment should exist to support communication between the teachers, and the materials and tasks that courses are based around need to be practical and applicable to their teaching context.

Teachers don't want to be assessed, evaluated and tested by a computer; they want to be able to make mistakes, share ideas and experiment, with the support of a real person who understands that the learning process is about more than just having the correct answers.

Rather than working through materials in isolation, they want to be able to exchange ideas within groups and build lasting contacts and networks among the people they study with.

Time spent online needs to be limited, so learning needs to be concise and 'bite-sized' so that the participants can fit short bursts of study into the busy regular schedule of their lives.

I believe that, increasingly, course developers are waking up to these needs and many providers such as The Consultants-E, Bell and International House, as well as publishers and assessment bodies like CUP and Cambridge ESOL, are starting to provide good-quality courses at reasonable prices. There is clearly a growing and wider acceptance among teachers that online courses offer a viable, good-quality and good-value alternative to face-to-face courses. In fact, the newly-launched Cambridge English Teacher online courses had attracted more than 12,000 guest users by July 2012, after starting with only just over 2,000 back in March.

Content curation

Any article dealing with online teacher development would, I believe, be incomplete without mention of a new and growing internet trend among teachers: 'content curation'. In 2009, Michael Wesch stated that, each second, 2,000 gigabytes of new information was being created. This staggering figure has, I'm sure, grown since then, and it leaves us with a problem: how within that vast quantity of information being generated do we locate, digest and assimilate that minuscule portion which is relevant to us?

Twitter goes some way towards answering that question, because it puts us in touch with people who can help us to mediate the torrent of information, filter out some of the vast irrelevancies and reduce it to something that we can attempt to consume. This still leaves us with the question of how we make sense of the still quite considerable and valuable amount of information that is being generated about our profession. Content curation, in the form of a number of web-based tools, can help with this problem and assist us in the process of making sense of that information and converting it into knowledge.

★ ★ ★

I believe the process of organising and arranging web content and developing through online resources can help us to work more effectively, learn more efficiently and, perhaps more importantly, take us a little closer to the kinds of practices needed by the digital generation that we teach. I recently found a wonderful video clip at *http://youtube/XwM4ieFOotA* (it's now saved in my *Pinterest* account). This clip describes the digitally networked student – just the kind of student we teach and the kind of teacher we need to aspire to be in order to do credit to the students we teach. If you have a moment, watch it and think about how *you* can be more like this. ETp

Wesch, M 'Knowledgable to knowledge-able: learning in new media environments' *Academic Commons* 2009



Nik Peachey is a freelance consultant, trainer, writer, conference speaker and course designer, specialising in educational technology and ELT. He has been involved in ELT since 1992 and has worked all over the world as a teacher and ICT specialist.

nikpeachey@mac.com

Content curation

These are some of the most useful free content curation tools around at present:

- *Scoop.it*
- *Pinterest.com*
- *Meaki.com*

These tools can help us save, organise, use and eventually share the useful resources we find online, and this process is what curation is all about. It is a process of understanding and organising web-based content to make it useable.

My own approach to using these services works like this:

- *Scoop.it* has a very reader-friendly magazine-like format and, like *Twitter*, you can also follow other users to find out what they are reading. I use it to save and share interesting articles from around the web. You can see my collection at *www.scoop.it/t/learning-technology.*
- I use *Pinterest* to capture useful videos and images from around the web that I can then use in classroom and online materials development. *Pinterest* was designed for sharing web-based images (without violating copyright) and has a simple-to-use interface that works well to make the images easy to locate. You can see my video collection at *http://pinterest.com/nikpeachey/video/.*
- I use *Meaki* to collect and organise web-based learning tools. *Meaki* is a visual bookmarking tool, a bit like 'favourites' on your web browser, except that the links are stored online. You browse them by looking through images of the website with short summaries rather than just a title. You can see my collection of video-related tools at *http://tinyurl.com/d6t4c27.*


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Practice makes perfect

Leo Boylan uses student journals to promote good writing habits.

'Excuse me, sir, but how do I get to Carnegie Hall?' 'Practise.'

That old joke still rings true for many pursuits, but none so much as writing. The actual process of gathering one's thoughts and getting them down on paper is by far the best method to improve writing skills at any level of education.

It is particularly challenging to teach courses such as Basic Writing, Critical Writing and Composition and Literature to new students who enter college with varied abilities. I believe the best way to improve their writing from the very first day of class, and throughout the semester, is to use journals. Writing daily entries in a journal offers the students the opportunity to get the practice they need in order to develop critical thinking skills which will lead to self-discovery, improved communication skills, learning and creativity. Journals can also provide the foundation for class discussions, written responses to literature and material for formal essays. They may be shared with partners, groups or the whole class. They offer students the chance to write for themselves, as well as for an audience, in a supportive, non-judgemental environment.

I became a journal writer myself when I was a junior in high school, and I have continued the practice on and off for the last 40 years. When I began teaching, I decided to experiment with journal use in my writing classes and, based on my students' enthusiasm for journal writing and their success in improving their writing skills, I expanded the use of journals into all my courses. Achieving goals through journals depends on numerous factors, but I believe we can start with a basic human premise: people want to gain a better understanding of themselves, their experiences and the world around them. Their curiosity leads them to seek knowledge and, by recording daily occurrences in a journal, they reflect on their world and communicate their thoughts and ideas in a safe environment.

A good habit

Students on remedial writing courses can improve their organisation and development strategies naturally through anecdotes and storytelling and by responding to literature and teacher prompts. Journal entries lead to a better understanding of paragraph and essay development as students explain incidents in chronological order or summarise readings. By listening to entries read aloud by classmates, they hear how other writers use description, examples and comparisons. Teachers may also decide to model aspects of writing by using their own journal entries as examples. As the teacher explains how to develop an essay, with an introduction, a body and a conclusion, the students experience the process in their journals. It is my hope that my students will enjoy the opportunity for self-expression and communication as it becomes integrated into their daily activities, and will it inspire them to become reflective, critical

They offer students the chance to write for themselves, as well as for an audience, in a supportive, non-judgemental environment

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As students read their journals aloud, the others hear them communicating their ideas, arguing their principles and expressing their opinions

thinkers who are open to new ideas. Keeping a journal makes writing a way of life, along with speaking, listening, reading, and thinking – it may even lead to a life-long habit of creative writing.

Other benefits of journal writing include improved reading comprehension and expansion of vocabulary. I use journals regularly in literature classes, and when the students have to answer questions about assigned readings in their journals, they are forced to read more closely for meaning. In-class journal reading increases their self-confidence and listening skills. As students read their journal entries aloud, the others hear them expressing their ideas, communicating their thoughts, arguing their principles and expressing their opinions. They are also exposed to new words and terminology. As in formal essay writing, I encourage dictionary and thesaurus use for building vocabulary and style.

Getting into the habit

I introduce the concept of journals at the very beginning of the semester because it is important that everyone gets into the habit of composing on a daily basis. I suggest that my students buy a spiral notebook for the sole purpose of journal writing. I find that it is important to articulate specific expectations – for example, I stipulate a certain size for their notebooks and suggest that all entries should be at least one page in length.

Often students are unsure of what is expected and the task may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable, so I try to offer as many specific instructions as possible to alleviate their fears. First, I explain that the purpose is to improve their overall writing skills. I tell them that writing journal entries and sharing them with the class will provide material for class discussions and ideas for formal essays and research assignments. I also point out that their journals will be an outlet for self-discovery and creativity, and that when they are asked to write about an assigned reading text, the task and prompts will help them focus on the meaning of the literature. (I make sure that the assigned prompts for writing tasks based on literature always promote thought, require critical thinking – perhaps through identification with characters or situations – and don't allow the students merely to summarise the plot.) Lastly, I tell them that their journals should be written in their own voice, with an audience of fellow students and the teacher in mind.

After answering my students' questions during this introductory period, I ask them to write a practice entry in class. I use a short poem or essay for this purpose. For example, I hand out copies of the poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost, together with worksheets with prompts for responding to the poem. First, I read it aloud and then ask the students to read it. Then I ask them to respond to at least one of the following prompts:

- *What are the implications of the poem?*
- *What would the narrator do if he did not keep his promises?*
- *What do you believe is happening in the poem?*
- *Discuss Frost's use of imagery.*

I then ask that every student write an entry in response to the poem.

The students share their responses in pairs first; this allows them to practise reading their work and to become acquainted with another person in the class. Then they are asked individually to stand at the lectern at the front of the classroom to read their entries. The public reading stage emphasises the importance of their ideas and their role as part of a community of writers. It demonstrates the value of an audience and also serves as an icebreaker in a class where the students may not know each other. A class discussion of the poem follows, and the students see how their writing is integrated into the class and how it is used as a tool for their understanding of literature.

I believe that it is important that every student should have the opportunity to share their work, not just those who volunteer

Sharing the journals

Sharing journal entries in class is an effective catalyst for class discussion, as the students agree or disagree with the opinions of their peers, and it helps them to focus on literature and meaning. Some students look forward to reading their stories and essays aloud. Others dread it. To alleviate this dilemma, I usually put their names in a hat and pick the day's readers by lottery. I believe that it is important that every student should have the opportunity to share their work, not just those who volunteer. By using the lottery system, I ensure that every student has the chance to have their work critiqued by me and the class. It is imperative that constructive criticism is a class effort, not just the domain of the teacher. This will, in effect, promote full class participation and enhance critical thinking.

I schedule journal presentation at regular intervals and encourage the students to share their best work during these readings. The class soon becomes engaged with the readers as they share their deepest secrets, hopes, dreams and realities. It is helpful to make this a festive time for the class. Each student is encouraged to stand behind the lectern and read in a clear, distinct voice, using appropriate inflections. This builds self-confidence and fosters composure. Those in the audience are encouraged to give their undivided attention and to show respect for the individual who is reading – I make sure that any criticism is constructive. Applause is welcomed at the end of each reading: a testimony to the students' emerging voices and growth as writers.

Topics

Topics for journal entries may be assigned or the students may be given a free choice. Freedom of expression can be encouraged by stressing that no topic is off-limits and that privacy will be respected when the students deem their entries to be too personal to share with the class. In this case, writers may fold, tape or staple the pages before the journals are collected.

Practice makes perfect

Journal entries may range from descriptive paragraphs about people and places to subjects of a very personal nature. Some students use their journals as confessionals or places for healing. One student of mine wrote about his twelve-year-old sister, his 'angel', who had died of a blood disease. Another described the experience of being raped as a girl by one of her relatives, and the rage she still feels. One young woman wrote about her numerous suicide attempts. One young man discussed his father's incarceration for murder and his own resolve to become a police officer.

So expect to read about family conflicts, relationships, friendships and sexual encounters as well as personal tragedies, including different kinds of abuse, illness and death. On the other hand, some students will write about situations with friends and families that make the whole class laugh out loud.

It is important to encourage the students to use detail, description, imagery and other tools as they develop their topics. Although I don't recommend grading journals for punctuation and usage, I do ask that the students try to use correct grammar.

Assessment

The question of assessment will arise, and I believe that grading on a holistic basis is crucial. I explain that journal grades depend on the quality of thoughts, ideas and writing, as well as development, creativity and willingness to share. I stress that everyone who works at their journal will succeed. I offer my students the option of using their journals to write short stories, poetry, plays or essays. The important thing is that they are writing. I tell them that the journals will account for 10 to 20 percent of a semester grade. The students need to understand that their journals will be read and assessed, so their writing should be meaningful.

Reading their journals at prearranged intervals allows me to monitor their progress and identify any students who are having difficulty with their writing, as well as those who have problems with reading comprehension. It is important to praise those who are doing well and to encourage and guide those who are having difficulties. Sometimes it is necessary to meet with students individually to explain what is lacking and help them to overcome the problem.

Progress and development

As my students become accustomed to writing on a daily basis, I witness individual progress in critical thinking, organisation, paragraph development and vocabulary. As they wrestle with problems and face conflicts, describe the joys and tribulations of daily life and reflect on what they are reading, many begin to develop creative abilities as poets, playwrights, fiction writers and essayists, especially when they feel their work is appreciated. They also exhibit more confidence in their writing and presentation skills through regular in-class reading of their journal entries.

> *Journals provide a window into our thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions, at a particular time and place in our lives*

Journals cannot *replace* formal essays, which require more thought, planning and organisation, and greater accuracy with punctuation and grammar. However, they can *support* the process of learning the art of essay writing. Students often find it difficult to decide what to write about in formal essays, and journal entries and subsequent class discussion may act as springboards for topics. Teachers should encourage their students to develop their own topics, based on their personal preferences and interests. Many topics develop from literature read in class. For instance, the Greek tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles, offers a variety of subjects to write about, including women's roles in society, civil disobedience and the power of the individual to change society through action.

When we read Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech for a Composition and Literature class, the students were asked to consider whether or not King's dream had come true. While many felt that it had been realised, one student strongly disagreed, and his response became the basis for a research paper in which he argued that the dream had not come to fruition for many people in both urban and rural areas of the United States.

Journals may be tailored to all English courses, as well as to classes in most other disciplines because they serve as a place to respond to ideas, readings and discussions.

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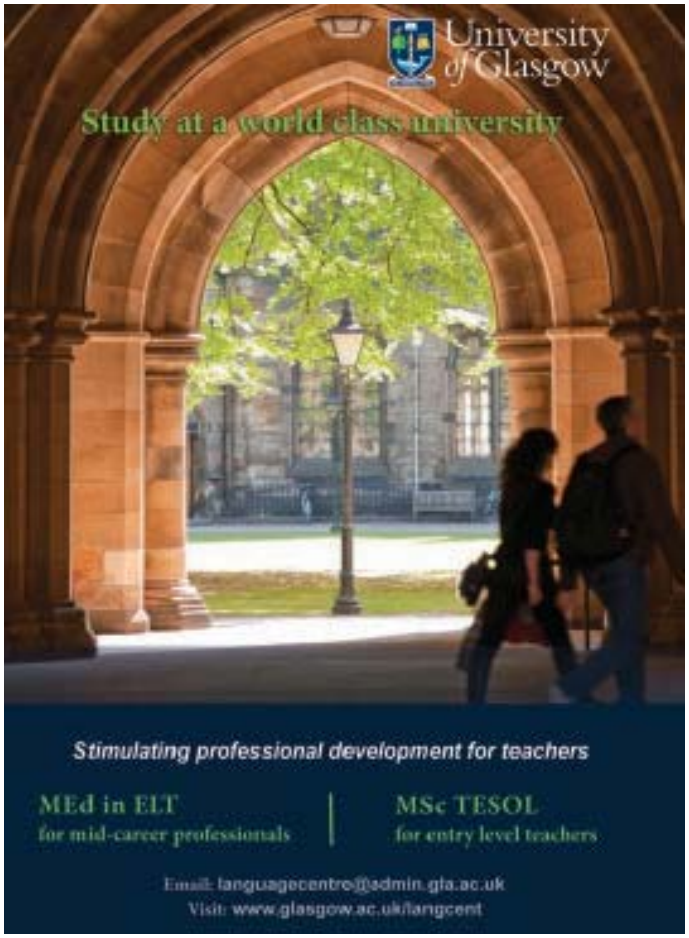
Journals are as individual as our thumb prints. They provide a window into our thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions, at a particular time and place in our lives. They are our own history. I encourage my students to continue writing in their journals after the semester is over. Some day, when they look back at their entries, they may recall special moments. They may see how much they have changed and grown. When I look at a photograph from 20 years ago and see myself, a smiling husband and father with my wife and two young daughters, I see how my family appeared all those years ago. Then I can pick up a journal from the same time period, open to a certain date and read about what we did as a family that day, what was important at that time and what observations I made in that moment. I experience again what I was feeling at that time and in that place. Memories of hopes and dreams long forgotten come to life again. It is a gift to relive these memories in such vivid detail, and it is a gift you can give to your students and to all young writers. ETp



Leo Boylan is an Adjunct Associate Professor of English at Pace University, Pleasantville, NY, USA, and an Adjunct Instructor of English at Westchester Community College, Valhalla, NY. He is faculty advisor for the Pace Drama Alliance.

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One is a lovely number

Emily Edwards

begins a three-part series on one-to-one teaching with a look at planning.

One-to-one lessons are a popular option for many students of English around the world today. Such lessons have a range of focuses, such as general English, business, IELTS exams, EAP (English for Academic Purposes) or ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Teachers may be working in a company that offers one-to-one classes, or students may approach a teacher for private lessons, especially in preparation for IELTS or further study. The benefits of this kind of learning situation can be:

- The students are often highly motivated and working towards a goal.
- The teacher can focus entirely on one student's needs.
- The syllabus can often be tailored to fit these needs.

However, despite being aware of these advantages, I have often found it really difficult to design a well-structured and actually *useful* syllabus for the one-to-one students I have taught. This is what led me to choose one-to-one teaching as the specialism for my DELTA extended assignment, which involved planning a course for an upper-intermediate ESP student in preparation for a vocational college course. I will expand on my findings in this article, and explain how this approach can be useful for any type of one-to-one course.

Syllabus plan

Some teachers may argue that a syllabus is not required – the student and teacher can negotiate the content of the next lesson briefly at the end of each class, and this can sometimes work well, especially when the course of lessons is quite short. However, I feel that a flexible syllabus plan can support the teacher (assisting with preparation) and the learner (it gives them a visible record of progress and also shows them what they have paid for!). This is especially true when a coursebook is not being used. It is, of course, possible (and advisable) to continually re-negotiate the plan according to the student's developing needs, but having an outline to start with can be extremely helpful.

Needs analysis

So the next question is: how does the teacher find out what the student needs in order to make a syllabus plan? At language schools, students are normally tested when they start a course in order to determine their correct level – this is known as a diagnostic test and may include an assessment of grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is possible to test a one-to-one student in the same way, but I've found that the best method is simply to concentrate on determining the learner's strengths and weaknesses – and what they want or need to focus on in the short term. This can involve one or more of the following methods:

- A brief interview or questionnaire about the student's learning background and why they want to take one-to-one English lessons.
- Discussion of the importance of different skills and topic areas using cards (for example, using the blocks of Kathleen Graves' syllabus grid – see page 13): the student can put these in order of difficulty, ease or desire to learn more about.
- Negotiation of a list of key objectives (see page 13 for an example).
- The student can prepare (beforehand) and give a short presentation in the first lesson about themselves and their goals – particularly useful for business or EAP students who would also need feedback anyway on how to give good presentations.

- The teacher can also collect brochures, prospectuses or general information about the student's company or planned university course or exam (such as IELTS), in order to help prepare the syllabus plan.

A general framework

One of the most important steps in needs analysis, and which is of most help in designing the syllabus, is drafting a list of key objectives. With these to hand, a syllabus can then be sketched out which is based on these goals. In designing the course for my DELTA project, I used Kathleen Graves' suggestion of the key syllabus components, or 'syllabus grid', to help me know what should be included:

Participatory processes	Learning strategies	Content	
Culture	Tasks and activities	Competencies	
Listening skills	Speaking skills	Reading skills	Writing skills
Functions	Notions and topics	Communicative situations	
Grammar	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	

The elements contained in the grid above show what can be included in an all-encompassing course, and the various components can be selected according to the needs of the learner.

The easiest way I have found to plan a one-to-one course is by using a matrix, with a box for each lesson, for which specific options can then be chosen. The following plan shows one week of a course, where the student wants two hours of tuition per day, so the letters A to F each represent one hour:

Day and time	Matrix – option(s) to be chosen daily	
Monday 10 am–12 pm	**A**	**B**
Wednesday 10 am–12 pm	**C**	**D**
Friday 10 am–12 pm	**E**	**F**

Depending on the type of course, student and/or context, either a detailed or a simpler plan of what A to F actually involve would work well, and I will now give an example of each.

A detailed plan

The following plan shows one of the weeks of an eight-week course. The student wanted to prepare for starting a Diploma in Aromatherapy, so she wanted a course which developed this specific vocabulary, as well as preparing her for life at a vocational college in Australia. Her objectives, which we drafted together, were as follows:

1. I will develop my range of specific vocabulary related to the study of aromatherapy.
2. I will improve my reading skills, especially reading long articles on the topic of aromatherapy.
3. I will build on my academic writing skills so that I can write assignments and reports.
4. I will develop my ability to listen to lectures and presentations, take notes and answer comprehension questions based on the listening.
5. I will continuously practise and improve my speaking skills and fluency, especially when participating in discussions about aromatherapy.
6. I will build on my ability to use grammar accurately when speaking and writing.
7. I will develop study habits that will help me to continue the learning process in the future.

All of these objectives could be slightly adapted to make them relevant to any other learner and their needs.

I then used the specific objectives above to design a detailed weekly plan, ensuring that most of the student's objectives were at least partially covered each week:

Day	Lesson outline	Matrix: divided into six 'options'	
Monday	• Use learner's material to generate discussion. • Option(s) chosen from matrix: eg A and C. ** • **Homework** Make vocabulary cards (after option C).	**A** **Input: Reading** Reading an aromatherapy text to develop skimming and scanning skills, using a time limit to improve speed. Identifying vocabulary in context: phrases, chunks and collocations.	**B** **Input: Listening** Listening to a lecture about health issues (*YouTube* video) to improve listening for gist and detail, and to develop note-taking strategies.
Wednesday	• Option(s) chosen from matrix: eg B and F. • **Homework** Write short responses to a set of questions (after option F).	**C** **Learning Strategies: Dictionaries and Vocabulary** Discussing use of dictionary and ways of recording vocabulary to match learning style. Record and recycle vocabulary learnt so far.	**D** **Output: Speaking** Discussing a variety of topics (linked to material used in options A and B, or material brought in by learner). Feedback on linguistic mistakes (error correction) and pronunciation.
Friday	• Option(s) chosen from matrix: eg D and E. • Remedial work and formative test/quiz with feedback. • **Homework** Case studies to read and analyse.	**E** **Focus on Vocabulary** High-meaning content words. Related to this week's topic, especially anatomy, and/or the input used in options A and B.	**F** **Output: Writing** Identifying the key words and task set in typical academic writing questions in order to provide a full answer.

** **Suggestions of which options to choose are provided here, but selection would depend on both the learner and the context.**

One is a lovely number

A simpler plan

In many cases, it may not be appropriate or practical to make a plan as detailed as the one shown above; a simpler one is quick to write and easy to use. The following grid of six squares could be used for a six-week or six 'block' course, in which each block represents one hour. In lessons, the student can negotiate with the teacher which block to focus on for the following class.

Plan – Week 2		
A Focus on reading (aromatherapy text)	**B** Focus on listening (lecture about health)	**C** Focus on learning strategies (dictionaries and vocabulary)
D Focus on speaking (about health issues) and pronunciation	**E** Focus on vocabulary development	**F** Focus on writing (addressing the task)

Key things to include

In designing any syllabus for one-to-one learners, it is important to keep the following points in mind:

- Include a range of skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking), varied according to the student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Balance input (reading and listening) with output (speaking and writing).
- Focus on developing vocabulary, as well as reviewing and recycling new words in subsequent lessons.
- Give specialised feedback and error correction (on pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar) each lesson. This should be relatively easy because of the focus on just one student, and this will be really useful to them.
- Keep the syllabus varied to challenge and motivate the student.
- Use a variety of assessment tasks (eg vocabulary tests, roleplays, recording and grading a presentation), which can be very informal, to give the student a sense of progress.
- Include space in the syllabus for the student to bring in their own material to work on (eg an assignment they have to complete, an email they need to write).

Continuous negotiation with the learner

A key feature of one-to-one programmes is that, according to Priscilla Osborne, they cannot be 'fixed in stone' because what happens in each lesson will determine what happens next, and I think this is certainly one of the benefits of this type of teaching. So, as both Osborne and Peter Wilberg note, it is important to keep in mind that one-to-one courses demand continuous re-evaluation to ensure that the course content continues to meet with what the student actually wants and needs. Just ask your student at the end of each set of lessons (eg every five or ten hours) how they are finding the course, and what they might want to change. Another option is to conduct a new needs analysis every so often, using one of the methods suggested in the 'needs analysis' section above.

Five steps to planning a one-to-one course

In conclusion, these five steps can be followed to plan, design and implement a specialised one-to-one syllabus for any English language learner:

1. Start with a needs analysis (either pre-course or during the first lesson).
2. Draft a syllabus plan and check it with your student.
3. Each lesson, choose a topic or 'block' for the next lesson (so you know what to plan for).
4. Plan carefully for each lesson, but also be prepared to adapt to what the student has brought along that day in terms of materials or ideas.
5. Continuously re-negotiate with the student as their needs (and priorities) change.

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Emily Edwards works as a senior teacher at English Language Company, a language school in Australia. She has recently completed the Cambridge Delta as well as an MA in Applied Linguistics, and her particular interests are syllabus design, motivation, EAP and teacher training.

e.c.edwards@hotmail.co.uk



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‘Heaven does not talk’

Phillip Brown has some down-to-earth observations about teachers and silence.

Some very valid observations are made about Student Talking Time (STT) in Marianne Raynaud’s article in Issue 75 of ET*p*. Strategies should be adopted and opportunities should be created to give maximum scope for STT in the language classroom, based on a proper appreciation of the fact that students need to know how to take advantage of such strategies and opportunities in L2. Unless the difficulties facing the students themselves are properly understood, it is easy to understand how teachers, themselves faced with a sea of silence, can be afflicted with the ‘disease to please’ and still make no real progress towards the goal of getting their students to speak.

However, in the effort, quite right and proper, to give maximum scope to the students, teachers may find themselves troubled by an alternative disease, namely a *phobia* about talking too much. It looks as though some kind of balance should be struck between STT and TTT (Teacher Talking Time), one which gives sufficient opportunity for the students to do what they should be doing and at the same time allows teachers to teach, and to teach in such a way that they don’t end up sacrificing their personalities to the extent that they become no more than facilitating automata. Facilitating automata may be the stuff of the future, when human beings are totally replaced by machines and holograms, but it is not a future I would ever want to be part of. It is teachers as *people* that would, in such a future, be eliminated. And it is this question of *personality* that I would like to pursue in this article.



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Silence

There are many anecdotes about the Chinese philosopher Confucius, and one concerning his pedagogical methods is worth considering here. It is based on what he considered to be an essential prerequisite of teaching, namely the silent, pervasive personality and character of the teacher. On one occasion he is supposed to have said *‘I would much rather not have to talk’*, to which his disciple Tzu-kung responded, *‘If our master did not talk, what should we disciples have to pass on?’* Confucius then replied, *‘Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby. Heaven does not talk.’* (Perhaps it was one of the great man’s bad days; he had probably exhausted himself and, finding himself in front of a sea of bewilderment, wondered whether he was really in the right job. Does that sound familiar?)

It might appear that what worried Confucius should worry us also, and that he would be quick to advocate what has been called the *Silent Way*. One way of pruning TTT is to cut it right back to the roots and dispense with it altogether. This might seem absurd, yet it is astonishing to what absurdities we may sometimes be reduced. But the so-called *Silent Way* cannot be what Confucius would have endorsed, since central to his idea of what teaching is, or should be, is the power and educating influence of the personality and character of the teacher – and it is hard to see how primacy could be given to this by shutting teachers up altogether. Tzu-kung was right to protest that what is unexpressed cannot be passed on! And, surely, teaching is all about passing things on.

As a crucial means of verbal communication, a language must be expressible; its rules must be explicable and explicated, both by example and by analysis; and explication and analysis cannot be rendered by an appeal to 'Heaven'. That a language teacher should talk is, therefore, a platitude so obvious that calling it a platitude is itself platitudinous.

Personality

There can be little doubt that Confucius's pupils loved to hear him speak. He was a model of wisdom and, no doubt, his language was a model of how it should be spoken. They must have learnt a lot from that. What, of course, enthralled them was the *personality* of their teacher, and it was certainly not the personality of the teacher that was central to the philosophy of the *Silent Way*. Why don't we speak of having the 'right personality' to be a teacher? Isn't this the most important requirement of all? Of course, *personality* is a complex concept, a kind of catch-all, and we may disagree over this or that element or over questions of degree, but patience, at least a smattering of humour, consideration and respect for others, and commitment to the task of teaching, all these would no doubt be accepted by the majority of us as fundamental requirements of good teaching. You might find personality which is uninspiring, but you can't have inspiration without personality. Perhaps Confucius was right to give personality primacy.

Central to Confucius's idea of what teaching should be, is the power and educating influence of the personality and character of the teacher

Excellence

So, how should we rate silence? I should like to say that *silence* is 'thin'. Think, for example, of fashion models on the catwalk. They are dangerously and lamentably thin, and would not, I think, have suited Confucius, Yet they are revered as models of excellence. Oh dear! We really must take care, lest what is dangerous and lamentable should become a model of excellence in the teaching of English, or for that matter of any language – or indeed of anything at all.

What may be listed as the requirements of good teaching are there to guide and to help, not to hinder

I remember a model of excellence. She was a teacher of Italian. If, during one of her lessons, you asked her a question which even remotely impinged upon Italian politics, culture or history, she would fly off on a tangent and talk and talk and talk. No matter, we loved to hear her speak. It was an exercise in listening comprehension, without the necessity of being tested and graded and stressed out. In any case, it was a different kind of listening comprehension: we were listening to how Italian *should* be spoken, to how the natives do it when they do it well. We weren't slow to comment or ask questions. We were content with any kind of response, simple or complex, because the subject was difficult and we felt that we, too, were making a contribution to a serious matter. Without having planned it, without having engineered it, she got her students engaged – and all at their own pace and competence. We all felt privileged to hear someone speaking in the language we were learning. She gave us a model of excellence that was due to her inspirational personality, and it was because of this, not despite it, that her students learnt Italian. She was an inspiration: no doubt because she was inspired herself!

The requirements of good teaching should be tempered by wisdom to avoid misunderstandings about what 'good teaching' is

Good teaching

What may be listed as the requirements of good teaching are there to guide and to help, not to hinder; they should, indeed, be abstractions from what is already done, rather as the rules of grammar are abstractions from language in use. But they must not be allowed to get in the way of good teaching.

The idea that TTT imposes limitations is now almost canonical, and those mindful of the requirements of good teaching laid down by such august bodies as the British Council Inspectorate may be fearful of opening their mouths lest they trespass on hallowed ground. Of course, it will not do to argue, in defence of this notion, that Confucius himself would have endorsed it. On the contrary, the anecdote must be taken together with the reply of his disciple: that unless the teacher speaks, nothing will be said at all! Confucius may appeal to Heaven, but we look to Heaven in vain for an analysis of verb tenses and the intricacies of lexis, for the explication of pronunciation rules and discourse markers.

Licence should be tempered by the requirements of good teaching to avoid chaos and confusion; likewise, the requirements of good teaching should be tempered by wisdom to avoid misunderstandings about what 'good teaching' is. For it is fallacy to suppose that strict adherence to a set of depersonalised criteria can constitute good teaching. Good teaching will pay attention to such criteria, but only if and when such criteria can be tempered by the personality of both the teacher and of the class. Granted the need for requirements, teaching can be

'Heaven does not talk'

mechanical, lifeless and forgettable, and such epithets remind me of the kind of 'lesson plans' that win applause from many of those who seriously believe that they can teach teachers a thing or two! Goodness knows how the progressive educationalist A S Neill would have coped with that – no doubt hopelessly.

Criteria

I recall an elderly woman who established her own school, which specialised in mathematics. She would employ people to teach with her. What about trained teachers and teacher training? *'Teacher training?'* she would exclaim. *'Well, first I see whether a person* ***can*** *teach! If I see that they can teach, then and only then do I start to think about training them. And more often than not, it isn't necessary, and it might even get in the way.'* She was unimpressed with dossiers, references and qualifications or any kind of institutionalised gimmickry. She would see for herself, and what she looked for was *personality* and with it the ability to inspire, to get things across, to pass stuff on. And if that meant on occasion talking their heads off, well so be it. Did her teachers really succeed in teaching the subject, though? Of course they did.

> *Models of teaching should never be permitted to underestimate, let alone ignore, the personality of the teacher nor yet the personality of the class*

And she considered them superior to traditionally trained teachers. You wouldn't dare talk to her about the limitations imposed by TTT!

Are we wrong to talk about the requirements of good teaching, then? Not at all. But the danger is that such requirements may be seen as a total abstraction from that which gives them life, in much the same way as the rules of grammar may wrongly be divorced from that which gives birth to them. Models of teaching should never be permitted to underestimate, let alone *ignore*, the personality of the teacher nor yet the personality of the class. To bend the words of St Augustine, one might be tempted to say *'Love teaching and do what you will'*: a dictum that contains its own corrective to the chaos of wild licence. If it is, indeed, teaching you love, you will be mindful of such things as TTT; you will be mindful of the requirements of good teaching, as a matter of course. Quite simply, love of teaching imposes its own requirements.

> *In real life, the ability to ad-lib, to make it up as you go along, seems indispensable and quite the norm*

It is not that the requirements will be imposed upon you from outside, for that makes it sound as though there is no more to teaching than following the requirements. It is like saying that all you need to be a good actor is to learn your lines. In fact, some of the best lines are never learnt at all. In real life, the ability to ad-lib, to make it up as you go along, seems indispensable and quite the norm.

Essentials

Temper requirement with wisdom. Mencius tells us that Confucius abstained from extremes. To go too far is as bad as not going far enough. All the so-called requirements of good teaching should be approached with a generous degree of circumspection, for when they are strict and strictly applied, they are dangerous, and when they are not dangerous, they are ludicrous. What can be said about TTT can also be applied to, for example, the *pace* of a lesson. Just how long should the various stages of a lesson be? Well, how long is a piece of string? How long do you *want* it to be? And can you really say in advance how long it *ought* to be. What right do you have to introduce 'ought' into the discussion at all? And this with no consideration of personality, as though we are applying a rule quite mechanically, like an actor saying the lines of a play without appropriate feeling – reciting Shakespeare like a railway timetable!

William James, the nineteenth-century American psychologist, advised teachers to prepare their lessons meticulously – and then to dump all their notes into the trash-can on the way to the classroom. Heaven forbid! But then, Heaven is not charged with the task of teaching and really has nothing to say on the matter.

James recognised the importance of lesson preparation, lesson planning, timing, pace, TTT and all the rest. But he also saw that all this was useless unless teachers feel comfortable with themselves; and they can't feel comfortable with themselves unless they *are* themselves; just as actors feel comfortable with the parts they play. (The actor Thora Hird said that for her, this depended on her shoes: she had to have the right shoes, and then everything else fell into place. She worried about the lines after that, not before.)

James knew what a mess we make of things. Even when we attempt to bring order out of chaos, we devise *requirements*, or *essentials* and *criteria*, which we then seek to impose with an iron fist, forgetting that hands of iron are not the hands we need when handling fine porcelain.

★ ★ ★

I hear a protest from those who believe they can teach teachers a thing or two: *'Oh, but we don't seek to impose anything with a fist of iron.'* Well, perhaps not, but they should take care that they are not perceived to be doing so, lest they spoil many a good teacher and many a good lesson. ETp

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Dr Phillip Brown teaches English at Studio School, Cambridge, UK. He has a PhD in Philosophy from St John's College, Cambridge, and has a continuing interest in his area of specialisation. He plays classical guitar as a hobby.

phillip.brown7@ntlworld.com

Less is more

Robert Buckmaster

exploits minimal texts for maximum benefit.

Many writers, including Scott Thornbury, Martin Parrott and Alan Maley, have argued for the use of short texts in language teaching. This article shows a way of exploiting such a text in a lesson.

But first, why should texts be short?

- They should be short so learners don't get bored with them.
- They should be short so that the whole text and all its parts can be dealt with completely.
- They should be short so that not a lot of time is spent on reading, but a lot of time is spent on learning.

Texts should be many and various, of different genres, woven in connected strands throughout the course and of intrinsic interest to learners. They should be dealt with intensively so that at the end of the lesson, as Scott Thornbury has suggested, the learners are in a 'state of grace' vis à vis the text: that is, they understand it completely – all the grammar, all the lexis and all the collocations and colligations.

PURPoseful texts

Not all texts need to be dealt with in the same way, with the same sequence of activities: different texts will lend themselves to different types of activities. The key is to deal with all the salient aspects of a particular text in the best and most appropriate way.

There is, however, a basic four-stage process that can be used with all them: PURP.

Prepare for the text.
Understand the text.
Respond to the text.
Process the text.

A text with a PURPose

What follows is an example of a short text lesson with a commentary. Note that the text is a specially written version of a news item about an armed robber who made his getaway by floating downriver on an inner tube. The information was drawn from several sources on the internet and was written to challenge students of intermediate level and above. The text is in the box below.

Escape by tube

Seattle police are looking for an armed bank robber who used an inner tube to get away from the scene of the crime.

The man stole a money bag from a security guard outside a bank and then raced across the car park to a nearby creek and floated away on the inner tube.

The robbery happened near a branch of the Bank of America on US Route 2 in Monroe, Seattle.

According to police spokeswoman Debbie Willis, the robber, wearing a surgical mask, walked up to the guard, who was carrying two canvas money bags, at about 11 am on Tuesday as he walked from the bank to an armoured car parked outside.

He sprayed the guard with pepper spray then grabbed a bag of the money and ran to the creek. Some witnesses say that he got into an inner tube or an inflatable boat and floated downstream towards the Skykomish River.

Investigators have no leads so far, but believe that accomplices could have been waiting for him near the river. An inner tube was later found 200 yards downstream of the car park.

Analysing the text

It is good to know your text intimately before you use it. The vocabulary profiler at *The Compleat Lexical Tutor* (*www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng*) can help you analyse your chosen text. You paste the text into the profiler and submit it. It compares the words in the text with lists of the most common words of English (1–1,000; 1,001–2,000) and an Academic Word List (AWL). You can then see the text with the words colour-coded according to the list they occur

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Less is more

in. This gives you a really good visual idea of which words are in which list and their distribution in the text. You can then judge the level of difficulty of the text and decide which words, if any, you will need to pre-teach, and also which words you might sensibly ask the learners to guess from the context. When I entered my text, I found that almost 73% of the words occur in the list of the most common 1,000 words, about 13% of the words are in the second most common list (1,001–2,000) and under 2% are in the AWL. This leaves just under 13% which do not appear in any of these lists.



Exploiting the text

Task 1: Prediction

Write the text title (*Escape by tube*) on the board and ask the learners what they think the text will be about. Elicit ideas from the learners and write them on the board.

Commentary

This task prepares the learners for their first encounter with the text. By making predictions, their schemata are activated and they have an investment in reading the text to find out if their predictions were correct. They have taken the first step towards bridging the information gap which exists between their current state of knowledge prior to reading the text and their knowledge after reading it.

You might want to pre-teach some vocabulary at this stage, though pre-teaching vocabulary is an implicit admission that your learners don't have enough vocabulary for the text. Alternatively, you might want to activate the learners' schemata further through some text vocabulary. One way to do this is to use a word cloud. Above is a word cloud for this text (created at *www.wordle.net*).



This word cloud could also be used in a later lesson as a prompt for a text reconstruction task: give the learners the cloud and ask them to rewrite the text.

Task 2: Listening

Read the text aloud to the class (this is analogous to someone reading an interesting newspaper article aloud to a friend). The learners listen to see if their predictions were correct and to answer the questions which a newspaper article should answer: *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why* and *how*.

Check whose predictions were closest and the answers to the *what*, *why*, etc questions.

Commentary

This first encounter with the text is based on meaning. The learners use their current knowledge of English to complete the task as best they can, guided by their predictions and the tasks of seeing if their predictions were correct and answering questions.

Task 3: Reaction

Ask the learners for their reaction to the text: *Was it interesting? Were you surprised? What do you think about the thief and his plan? Do you think he will be caught?*

Commentary

These questions allow the learners to respond to the text and express their feelings and ideas about it.

Task 4: Reconstruction 1

Give pairs or small groups of learners the text cut up into sentences or paragraphs and ask them to reconstruct it.

Monitor, prompt as necessary and check as a class. Ask the learners to justify their choices, and check grammar and vocabulary, the structure of the text, the choices the writer made, the subjects of the sentences, etc in detail. You will have to be completely familiar with the text itself and know what you want to focus on in this stage.

Commentary

This task focuses on the structure and the language of the text. During the checking of the task, problems with grammar and vocabulary can be cleared up. Grammatical choices are analysed, eg *Why is 'the' used here?* Vocabulary meaning and collocation and colligation are focused on. The learners will notice points of the language with which they are already familiar, and may be exposed to structures they are not familiar with.

Task 5: Reconstruction 2

Collect the slips of paper with the cut-up text so that the learners no longer have a record of it. Then give them a copy of the text with gaps (see below) and ask them to complete it. This gap-fill focuses on single items, eg verb forms or prepositions, etc. Monitor and help the learners to complete the task. Check answers with the class.

Escape by tube

Seattle police are looking for an (1) _____ bank robber who used an inner tube to (2) _____ from the scene of the crime.

The man stole a (3) _____ bag from a security guard outside a bank and then raced across the car (4) _____ to a nearby creek and (5) _____ away on the inner tube.

The robbery (6) _____ near a (7) _____ of the Bank of America on US Route 2 in Monroe, Seattle.

According to police spokeswoman Debbie Willis, the robber, (8) _____ a surgical mask, walked up to the guard, who was (9) _____ two canvas

money bags, at about 11 am on Tuesday as he walked from the bank to an (10) _____ car parked outside.

He (11) _____ the guard with pepper spray then grabbed a bag of the money and ran to the creek. Some (12) _____ say that he got (13) _____ an inner tube or an inflatable boat and (14) _____ downstream towards the Skykomish River.

Investigators have no (15) _____ so far but believe that (16) _____ could have been waiting for him near the river. An inner tube was later found 200 yards (17) _____ of the car park.

Commentary

This task focuses on the language of the text while giving most of it as support. The learners have to complete the text using their knowledge of English, what they noticed in the previous text reconstruction task, any notes they made and their memory. (If your learners are anything like my teenage learners, then they will not want to make notes, but if you do this task sequence several times, they will come round to the idea and realise that reading and understanding are not enough for learning: they have to process the text.)

Task 6: Reconstruction 3

Collect the completed gapped text and give the learners another version of it which has some phrases highlighted in bold, but with the words in those phrases mixed up (see below). Tell them to reorder the words so that they make sense in the sentences and that these reconstituted sentences make sense in the wider text.

Escape by tube

Seattle police are looking for an armed bank robber who used an inner tube **scene get away from to the crime of the**.

The man **bag a bank stole guard a a security money from outside** and then raced across the car park to a nearby creek and floated away on the inner tube.

The robbery happened **a of Monroe America near the Bank in of on US Route 2, Seattle branch**.

According to police spokeswoman Debbie Willis, the robber, wearing a surgical mask, **who up to the, was carrying Tuesday walked about two bank bags, at walked money 11 am on guard as he from canvas the** to an armoured car parked outside.

He sprayed **spray money with bag the then grabbed guard a pepper of the** and ran to the creek. Some witnesses say that he got into an inner tube or **towards River floated and boat downstream the an Skykomish inflatable**.

Investigators have no leads so far but believe that **waiting near could for river him been the have accomplices**. An inner tube was later found 200 yards downstream of the car park.

Commentary

This task focuses on longer stretches of language than are normal. This means that word order, collocation, noun modification and colligation can all be dealt with. Such exercises have an extremely valuable part to play in language learning. Learners again have to activate their knowledge of the language and their memory of the text to complete the task. This is in-depth processing of the language in the text.

Task 7: Summary

Ask the learners to summarise the key information in the text in one sentence. For example:

A man robbed a bank guard in a car park in Monroe and escaped by floating down a creek in an inner tube.

Commentary

This task focuses the learners' attention on the essential information of the text and how this is presented. They have to deal with the text on a word-by-word basis and make decisions on what to include in their summary and how present this in coherent English. This is a very powerful exercise.

Task 8: Speaking

Ask the learners to discuss some of the questions and do some of the activities described below.

1. Is this a serious crime? Why? Why not?
2. Why do criminals commit crimes?
3. Was it a good plan? Why? What were the risks?
4. What do you think the guard felt as he was approached by a man in the car park?
5. Do you think the police will catch the thief?
6. What punishment should the thief get if he is caught and convicted? Why?
7. Do you know any similar crime stories? Tell the class.
8. Imagine you are the thief – tell your friend how you committed the robbery. Include as many details as you can: How did you prepare? What exactly did you do? How did you feel?
9. What do you think the guard said to the police? Roleplay the conversation.
10. Imagine you are a police investigator: write a report about the robbery.
11. Prepare a Wanted poster.
12. Search the internet for more information about this crime and report to the class on your findings.

Commentary

These activities extend beyond the text into speaking activities. The text is now being used as a springboard for other language work.

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This very intensive way of dealing with a short text focuses the learners' attention on all aspects of the text – its meaning and grammar and vocabulary. The learners have to use their memories and focus on connected text to complete the tasks. All classroom texts should be dealt with in a similar way: if you read texts in a superficial manner with your students, then they are missing out on a great deal of language learning and practice. It is not enough just to ask some comprehension questions and focus on a language point or two. Too much reading in class is undertaken with a minimal-success approach. We need a 'complete text' approach to language learning, and the PURP sequence and the kind of activities outlined here are one way of providing it.



Robert Buckmaster is the Director of Studies at International House, Riga, Latvia. He has been teaching and training in eastern Europe and central Asia for over 20 years and is working on a new pedagogical grammar of English.

robert@rbuckmaster.com

Reading night

Constanze Schkölziger tells of exciting times after hours.

Reading is a key skill for primary school pupils, so it makes sense to look for ways of making it a wonderful, relaxing and even exciting part of their school lives.

The Kant Primary School in Berlin does this by putting on special events called 'Reading nights'. In the past, individual class teachers have organised these events by themselves for their own classes, but our 'Reading night' in May this year was a huge event, during which all 358 of our students were read to by the entire teaching staff, with the help of guest readers: school alumni, pupils' parents and grandparents – and even actors and film producers. Everyone was involved – from the headmaster to the caretaker and even the kitchen ladies. For one day and one night, the school turned into a big reading circus. Even the youngest children (in year one) had a lot of fun reading and listening to stories.

Planning the event

Before this big event, we made preparations to cater for all the different levels of reading and all the different interest groups in order to make it an unforgettable festival of reading.

Although much of the reading was going to be done in German – the first language of the vast majority of our pupils – as an English teacher, I thought it would be a great idea to include the reading of English literature as well, giving the older students with some English ability and those native speakers of English who attend the school the opportunity to listen to books read in English. This





was the first time that we had included an English reading element in the event.

Choosing books

First of all, we conducted a survey in all our classes to find out what sort of books the children like to read, and we then took the results back to teacher planning groups and looked for appropriate books. We researched different types of literature in order to identify a range of books which the children would find enjoyable. We also lined up a number of guest readers and some of them made their own suggestions for books.

Just the thought of conducting part of the event in English got me excited, and I soon had many ideas for possible books to be read. As the main English teacher in the school, I made the final choice of the book which was to be read in English. I decided on a crime thriller as the children like to read exciting literature.

Finding readers

The guest readers were found by asking every pupil's family several months in advance whether any of them would like to come and read. They were also asked if they knew anyone else outside the family who would be interested in taking part as a guest reader.

We were amazed by how many people were happy to read for the children in our school, and by asking for readers from outside we got many interesting people from different parts of society to participate in our event. These included several well-known actors, film producers and even politicians who were former students or friends of the school. The English book was read by a native speaker. All the guest readers were each given a small present at the end, sponsored by the Kant Primary Support Association.

We were delighted with the overwhelming response to our call for



readers and, in the end, we had to make a shortlist because there were more people available to read than we could take. However, we promised any 'rejected' readers that they would be included in the team the next time round.

Reading night

Running the event

The reading festival started at two o'clock on the first day and went on until eleven the following morning. It was organised in a rotation system. Groups of between five and ten pupils were read to for around 40 to 45 minutes and, at the end of this period, they could move to another group and listen to a different book.

It was important to find out in advance how many children would be in each group, so the pupils had to sign up to lists. By doing this, we could see how many were expected in each group and each pupil had their own schedule to follow. Between the readings, there was always a ten-minute break to give everyone the chance to change groups in time for the next reading session.

Several pupils chose to attend the English reading. We didn't do any pre-teaching of vocabulary, but the children were given the title of the book in advance and had the opportunity to ask questions. The reader was careful to make sure that the children were all following the story during the reading.

Between six and eight in the evening we all had dinner in the dining room, where our caretaker and the kitchen ladies had prepared a barbecue. Later in the evening, a special guest read to the older children in the assembly room.

Reading at night

From nine to eleven, the children could finally read by themselves with books they had brought from home or those provided by us from our reading circles. Some of the pupils chose to read English magazines and short stories in English, which were provided by the school. All the children had their own little 'nest', equipped with a mattress and a sleeping bag where they could read. They could bring small lamps or even torches. They were surprisingly calm and focused. We teachers stayed with the children from our classes and also read books by ourselves.

The morning after the night before

It had been a long night! The morning started with a good breakfast in the dining room and then we started to talk in our classes about our experiences of the 'Reading night'. The pupils went home tired but happy at 11 am. Everyone thought it was a great success and it gave us the inspiration to hold more similar events. The whole ethos of reading got a boost – even with the parents; it is particularly important to get them on board as they have such a strong influence on their children. Most importantly, the children loved it so much, that we have now decided to make it a fixed date in our yearly school calendar. ETp



Tips

Here are some tips in case you would like to hold a 'Reading night' in your school:

- ★ Make sure you have permission to stay overnight in the school with the children (you will need the agreement of the parents and the school authority).
- ★ Check out the rules and regulations that govern staying overnight with children in a school.
- ★ Get as many people involved as possible (neighbours, former pupils, parents, grandparents, etc).
- ★ Build a team of teachers who will take responsibility for organising different areas of the event – issuing invitations to different people, organising the catering, searching for books, etc.
- ★ Plan your event several months in advance.
- ★ Make sure you have the necessary finances to run the event.



Constanze Schkölziger has worked as a primary school teacher in Germany for 25 years. She specialises in German, maths, PE and English. As an English teacher, she won a foreign language competition in Saxony Anhalt in 2006 for her work with children who presented a play called *The Three Little Pigs*.

conny@schkoelziger.co.uk

Over the wall ...



Alan Maley

ponders what it means to be a teacher.

In this article I shall be looking at some books which attempt to convey the essence of what it is to be a teacher. Not a language teacher, but a teacher focused on the bond between teacher and taught – that magical relationship that the best teachers manage somehow, in the face of every kind of obstacle, to create. These are all highly personal accounts of how an individual found a key to opening up his or her learners. I will not be dealing with the highly influential contributions of people like Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, John Dewey, etc. What I want to focus on is not educational theory with a big T. Rather, I wish to revisit accounts of lived experience in sometimes difficult circumstances.



Teacher

One of the best examples is Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher*. This book documents the author's experiences working with underprivileged, mainly Maori, children in a small primary school in rural New Zealand in the 1950s. It is an unruly, loosely-organised book, yet it overflows with the exuberance of the kids and the passion of the teacher who took the trouble to let them learn. Part 1, *Creative Teaching*, recounts how she discovered what she calls 'organic learning' – starting from what is real and important to the child. *'… these first books ... must be made out of the stuff of the child itself. I reach a hand into the mind of the child, bring out a handful of the stuff I find there, and use that as our first working material. Whether it's good or bad stuff, violent or placid stuff, coloured or dun … within the security of it, the Maori finds that words have intense meaning for him, from which cannot help but arise a love of reading.'* The key vocabulary she works with comes from the words the children find significant: *cried*, *hit*, *fight*, *kiss*, *ghost* and the like. The readers they use are a far cry from the anodyne offerings in the 'Janet and John' series with which many UK readers of a certain age will be familiar. She engages the children in writing, stories, movement (dance and sport), nature walks and art. It looks chaotic but, as she says: *'I like unpredictability and I like gaiety; I like peace in the world and I like interesting people, and all this means that I like life in its organic shape, and that's just what you get in an infant room where the creative vent widens.'* In Part 2, *Life in a Maori School*, she draws on her diary to give an even more personal account of the life of the school, including some wonderful extracts of verbal exchanges and written work. There are some striking black and white photographs throughout the book, too, which help convey the flavour of her teaching. A final quote: *'But there are two kinds of order, and which is the one we wish for? Is it the conscious order that ends up as respectability? Or is it the unconscious order that looks like chaos …?'*



An Experiment in Education

Sybil Marshall's *An Experiment in Education* describes her 17 years in a rural primary school in deepest Essex, UK, in the 1940s and 1950s. There are many resonances with *Teacher* – the mixed ages, backgrounds and levels of the children, the small but close rural community, and the teacher's search for a way of opening the children to the world and the world to the children. Marshall starts off with art, and gradually comes to

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incorporate poetry, music, dance, puppetry and all the expressive arts into what she terms 'a symphonic' approach. She roots the whole of her curriculum in the reality of the village community, weaving the subjects – history, geography, maths, biology, English, and so on – into a seamless cloth. She, like Ashton-Warner, has to find her own way, *'not having had one single minute's training to uphold me in facing a class of thirty-odd children …'*. She rails against those *'who worship at the shrine of the fixed and dependable, of the scheme, the record, the timetable'*. The book is full of radical insights, and is generously illustrated with samples of the children's writing and artwork. Most striking is her own openness to learning: *'I was being educated all over again by the children I was supposed to be teaching.'* Would that we were all so open!



Teacher Man

Anyone who has read Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* will be prepared for the iconoclastic, unconventional and humorous way he tells of his life as a teacher in New York in *Teacher Man*. The book is a mixture of autobiographical incidents relating to both his life as a teacher and his marriage, and some highly insightful and hard-headed observations about what it is to be a teacher. In Part 1, *It's a Long Road to Pedagogy*, he describes his fight to survive in the rough environment of a series of deadbeat New York schools, where *'All the ingredients of difficulty were wrapped up in this one group: gender clash, generation clash, racial clash'*. He is faced by a variety of different characters in every class: *'the complainer, the clown, the goody-goody, the beauty queen, the volunteer for everything, the jock, the intellectual, the momma's boy, the mystic, the sissy, the lover, the critic, the jerk, the religious fanatic who sees sin everywhere, the brooding one who sits in the back staring at the desk, the happy one, the saint who finds good in all creatures …'* His own role is no less varied: *'I was more than a teacher. And less. In the high school classroom you are a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinarian, a singer, a low-level scholar, a clerk, a referee, a clown, a counsellor, a dress-code enforcer, a conductor, an apologist, a philosopher …'* He concludes: *'You have to find yourself. You have to develop your own style, your own techniques. You have to tell the truth or you'll be found out … it isn't a matter of virtue or high morality.'* He survives by sheer tenacity and native wit, and by finding ways of turning happenings to his advantage. There is the hilarious opening scene where he takes the wind out of the sails of a boy who has thrown a baloney sandwich – by the simple expedient of eating it himself! *'I ate the sandwich. It was my first act of classroom management.'* He turns the plethora of forged excuse notes into a new genre of creative writing. While his students resisted any kind of writing in class, they were geniuses when it came to writing excuse notes. *'Here was American high school writing at its best – raw, real, urgent, lucid, brief, lying.'* He opens up poetry by having his students perform recipes as raps and songs. He takes risks. He knows that what he is doing is important – yet will soon be forgotten.



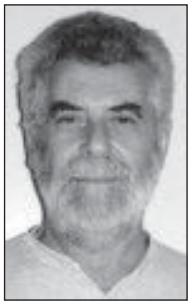
School Blues

School Blues, brilliantly translated from French by Sarah Ardizzone, is about educational failure and how to transform failures into success stories. Daniel Pennac, whose book *The Rights of the Reader* has also been reviewed here, was himself a 'cancre' – a dunce, an educational failure – so he comes at the problem of failure from the inside. He takes us through his own experience of hopelessness to becoming a teacher himself, dedicated to rescuing other potential dropouts. The story is full of anecdotes with the sometimes bitter ring of truth. He shows how vital the actions of a teacher can be. *'All it takes is one teacher – just one – to save us from ourselves and make us forget all the others.'* His saviour teachers never gave up on him, and they had 'style'. Along the way, he treats us to some of the ways he managed to interest demotivated students – ranging from memorisation of texts (yes, memorisation!) and questioning taken-for-granted bits of language to introduce grammar. He is scathing in his criticism of 'Granny Marketing', which reduces students *'to the same childish state of perpetual craving'*. The essence of his message is: *'You spend your time hiding behind methods when deep down you know perfectly well that no method is sufficient. No, what's missing is something else.'* And that something else is love: caring enough about what you are doing. After reading this fabulous book, I wished that I had had Pennac as my teacher!

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All these books offer reflection and revelation, and provide both inspiration and consolation. They are an indispensable complement to the more technical aspects of teaching. ETp

Ashton-Warner, S *Teacher* Penguin 1966
McCourt, F *Teacher Man* Scribners 2005
Marshall, S *An Experiment in Education* CUP 1970
Pennac, D *School Blues* Maclehose Press 2010



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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Outcomes-based language education

Peter Zoeftig concludes his series, makes recommendations and raises points for reflection.

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is known for measuring outcomes against definite standards and a concept of *mastery*, and places more emphasis on learning by doing things, rather than on attendance in a classroom setting with input provided by a teacher or trainer. In other words, coaching helps the coachees to do what they *need* to do whereas, in teaching, the teacher *tells* the students what to do. I take this further to say that instead of being instructed by a teacher on how to climb a 'mountain of knowledge', coachees need to develop their own map, which they can use to make progress and clarify with confidence their own needs and aims.

The coaching environment

Several ingredients are needed to ensure achieved successful outcomes.

- First, there should be minimum stress in the environment. Stress can be caused by externally-imposed expectations of student performance, and it introduces affective filters which hinder successful language acquisition.
- It is reasonable and proper to have clear personal targets and to involve the students in task-oriented preparation of information within their experience, such as a story, a presentation or participation in a discussion.
- Acquisition will be restricted unless there is a conscious focus on language processing and production so that some of the unconscious native-language reserve of resources is systematically re-programmed – not exactly 'unlearnt', but repositioned in order to be more resourceful.

Emphasis must be placed on these areas and not merely on 'performing'.

Re-programming

Following the fundamental insights of NLP – that it is impossible not to communicate and that our unconscious contains limitless possibilities – a gradual 're-programming' of the unconscious reservoir needs to be undertaken. This can be achieved through better understanding and listening, painstaking re-focusing and re-iterating, switching from unconscious, natural delivery to production of language that is done in a more dissociated state of mind and with a deliberate focus on what is going wrong in the coachees' processing of the language. This is done by allowing the learners' minds to wander away from the specific goals which have been set and agreed, only to bring them back to the areas to be practised with an increased awareness of problems that hitherto have been filtered from their conscious awareness. Thus, in gradual shifting patterns and improved reflexes, adding to the detail and refinement of their inner map of the language, the learners will edge nearer to the desired outcomes in clear steps and with an awareness of their improved performance.

Outcomes can be defined and presented through any sort of 'modelling' exercise, using all kinds of model texts, listening and sentence- or utterance-based models. The learner has to read and repeat them, adapt and develop them, systematically and incrementally. A limited amount of pre-prepared resource material is required, provided by and negotiated with the learners (who can select from notices, articles, dialogues, emails, reports, meetings expressions, as the case may be, to bring out suitable goals and outcomes). This conscious modelling phase is followed by a more unconscious, practice, experimental or 'gathering' phase, during which the learners visualise the task that they are about to perform. This finally leads to a more conscious mechanical delivery phase with essential performance aspects. Thus we have inverted the usual model that starts with mechanical practice and is meant to lead to a rapid 'jump' into performance. In this approach, we adopt a wholly different stance, allowing the coachees to listen to themselves more carefully.

Instead of being instructed by a teacher on how to climb a 'mountain of knowledge', coachees need to develop their own map

Perception

Metaphorically speaking, I invite my students to join me at the top of the mountain. Their terrain is their own; other peaks are distinct only in giving a personal or cultural difference. By having a clear eagle-eye view of the terrain below, the various problems that ▶▶▶

Outcomes-based language education

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they perceive can be navigated to the chosen point on the terrain with support from the coach.

The essential thing is that this creates a cycle of success, clear viewing, positive rapport and student-led outcomes. The coach does not choose or determine the goals or outcomes, but carefully and purposefully matches and paces the learner during the navigation by providing challenges. It must be emphasised that such an approach is not merely in the domain of the classroom, though much of the metaphorical reframing can be done there – much can also be achieved by continuing the authentic immersion experience in all other aspects of the study and coaching programme. The school or training centre will benefit the clients by extending communicative practice outside the classroom or formal teaching environment to authentic social interchange, insisting perhaps on adherence to the target language.

Implementation

These other aspects must be non-stressful, supportive, guiding, listening and challenging. An atmosphere of heavy stress and rigorously imposed or inflexible timetabling is not really appropriate for such an approach. Planning, yes, but above all, involvement and support, great flexibility and total commitment.

I feel that it is usually very important that every single timetabled class should culminate in a clear and measurable outcome that is consciously understood, or has involved a shift of personal awareness, finishing the session with a summary of what has been achieved. These outcomes can of course be recorded for further consolidation and can also be used to lead into new and further outcomes on a related topic or higher goal. Resourcefulness is key.

Recycling

Recycled language is valuable also in generating more language that can be constantly re-framed and redeveloped during the course of study. It is the proud possession of the learner and contributes to their map of their 'terrain'. Language items should not simply be supplied by the teacher in a random way but should be matched to goals; these language items can be constantly upgraded and added to, reformulated and redesigned. They should be plentiful, or at least be as many as the learner can handle.

While students can read, do exercises and watch TV with subtitles, etc in their own time, the time spent with the coach should be of a different order. However, reflective study, reading and watching of good models, helping recycling, is very beneficial when guided and matched carefully to the coachee's developing insights; naturally, only deep listening by the coach can make this possible. Grammar exercises, texts and a variety of other materials can occasionally serve the purpose of training a discrete point, if they are geared to an outcome, and are not simply an easily-found input to fill time.

Generative learning

In NLP, the term *transderivational search* refers to the means by which a person accesses layers of memory and opens up parts of the mind to the technique of modelling. In this case, the coachee is developing the inner insight to begin to compose language. The coach is a catalyst here, empowering the coachee and engendering the right approach.

In larger groups, students are co-opted into shared tasks, such as meetings, by virtue of their emerging skills. This encourages mutual support, yet allows a certain objective distance and clearer awareness.

In each session we build on the coaching points from a previous session. This leads to the coachees using different perspectives to enable them to start to think in the new language.

Calibration

The coach should use a wide range of interesting conversational, textual, performance-based or listening-based resources that fit with the coachees' needs, and should give clear feedback, including references to the subjective shifts experienced by the coachees. At the same time, the coach should take care not to overload the coachees with more and more input but, instead, allow the natural development of clear insights into their own growth in the target language. The coach needs to keep referring the coachees back to how they are developing inwardly, as well as to observable and more objective changes in behaviour.

Acquisition

An important realisation is that coaching means making positive associations, termed 'anchors', for the deep insights that come from the re-working of language from different notional and perceptual positions, and that these anchors are the acquisitions that remain – long after short-term memorisation has faded.

Reflection

Finally, here are some questions for reflection:

- *Generally, would you say that your expectations of what your students can achieve are higher or lower than their own?*
- *In general, how achievable do you feel that the weekly goals set for the students are?*
- *How often do you 'take over' the conversation with your students in class and in breaks?*
- *In a conversation with a student, whose focus of interest are you concentrating on?*
- *How does it feel when you only concentrate on listening to what the student is saying, without reacting?*
- *How do you feel when simply echoing the student's words, in your own head or aloud?*
- *How much noise is there in your classroom and how conducive is this to achieving alpha-levels of experience and concentration?*
- *How can you judge your student's inner dialogue?*
- *How can you encourage more dissociative learning?*
- *What key presuppositions would it help to have about the student?*



Peter Zoeftig has over 25 years' experience of teaching, and is involved in both personal and business executive coaching. He has qualifications in NLP and coaching and has worked in Italy, France, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom (in York, Bromsgrove, London, Birmingham and Warwick) and Belgium (Spa).

info@tostig.co.uk

Language Learner Literature Awards 2012

Congratulations to the winners of the 2012 Language Learner Literature Awards.

The LLL Awards are given by the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF), a not-for-profit organisation that supports and promotes extensive reading in language education. The winning book in each of five categories is chosen by an international jury, taking into account the internet votes and comments of students and teachers around the world.

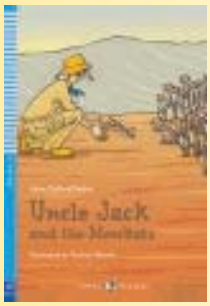
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Young learners

★ **Winner** ★ ***Uncle Jack and the Meeerkats***



by Jane Cadwallader, illustrated by Gustavo Mazali
Published by ELI Publishing
ISBN: 978-88-536-0627-3

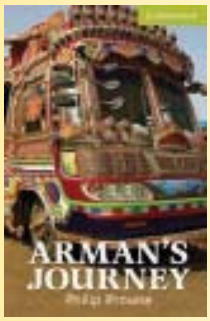
Judges' comment: *A nice mixture of adventure, fantasy and reality, with an animal conservation angle. It also has a cool family theme and intelligent child characters. Well-written, nice design and fun to read.*

Finalists

Hooray for the Holidays! by Dominique Guillemant (ELI Publishing); *Mansour and the Donkey* by Sue Arengo (OUP)

Adolescent and Adult: Beginner

★ **Winner** ★ ***Arman's Journey***



by Philip Prowse, illustrated by Paul Dickinson
Published by Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 978-0-521-18496-0

Judges' comment: *This original story is filled with adventure that compels the reader through to the end. The content is especially relevant for adult learners – touching on conflict, economics, prejudice and romance.*

Finalists

A Little Trouble in California by Richard MacAndrew (CUP); *Roommates* by Sue Leather and Julian Thomlinson (National Geographic Learning)

Adolescent and Adult: Elementary

★ **Winner** ★ ***Harry's Holiday***



by Antoinette Moses, illustrated by Mikela Prevost
Published by Cambridge University Press
ISBN: 978-84-8323-858-5

Judges' comments: *This is an intriguing book, with an excellent plot. The reader is kept on edge, wondering what will happen to Harry. Will he get to go on a holiday?*

Finalists

Ask Alice by Margaret Johnson (CUP); *Running Free* by Sue Leather and Julian Thomlinson (National Geographic Learning)

Adolescent and Adult: Intermediate

★ **Winner** ★ ***A Christmas Carol***



by Charles Dickens, retold by Sean Michael Wilson, illustrated by Mike Collins
Published by National Geographic Learning
ISBN: 978-1-4240-4287-6

Judges' comments: *This version of* A Christmas Carol *is a graphic novel which has the rare combination of excellent artwork and skillful retelling that can engage readers from start to finish.*

Finalists

Call of the Wild retold by Rachel Bladon (Macmillan); *Noughts and Crosses* retold by Karen Holmes (Pearson)

Adolescent and Adult: Upper-intermediate and Advanced

★ **Winner** ★ ***Joe Faust***



by Frank Brennan, illustrated by Redbean Design
Published by National Geographic Learning
ISBN: 978-1-4240-1796-6

Judges' comments: *This is a gripping story, and a moral tale for our times that speaks across different cultures and societies.*

Finalists

The Great Gatsby retold by Richard Larkham (ELI Publishing); *Solo Saxophone* by Jeremy Harmer (CUP)

2013 Awards

Have you enjoyed a reader that was published in 2012? The nomination and voting procedures for the 2013 Language Learner Literature Award will be posted on the ERF website (*www.erfoundation.org*).

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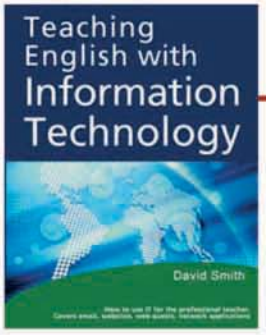
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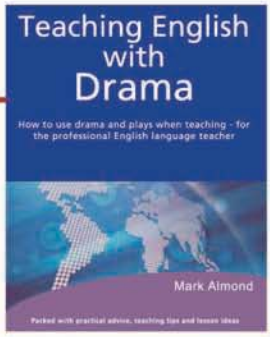
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IT WORKS IN PRACTICE



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

All the contributions to It Works in Practice in this issue of ET*p* come from Alison Elflett, and they are activities that she and her colleagues at Lanser Language Services in Bilbao, Spain, have tried and tested. Alison will receive copies of *Skillful Reading and Writing* and *Skillful Listening and Speaking*, published by Macmillan in their *Academic Skills* series. Macmillan have kindly agreed to be sponsors of It Works in Practice for this year.

Interview time

Students often have difficulty forming questions correctly. Here are three activities for the one-to-one classroom which practise question-forming in ways which students find interesting and engaging. Although the activities probably work best with one-to-one students, they could be adapted for groups.

1 Formal interview (over two lessons)

1 Tell your student to imagine they are leaving their present job and moving to a new department in the company. The boss has asked them to help interview candidates for the position they are leaving. For homework, ask the student to reflect on what qualities and abilities (apart from academic qualifications) a person would need to do their present job successfully, and to write ten questions that they would ask interviewees.

2 In the next class, go through your student's questions, correcting errors in grammar and vocabulary or helping them to self-correct.

3 Go through the questions again, this time asking the student to explain a) exactly why they chose each question (what would the answer tell them about the candidate's suitability?) and b) what would be a good/poor answer.

2 Informal interview (over three to four lessons)

1 Tell your student that you are going to interview them about one of their hobbies or interests, but that *they* are going to write the questions for the interview. For homework, ask them to write ten questions on the topic chosen.

2 Make sure you have the necessary equipment to record the interview, preferably as an MP3 file.

3 In the next class, go through the student's questions, correcting errors in grammar and vocabulary or assisting with self-correction. When the questions are correct, proceed with the interview, asking your student the ten questions. You may also want to ask unscripted follow-up questions in addition to the planned ones.

4 Don't correct the student while they are speaking, but record the interview for later analysis and correction.

5 Before the next lesson, listen to the recording and note down both good points and errors (in aspects of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary). Select some of these to go over with your student, encouraging self-correction in the case of basic errors. For very advanced students who make few errors, focus on any language used which, although it would be understood by native speakers, could be expressed more precisely or in a more natural way. Help the student to reformulate it.

6 Give your student a copy of the recording so that they can listen to the whole interview if they wish, and ask them to go over the corrections discussed in that class. In the following lesson, interview the student a second time (using the same questions), asking them to focus on correcting the errors you pointed out previously.

3 Interview the teacher

1 Tell your student that they are going to interview you about your career to date, or a hobby, an interest, a holiday, etc. For homework, ask them to write ten questions about the topic you have chosen.

2 Make sure you have the necessary equipment to record the interview, preferably as an MP3 file.

3 In the next class, go through the student's questions, correcting errors in grammar and vocabulary or assisting with self-correction. When the questions are correct, proceed with the interview, answering your student's ten questions and any follow-up questions they may ask you. Keep your answers reasonably short! Record the complete interview.

4 Before the next lesson, listen to the recording and analyse the student's performance with respect to pronunciation, especially intonation in question forms. Also pay attention to how your student reacts to your answers – is backchannelling used to show that they are following what you are saying and to encourage you to continue? Go over these points with your student in class and choose suitable follow-up activities to provide further practice or consolidation.

Dialogues from news stories

Adult students who use English in their jobs can find it challenging when they have to socialise in English with colleagues or clients. This activity started out as a way of 'activating' a news article (which has a grammar and vocabulary focus) with a one-to-one student, but it actually allows you to help your student create an informal dialogue of the type they may have when socialising with foreign colleagues. This is a good way to introduce or encourage backchannelling and discourse markers (eg *well*, *so*, *anyway*, etc) which 'oil' a conversation and help it to flow, as well as exit strategies (eg *Anyway, I need to make a call before we start, so I'll see you in a minute*).

1. You will need a short news article (text or audio) from a coursebook, the internet or a magazine. *The Week* magazine is an excellent source.
2. After working on vocabulary, grammar, etc and discussing the student's reactions to the article, ask them to imagine they are having a coffee with some foreign colleagues while waiting for a meeting to start. Elicit how they could start a conversation about the article, eg *Have you seen the news today?* or *Have you read today's paper?*
3. Now proceed to prompt and elicit language from your student to create a short dialogue (on the board, on your laptop or on a piece of paper). Insist on a less formal register (your student may try to use vocabulary from the article which is too formal), correcting and re-formulating as you go along.
4. If this is the first time you have focused on discourse markers, introduce them once you have the completed dialogue on the board. If your student is familiar with them, elicit as you go along.
5. When the dialogue is complete, join your student in reading it aloud, helping with pronunciation and intonation where necessary. Read it a few times, then gradually start to rub parts of it out, so that eventually both you and your student memorise the dialogue (approximately – it doesn't have to be word for word). This can help your student to memorise useful chunks of language, eg (from the dialogue below) *What was ... about? They get more and more ... It sounds a bit ... .*
6. If you get into the habit of doing this regularly with reading and listening texts, your student may start to feel more confident about socialising in English.

Note: This activity could be adapted for a class by asking the students to create the dialogue in pairs or groups. Monitor the students, correcting, helping and encouraging. Obviously, the one-to-one classroom allows the teacher to work very closely with the student to produce a natural dialogue. In the case of a large group, it may be better for the teacher to collect the dialogues after Stage 3 and correct them. Stage 5 could then be done in a second lesson, with the teacher putting just one of the dialogues produced on the board for the whole class to work with.

Here's an example of a dialogue from one class:

A: *Have you read the paper today?*

B: *No, not yet. Any interesting news?*

A: *Well, I read an article this morning about people and their pets. You've got a dog, haven't you?*

B: *Yes, a German Shepherd. So what was the article about?*

A: *Well, it was about the similarities between pets and their owners. Apparently, they get more and more alike over time.*

B: *Oh, I've heard that before, but it sounds a bit far-fetched if you ask me. Or are you saying I'm like my dog?*

A: *Not exactly! But it did sound like a serious study. It was done by a British university.*

B: *Really? Don't they have anything more important to study?*

A: *I suppose not. Anyway, the meeting's starting in a minute. Have you got the agenda with you? I haven't printed it off ...*

IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

Do you have an idea which you would like to contribute to our *It Works in Practice* section? It might be anything from an activity which you use in class to a teaching technique that has worked for you. Send us your contribution, by post or by email to *helena.gomm@pavpub.com*.

All the contributors to *It Works in Practice* get a prize! We especially welcome joint entries from teachers working at the same institution. Why not get together with your colleagues to provide a whole *It Works in Practice* section of your ideas? We will publish a photo of you all.

If you don't know me by now...

Phil Wade analyses the information he really needs about his students.

At the beginning of my ELT career, I had limited experience of needs analysies (NAs) and diagnostic tests (DTs). Then, while studying for my DELTA, I produced highly detailed ones, which enabled me to create a full university business English course. This was the first time I'd really got my hands so dirty – if you work for a school or other teaching organisation, as I often do, they generally take care of this and create a syllabus for you to deliver. If you are lucky (or unlucky, depending on your perspective), you are also given complete lesson materials to follow.

On the other hand, if you are freelance and teach students in a variety of companies, then this task is certainly down to you. We are probably all familiar with a run-of-the-mill DT, consisting of questions, writing, listening and maybe some speaking of incremental difficulty, which uncovers weaknesses in the student's language and enables levelling. An NA, however, unmasks why a student needs English, what they hope to do with it and, by cross referencing both, we can build a course which blends what they need and what they want. Of course, we're all probably familiar with the great difficulty presented by students who really *require* something, such as pronunciation work, but who either don't want it or who believe they are far better than they actually are.

Changing the standards

The more I teach business English and corporate students, the more I find that the amount of information I require to develop personalised courses which will maximise learning becomes greater and greater. Don't get me wrong: my bosses or I do conduct standard DTs and NAs, but I find these are not enough. My courses never seem to start off feeling right and constantly have to be adapted through trial and error. Only by midway or three quarters of the way through the course do I have the optimum formula. To remedy this, I've begun to realise that the greater the time spent getting to know the students at the very beginning, the easier it is to hit the ground running in the first or second lesson – as opposed to racking my brains constantly for ideas, or learning something important about the students later on and then having to change everything. For this reason, I am convinced that the

The greater the time spent getting to know the students at the very beginning, the easier it is to hit the ground running

first lesson should be devoted, partially or entirely, to an in-depth needs analysis in one shape or another.

A major problem I see with standard NAs is that they are often limited to pre-set questions, whether these are from a book or ones that you have created, keeping in mind what you believe the answers will be. A related issue is that teachers in a school, university or any other teaching organisation will also have less leeway to adapt courses to reflect NA feedback. For instance, there may be a set coursebook or handouts that can't be changed, even if the students request it. Thus, certain elements of how the course works are non-negotiable. This creates a difficult situation: we ask the students what they want, they make a request, but we then have to say it's not possible. Because of this, I have sometimes been discouraged from doing any NA in lesson one when working in formal organisations where I have essentially been hired just to deliver a pre-planned pre-organised course with daily and weekly objectives.

Changing the teaching method

Another factor we generally choose not to alter is the teaching method. We almost automatically use the same one with every level, course, age, etc. You know the one: it has various objectives, a warmer, a language point, lots of practice and it ends with speaking – all quite fun and fast tempo. Yet, a class of teens and a business executive are rather different challenges and demand different approaches. I believe we overuse this particular method as we have been raised to believe in its superiority. We may throw in a bit of task-based work, perhaps, but we still tend to lean too much on that traditional approach – and why not? It works so well most of the time. But if we are supposed to be giving tailored lessons, shouldn't we also be moulding a method to suit the client? It's not uncommon to hear businesspeople ask for a whole course on just one skill or requirement, some even ask for it in their L1 or, even worse still, a grammar translation style lesson. Numerous ELT courses are supposed to be communicative-based but is it real communication or just added-on extended speaking practice? Strange, isn't it, that our cherished communicative-based methodology frequently involves little authentic communication, particularly if judged by a lesson plan.

Taking all these factors into consideration, there are certain questions I consider necessary for the initial NA:

1. What do the students actually want to learn?
2. How would they like to learn it?
3. How much out-of-class work are they willing to put in?
4. How much do they want to learn in one class?
5. How will their progress be assessed?
6. What materials do they want to use?
7. What technology do they have access to, and what could they use in and out of class?
8. What blend of skills/activities would they like in each lesson?
9. Do they want recycling and revision?
10. How would they like to be taught?
11. How fast do they want to progress and how much pressure would they like?

These questions will provide you with in-depth knowledge of your student(s) and help you craft a real course to meet their actual needs and wants.

Changing the format

To get to the truth about the requirements of the students, perhaps a more open speaking format is necessary for the NA, as opposed to just a written questionnaire or a spoken 'question and answer' session. We might consider a discussion or even a student presentation, or both. Carrying this out in the first lesson establishes the course from the very beginning as being student- and needs/desires-centred, and you can keep this momentum going in subsequent lessons, making it an integral part of the course. For example, at the end of each class you can review what you did, how it went, if the students are happy with the tempo, the amount of work, activities, etc. You can then adapt the formula for the next class. The kind of trainer who does this really wants to make the class all about their students, and it is what I have always believed 'tailored' refers to. Yes, it's not easy and doesn't allow for rehashing of set syllabi and courses and it involves lesson-by-lesson tinkering, but it will increase student participation, motivation and dedication. In the corporate world, this sets your courses apart from the average 'teach with this book' courses. Then, if you can add your own purpose-written materials – possibly via an online virtual learning platform, then your courses are certainly worth more money than the average.

If we take this idea to the logical next step, how about a combined NA and DT? One of my previous bosses used to bring new enrolees to my office, ostensibly to ask me to talk to them about the course and to see if they were suitable but, unofficially, to check their level. This sort of encounter can result in a real meaningful conversation about needs which incorporates listening, reading of course literature or sample materials, a discussion about levels and degree of challenge and, frequently, some follow-up email correspondence. After five minutes you can quite successfully assess the level of the student and you have enough factual information to build a suitable course foundation.

★ ★ ★

In this article, I have outlined some of the reasons why I think we need to rethink the typical needs analysis and I have also given some possible adaptations. In no way do I mean this to be followed to the letter, but I hope it will give you an idea of what I feel I need to know about my own students, and how I believe that information could benefit my own courses. Each of us is unique, as is our teaching situation, so there is no perfect formula. However, as our students are the reason why we teach and usually the ones giving feedback on us, shouldn't we be finding out and giving them what they *really* want? ETp



Phil Wade has a Business degree, a PGCE, the CELTA, MA TESOL and DELTA Module 3. He is a qualified Cambridge examiner and online teacher. He has 14 years' teaching and course management experience in schools, universities and companies. He currently teaches business English, trains teachers and writes materials.

philawade@gmail.com

The best of both worlds?

Louis Rogers puts business English in the blender.

Back in the 1960s, there was a BBC television programme called *Tomorrow's World*. The concept of the show, for those that have never seen it, was to forecast the future of technology and how it would change our lives. Looking back, some of the predictions were shockingly inaccurate – I'm still waiting for the domestic robot to come along and take over all the cooking, cleaning and tidying! However, for every one that was wide of the mark, there were many others that were incredibly accurate. From laser eye surgery in 1965 to touch-screen computers in 1982, the programme accurately forecast many things widely available today, a whole host of which have changed the very way we live.

How is this relevant to blended learning and business English? Well, for me it relates to how I first encountered the concepts of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) back in the mid-90s as a module of my first degree. Had some of the predictions made in those classes been true, I probably wouldn't be writing this article and you wouldn't be reading it. The best we could hope for would be working as classroom assistants to a robot who was a much more capable teacher than we could ever be. By the time I returned to study my Masters a decade later, the term *CALL* was less in use, and much more prominent was the concept of blended learning. Technology was no longer going to *control* the language classroom; it would, rather, *enhance* learning and the classroom environment.

Blended learning has actually been around much longer than the commonly understood description in use today. However, early definitions were much different. In fact, early references to blended learning often did not mention technology at all; they simply described courses with a variety of pedagogical approaches, for example a course mixing face-to-face teaching with distance learning, but with no mention of technology. By 2003, Charles Graham of the American Society for Training and Development was describing blended learning as a top-ten trend in the educational sector. It is now arguably the dominant term used for the combination of a content subject and technology both inside and outside the classroom.

Engaging with blended learning

In the different contexts I have worked in, I have found that blended learning can vary in its usefulness. In particular, I have found that the more face-to-face contact you have with students on, say, short intensive courses of 20+ hours per week, the less keen the students seem to be to engage with technology such as a virtual learning platform (VLP) outside the classroom. Without frequent and active coercing, many students don't make full use of the technology and materials available to them, and perhaps because of the number of contact hours with the teacher, they don't see the need to engage with a VLP or other learning platform outside lesons. Of course, they could still benefit from a blended approach if the necessary facilities were available within their institution.

Technology, though, is still something that divides teachers – there are those who actively and excitedly embrace it, but there are many who find it disorienting or frightening. Obviously, this could all change as the Net Generation (or Generation Y) – people born between 1982 and 1996 who have grown up with technology – start to enter the classroom as teachers rather than students.

Without frequent and active coercing, many students don't make full use of the technology and materials available to them

Depending on the country they are from, nearly half this generation are already of an age to be teachers – not that age means you cannot engage with technology, but in all likelihood it would be unusual not to engage with it when you come from that particular generation.

Business English and blended learning

Whilst all language instruction in all contexts can arguably be blended, it is perhaps business English which could benefit the most from this approach. In this context, I am referring to in-work learners rather than pre-work learners. Pre-work learners studying in a university,

for example, have the same time and technology available to them as do students in many other ELT contexts, such as primary, secondary and evening classes. I differentiate in-work learners from pre-work learners because of the number of pressures placed on the former. Business English trainers will be familiar with the fact that their students regularly cancel classes, a small group of eight never has the same members from one week to the next and students rarely have time for homework or any form of independent study. Many are trying to balance their workload and family life already and can just about squeeze in an English class during the week. When dealing with students with busy lives, we need to provide bite-sized amounts of input which they can access anywhere at any time. In other words, business English needs to be conducted *on the move*.

If homework is set from a coursebook, the students will most likely have to carry the book everywhere with them in order to try to grab a moment when they can do it. In most cases, I would say, this is quite unlikely to be done. However, many business English students will carry around with them one or more of the following: a mobile phone, a tablet, a laptop and an e-reader. As these gadgets are part of their everyday lives, if we set homework involving one or other of them, we are not asking the students to carry anything extra around with them, but simply to use what they already have in a different way – for catching up, reviewing or improving their knowledge.

So how can we use technology to create a blended learning approach that can be used on the move? What are the benefits of using technology as opposed to other traditional media of learning? And what resources are available?

Vocabulary

The majority of studies into vocabulary learning are concerned with approaches that don't involve the use of technology. However, a number of studies, including those by Wenli Tsoua, Weichung Wang and Hung-yi Li, by Nadire Cavus and Dogan Ibrahim and by Linda Jones, have shown that the use of computers in vocabulary learning can have extremely positive results. The resources used in these studies included SMS, websites and listening tasks and involved the use of pictures, animation and sounds. Results showed positive reactions from the students and better results in vocabulary learning.

So if technology is valuable in enhancing vocabulary development, why not exploit this?

Vocabulary learning can be divided largely into incidental and intentional learning. The range of opportunities for incidental learning online is high as students can select any text that interests them. In terms of intentional learning, the range of apps and websites available for studying English is also high – perhaps highest of all the language areas.

We need to provide bite-sized amounts of input which students with busy lives can access anywhere at any time

Grammar

There are many websites which offer controlled grammar practice for business English students. In addition, there are a number of apps, including the free *Grammar Up*, produced by Eknath Kadam (downloadable from the Apple store). Also available is *Grammar & Practice for Business: Intermediate*, published by HarperCollins. This is a much more comprehensive business grammar app for students to use, with over 2,600 exercises. Whilst there is no research suggesting that this method is any better than the traditional grammar book approach, it is clearly much more convenient just to turn on your phone, rather than to open a chunky book on the train to work.

Skills

When it comes to the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, the digital environment opens up many more resources than the traditional approach.

The BBC, at *www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish*, has some excellent activities for both general and business English, including six-minute video clips which are ideal for the commute to work or for use in a short break.

Starting wikis or blogs with your students can be a great way to engage them in writing practice – to a certain extent, writing is perhaps best done outside of class time. Shenggao Wang and Camilla Vasquez reported on the positive response students have to an e-learning environment, so learners may be more likely to engage in writing if it is presented as an online activity.

Whilst there is clearly a vast array of materials online for students to read for personal interest, most of it is not graded for level. A number of publishers have started to produce graded readers on business-oriented subjects, for example looking at famous people in business, leading companies and business theories. So far, these haven't made their way into the e-book market. However, once they do, this will be a valuable addition to the online skills development resources.

In terms of business skills – telephoning, meetings, negotiations, presentations and emails, there are now e-books available for students. These could be particularly useful when it comes to emailing, giving the students models and phrases that can be cut and pasted into their own emails and used whilst on the move.

Exploiting the internet

There are many ways in which the internet can be exploited for learning a foreign language, many of which have already been discussed. A wealth of ideas can be found in books such as *50 Ways to Improve Your Business English Using the Internet* by Eric Baber and *Digital Play: Computer Games and Language Aims* by Kyle Mawer and Graham Stanley. The latter was a recent ELTons prizewinner and contains many ways to incorporate digital games into language teaching, although it is not aimed specifically at business English teachers.

One activity which is easy for teachers to devise, and which requires little technological knowledge other than how to use a word processor and the internet, is a webquest. Essentially, webquests are task-based-learning activities. There is an example of one on page 38 which you might like to photocopy and use. Bernie Dodge and Tom March invented webquests back in 1995 and their

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The best of both worlds?

website (*www.webquest.org*) enables you to search for webquests that have already been created – there are many available for free on the web. This website also has a number of scholarly articles investigating the impact of the use of such activities. You can quite easily create your own as an extension of work you have been doing in class. Webquests typically have five main stages: Task, Process, Resource, Evaluation and Conclusion.

Notes on the worksheet

The worksheet opposite is a webquest which can be given to students as a follow-up to work on writing emails, making requests or direct and indirect language. It is suitable for pre-intermediate students.

Baber, E *50 Ways to Improve Your Business English Using the Internet* Cengage Learning 2007

Cavus, C and Ibrahim, D 'M-learning: an experiment in using SMS to support learning new English language words' *British Journal of Educational Technology* 40 (1) 2009

Jones, L C 'Effects of collaboration and multimedia annotations on vocabulary learning and listening comprehension' *British Journal of Educational Technology* 40 (1) 2006

Mawer, K and Stanley, G *Digital Play: Computer Games And Language Aims* DELTA Publishing 2011

Tsoua, W, Wang, W and Li, H 'How computers facilitate English foreign language learners acquire English abstract words' *Computers & Education* 39 (4) 2002

Wang, S and Vasquez, C 'Web 2.0 and second language learning: what does the research tell us?' *Calico Journal* 29 (3) 2012



Louis Rogers is a Course Tutor at the University of Reading, UK. He is the author of *Reading Skills* and *Writing Skills*, in the *DELTA Academic Objectives* series, and the Intermediate and Upper-intermediate levels of the *Business Result Skills for Business Studies* workbooks, published by OUP.

l.j.rogers@reading.ac.uk

Webquest: polite emails

In this activity you are going to learn more about polite emails and making requests.

An order you placed with Aggo Ltd is late and you would like to confirm when it will arrive. Ideally, you want it to be delivered in the next two weeks.

Task 1
Revising how to write an email

Enter this url into your browser:

http://learningenglish.voanews.com/

Click on 'The Classroom' and then 'Activities'. Scroll down to Business English and click on 'Using Email in Business'.

Watch the video and do the activities as you watch.

Task 2
Making requests and structuring your email

Enter this url into your browser:

www.businessenglishpod.com

Search for 'Email Tune-up' and scroll down to 'ET03 Business Writing: An External Request'. These videos are also available on *YouTube*, but the website has a number of other resources you might like to use in future.

Play the video:

1. What are the four parts to a request email?
2. Pause the video at Step 2 and try to correct the mistakes. Continue playing the video and check your corrections.
3. Pause the video at Step 3 and check the structure of the email. Use your notes from Question 1 to help you.
4. In 'Step 4: Tone', make a note of any polite phrases that are used.

Task 3
The language of polite requests

1. Add any phrases you know for polite requests to your list from Task 2.
2. Enter this url into your browser:

   www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/learnit/learnitv239.shtml

   Add any further phrases to your list.

Task 4
Writing your email

Write your email to Aggo Ltd. Try to use what you have learnt from Tasks 1–3 to help you write and structure your email.

Take your email to your next class or email it to your teacher for feedback.

LANGUAGE LOG

Idiolect

John Potts charts the intricacies and idiosyncrasies, the contradictions and complications that make the English language so fascinating for teachers and teaching. In this issue, he looks at the language that marks us out as individuals.

In my article on indirectness in ET*p* Issue 82, I mentioned the term *idiolect* in the context of a commuter on a train who said to another: *'Excuse me, but my foot seems to have become accidentally trapped beneath yours.'* Here, in part, is what I wrote there: *'Other people would have reacted very differently, using far more direct language, so this raises the issue of the speaker's personal language choices and consequently of his idiolect. I feel fairly confident that he would also say (or have said) things like the following: "Did you need anything else?" / "I had been hoping that I could leave at ..." In contrast, other speakers would say none of the above things – these utterances would not be part of their repertoire. They might perhaps say: "Do you need anything else?" / "Can I leave at ..." ... As society changes, then influences will change, too, and there will be corresponding shifts in people's repertoires and idiolects.'*

So, what is idiolect, and can we make use of it in our teaching? *Wikipedia* defines it as *'a variety of language that is unique to a person, as manifested by the patterns of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation that he or she uses'*. (Its etymology is from Greek *idios*, meaning *own*, *personal*, *private*, *distinct*. Other words from the same root are *idiom* and *idiosyncratic*. *Lect* is formed after *dialect*.) We all have our own idiolect, a sort of linguistic profile that will identify us like a fingerprint. Indeed, a branch of linguistics called forensic linguistics is concerned with the analysis of language, based on idiolect, in a wide range of legal contexts, such as wills, criminal confessions, hoax calls, ransom demands, plagiarism, and so on. (See the *Wikipedia* article at *forensic linguistics* for much greater detail and references.)

We can also see examples of idiolect in novels. For example, in *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf creates complex and subtle idiolects for her main characters which enable us to identify who is speaking (or, more often, thinking) without our being told. At a rather less complex level, Charles Dickens gives many of his characters distinctive speech patterns and catchphrases that serve to identify and define them.

However, it isn't only in legal and literary contexts that idiolect is important. Since everyone has one, it follows that idiolect is present and plays a role in our (classroom) language as teachers, and in our learners' language as it develops. I try to be very aware of my idiolect in that I seek consciously to vary it. Most people, perhaps, don't do this, but then again, most people aren't language teachers. This is part of an enriched 'language bath' for my learners, appropriate to their level: I encourage them to pick out those items that appeal to them and that they would like to add to their own repertoire. Sometimes, these are fixed expressions that I may use (apparently) casually during the course of a lesson – *having said that*, *on balance*, *so to speak*, *with hindsight*, *and so on and so forth*.

Sometimes I introduce binomials and other fixed pairs (and triplets) into my language – *trial and error*, *ups and downs*, *dos and don'ts*, *by and large*, *body and soul*, *to and fro*, *back and forth*, *left, right and centre*. It's interesting to see which ones are appealing and subsequently start to appear in a particular learner's repertoire. *Doom and gloom* seems a favourite with one exam class at the moment, while *game, set and match* was topical during Wimbledon fortnight.

It's also the case that I sometimes set out to teach binomials as part of a vocabulary focus in a lesson, but I've found that it's the items that I used 'casually' that often provoke the greater interest and that tend to be adopted by

my learners. It's perhaps an example of that well-known paradox that learners seem to learn the very things that we're *not* trying (overtly) to teach them.

As we saw in the *Wikipedia* definition above, idiolect is also revealed through grammar and pronunciation. Some of the grammatical patterns expressing indirectness were the focus of my article in Issue 82, and there are many other examples of grammatical choices and preferences within a speaker's repertoire that contribute to their idiolect. For instance, some speakers may use more passives, or may tend towards second conditionals for the future rather than first conditionals: *If we hurried, we'd make the train* rather than *If we hurry, we'll make it!* In my own case, I often use subjunctive forms: in restaurants I frequently come out with *I should have had what you're having*, or *I wish I'd chosen that instead*.

Pronunciation is perhaps more difficult to analyse, though some features are easy to recognise – a tendency towards employing rising intonation at the end of statements, for example, or the use of glottal stops.

Dialect and regional variety add to the mix, as does the use of non-standard forms. And then there's the deliberate incorporation of other people's catchphrases – *Monty Python* must be responsible for a significant chunk of the idiolects of many of my generation, just as *The Goon Show* was for my parents'. These days, other comedies rule – but am I bovvered? (You may need to google this catchphrase.)

To conclude, here is another personal example: my father was very fond of qualifying statements with the expression *as it were*. It was a trademark component of his idiolect – if I had ever received a note saying *'John, I've been kidnapped and am being held to ransom, as it were'*, I'd have paid up immediately in the safe knowledge that the demand was genuine.



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

COMPETITION RESULTS

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

Congratulations to all those readers who successfully completed our Prize Crossword 53. The winners, who will each receive a copy of the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, are:

Gemma Alcaraz i Teixidó, Martorell, Spain
Mike Futcher, Edinburgh, UK
Lorenzo Gallego Pindado, Ullastrell, Spain
Sabine Liberto, Seuzach, Switzerland
Hazel McAllister, Wembley, UK
Pietro Pacini, Lucca, Italy
Teresa Puig, Dunstable, UK
Azo Salim, Buckfastleigh, UK
Chai Whatt Tan, Melaka, Malaysia
Paulina Zak-Grzybowska, Luton, UK



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

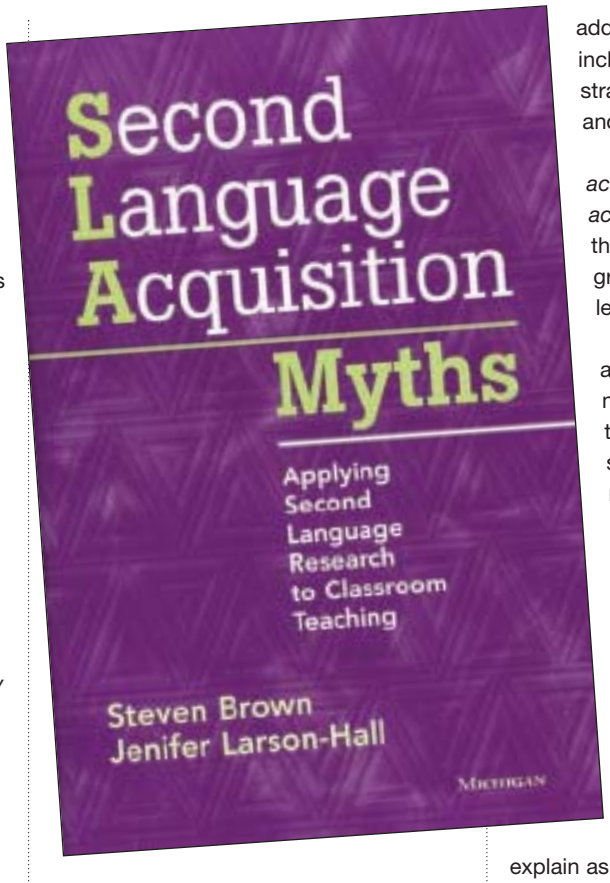
2 A		11 L	23 O	21 V	3 I	18 N	10 G		5 H	15 E	2 A	12 R	22 T		3 I	26 S		
22 T	5 H	15 E		22 T	12 R	12 U	15 E	26 S	22 T		17 W	3 I	26 S	1 D	23 O	20 M		

Charles Dickens

Reviews

Second Language Acquisition Myths

by Steven Brown
and Jenifer Larson-Hall
Michigan University Press 2012
978-0-47203-498-7



Second language acquisition (SLA) is a broad field, with research that investigates language learning in many contexts including instructed learning as well as naturalistic learning (learning outside the classroom). With numerous books, journals and academic papers on the subject appearing every year, teachers can feel overwhelmed by the task of keeping up with current research. This book is a bold attempt to create a readable introduction to SLA that summarises a few major issues. However, as the authors point out, *'it is not the goal of this book to address every SLA theory'*. Even so, they do an admirable job of tackling eight myths.

Following the structure of other titles in the *Myths* series by Michigan University Press, each chapter contains three parts: *In the Real World* (an introductory anecdote), *What the Research Says* (a description of relevant research) and *What We Can Do* (classroom applications).

Myth 1, *Children learn languages quickly and easily while adults are ineffective in comparison*, takes a closer look at commonly-held beliefs about children and adult language learning. It points out some of the major differences between the two, and gives a positive spin on the notion that adults are not good at learning foreign languages.

Myth 2, *A true bilingual is someone who speaks two languages perfectly*, zeroes in on this flawed definition of a bilingual. It summarises research about bilingualism, listing some of the benefits that bilingualism provides.

Myth 3, *You can acquire a language simply through listening or reading*, debunks the notion that input alone can result in language learning. This section of the book contains a robust discussion of input, output and interaction in language learning.

Myth 4, *Practice makes perfect*, is an overview of research about the role of practice in language learning. The authors emphasise that students need to do more than practise a language, indicating the need for noticing new language.

Myth 5, *Language students learn (and retain) what they are taught*, points out the perceptible gap between what teachers present in class and what students actually retain. This chapter has several practical suggestions for effective grammar teaching, such as repeating information on problematic grammar points and teaching chunks instead of single words.

Myth 6, *Language learners always benefit from correction*, is my favourite section of the book. It summarises several intriguing studies on error correction, and offers a helpful discussion about several types of oral correction, such as recasts and prompts.

Myth 7, *Individual differences are a major, perhaps the major, factor in SLA*, addresses a number of topics, including learning styles and strategies, personality differences and motivation.

The final myth, *Language acquisition is the individual acquisition of grammar*, covers the thorny issue of what role grammar should play in language learning.

Overall, I enjoyed this book a great deal. Some of the material was familiar, but a few topics, such as bilingualism and social approaches, were new to me, and I greatly appreciated learning about them.

The authors do a most commendable job of summarising the studies they cite, describing them without too much detail. They also include tables which provide quick reference for the studies they review.

Another winning feature of the book is the boxes that explain aspects of research that teachers may not fully understand, such as 'correlation' and 'effect sizes'. These provide assistance to teachers who want to read second language acquisition papers, or even do their own research.

I should emphasise here that this is a book on second language acquisition, not language teaching, so parts of the book go beyond language learning in the classroom setting. With that said, the authors make a concerted effort to make suggestions for teachers (through activities or policy) based on the research, quite often including practical activities for the classroom.

Second language acquisition researchers will find plenty to explore here (and even more in the references). Teachers at the beginning of their careers will find this an accessible introduction. More experienced teachers will enjoy the opportunity to review some main ideas of second language acquisition, and possibly learn something new.

Hall Houston
Luzhu, Taiwan

Reviews

International Negotiations

by Mark Powell
CUP 2012
978-05211-4992-1



Mark Powell continues to expand the world of quality business English materials with his latest publication, *International Negotiations*. This, like his previous book *Presenting In English*, is part of the *Cambridge Professional English* series, which combines real business content, speaking skills and functional language.

International Negotiations is, perhaps surprisingly, aimed at students from B1 right up to the C2 level on the Common European Framework scale. Intermediate students will find the materials comfortably challenging, but advanced and even proficiency-level students will get a lot out of the business side of the book: the negotiation skills training and the functional language. Having tried the book with all these levels, I would say that those of my students who were studying for the Cambridge Proficiency in English exam, in particular, really benefited from the negotiation skills development side and the varied nature of the speaking activities, which one manager amongst my students called 'extremely realistic'.

Mark Powell has certainly been busy since his last book came out. He has sourced a myriad of top business experts and leaders whose ideas appear in texts, quotes and listenings. This turns *International Negotiations* into as much a book for learning successful negotiation skills as a vehicle for learning business English. You can tell a good book when even the teacher learns something in every lesson, and that has been my experience with this book on countless occasions.

International Negotiations is organised into ten units and spans all the essentials of business negotiations, from the preparation (the topic of Unit 1) to closing the final deal. The book itself is quite light and easy to carry round and, like the others in the series, only devotes about a third of its length to typical textbook pages. Why? Because the rest offers enough materials for any teacher to create an optimal course for their own individual teaching situation. These include an initial needs analysis, which pinpoints which parts of the book need working through, exercise keys and a commentary for every unit, very professional additional speaking materials, audio scripts for the two accompanying CDs and a preview of the online feedback forms (one for each unit) which can be used for student assessment. You will also find a final downloadable in-depth negotiation and an impressive teacher's pack with many more teaching ideas.

Mark Powell has shown yet again that business can and should be interesting for both students and teachers. He has successfully integrated teaching authentic knowledge of the methods and techniques of negotiation with the study of the English language. This is the reason why this book will be of use with both students at intermediate level or those who are more advanced. Whether it is used for a short course, a couple of sessions of a more general business English programme or as a full-blown classroom course, *International Negotiations* has something up its sleeve for everyone. I have even enjoyed several one-to-one negotiation sessions with my corporate learners using the roleplays in the book. As these are quite easy to set up and run, they provide an ideal opportunity to focus on your one-to-one students and how they handle negotiating with a native speaker. But be careful – they are often better negotiators than we teachers are.

Phil Wade
La Réunion, France

Reviewing for ETp

Would you like to review books or other teaching materials for ETp? We are always looking for people who are interested in writing reviews for us. Please email helena.gomm@pavpub.com for advice and a copy of our guidelines for reviewers. You will need to give your postal address and say what areas of teaching you are most interested in.

IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

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helena.gomm@pavpub.com

Challenging our own authority

Cory McMillen and **Kara Boyer** recommend student-run help desks.

Peer tutoring, for all its untapped possibilities, remains one of the most variable and difficult to implement classroom practices. It has great *potential* for producing learning on the part of all participants, as Rod Roscoe and Michelene Chi point out, but often seems to produce very little aside from increased noise level. And it asks a lot of the students: it depends on their ability as a group to process, comprehend and ultimately present with a minimum of guidance; it seeks the pinnacle of both curricular knowledge and positive social skills. And in a regular classroom setting, peer tutoring can be very difficult to oversee effectively.

As a result, it can be tempting to avoid or minimise use of this technique. Or, even if you do soldier on, you may find yourself lamenting the results you see produced. Instinctively, teachers want to make peer tutoring work because we have a sense of unanswered questions: Shouldn't a classroom packed full of individuals with varying strengths and ideas be a resource unto itself? And shouldn't the growing student numbers in our biggest classes be as much the answer as they are the problem?

We have created a functioning student help desk programme that allows us to challenge our own authority by giving some of it away

A student-run help desk

We think the answer may lie in the creation of a student-run help desk. Over the course of the last seven years, we have used just such a system to incorporate peer tutoring into our everyday reading and writing routines. By isolating a space in the classroom and staffing it with brave volunteers, and by giving that space a title (the Experts' Corner), prestige and a few essential materials, we have created a functioning student help desk programme that allows us to challenge our own authority by giving some of it away.

Here in Omaha, we are working in an ESL context, but we hope that this account of our experiences will be of benefit to language teachers in a variety of other situations.

Benefits

Initially a simple set-up with limited goals and duties, the Experts' Corner has grown to become a central component of our classroom, and something that we maintain all year,

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Challenging our own authority

every year. Through a combination of procedure, structure and evidenced value, it now accomplishes the following:

- It provides a platform with which positive student leaders can be created and promoted, and by which student ownership of the classroom can be strengthened.
- It creates unique challenges for readers and writers at every level by placing members of a peer group in a position of teaching the skills they possess to others, and encouraging the rest of the class to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.
- It encourages the pre-teaching, re-teaching and reinforcement of positive social skills.
- It creates an invaluable resource for ESL students by allowing them to work with bilingual peers.
- It provides the students with established, permanent routines for seeking assistance or guidance.
- It maximises the availability of help while simultaneously freeing up time that can be used for other things.
- It maintains and oversees classroom supplies, allowing limited materials to have maximum use. For example, with just two classroom computers available, we count on the Experts to recognise when someone might benefit from the use of one of them. This might be because they need to do some research, are falling behind, are working out some spelling issues in a paper – or for any number of other reasons.

As we've developed our help desk, we've made a lot of discoveries regarding those factors that have allowed it to be as successful as it is – and also the mistakes which render it completely useless.

The selection process

Identifying students who would make successful Experts can be trickier than you'd think. Over the years, we've tried many approaches to choosing who will staff the help desk, with varying success. We've chosen students ourselves, created application forms for interested individuals to fill out, and had the current Experts recommend their own replacements. And although all of these systems had their benefits (the application process remains the method of choice), none of them taught us as much about what makes the help desk work as a student named Tristan.

Tristan

Tristan, in his way, proved to us that we cannot disqualify students simply because we consider them to be 'difficult' or because they don't always make the right choices in class. A stereotypical classroom disruptor, Tristan happened to have great verbal skills. Unfortunately, he was insistent in his desire to show them off. He simply would not stop talking. Or do his homework. Or stop blurting out comments. Did we mention the constant talking?

A student help desk maximises the availability of help while simultaneously freeing up time that can be used for other things

He also begged (for six of the longest months on record) to be an Expert. In truth, although we did finally relent, it was only because there were only six weeks of school left. We didn't think he could do too much damage in that short amount of time!

In fact, he didn't do any damage at all. Tristan remains, to this day, the most effective and remarkable Expert we've ever had. Being on the help desk fed his need for attention, giving him an avenue for his need to talk. It eliminated his need to interrupt. His use of humour and his 'gift of the gab' made it easy for the students he helped to listen, and to understand his suggestions. And like many rule-breaking students, he loved to help enforce those same rules that he struggled to follow himself. For six weeks, this child who never turned in any homework showed insights into the writing process that we would never otherwise have known that he had. He also initiated a redesign of the Expert work area, suggesting several innovations that we still incorporate today.

Two at a time

But even Tristan couldn't do it alone. We typically make a point of having two Experts at any given time. One is generally a student whom we see as a strong reader and writer, someone who is a little above their peers in terms of both ability and effort. The other we let be a wild card. It might be someone who is bilingual, or a Special Education student who is highly verbal, or it might just be another Tristan. Using 'common sense' methods such as putting the two best writers in together often undercuts the Corner's ability to function, for a number of reasons. Great writers don't always have a lot of patience with those who are struggling and, of course, being good at writing isn't the same as being good at *teaching* writing. Teaching is a verbal communication task as much as anything, although you may find that there are other qualities that you prefer to look for in a help desk student. Regardless, by differentiating the skill sets and encouraging the help desk students to collaborate when answering questions, you will always find that a great deal more is accomplished.

The importance of procedures

A help desk's ability to run requires consistency and design. Today, we invest two full class periods in teaching the procedures to our students, including several practice runs that emphasise the desired behaviour. We re-teach and review these procedures halfway through the year.

Absolutely every aspect of the help desk has, by necessity, a procedure: how to ask a question, how to answer it, how to turn in work or hand it back. Even how to wait your turn. When the Experts are first chosen, they are given an additional day away from the classroom to review these procedures and show their understanding of the expectations. They are also given codes that they can use to let us know if somebody is being impolite or rude, or just not following the established procedures.

Some of our procedures come in the form of carefully-phrased instructions. A help desk requires a large amount of preparation work, most of it done by us. For every assignment or project that

When student leaders are a visible presence, with a share of the classroom authority, the number of incidents of misbehaviour is reduced

the Experts help with, we create a series of flowcharts. They can use these to help identify problems, look for hints or instructions, or even find the right phrasing for a suggestion they want to make. The charts don't do their job for them, but they do give them a guide. The charts also help them see what our exact expectations are both for them and for the given assignment. Usually, by the third project they've assisted with, the Experts typically understand the job well enough not to need these charts anymore.

Creating clearly-defined procedures makes it much easier for us to delegate some of our authority to the help desk, as well, and this can be one of the most enlightening steps of the help desk design. Few individuals are truly happy having authority exercised over them, but people are especially sensitive to having someone in charge of them who is not *like* them. This is why a multinational corporation based in Europe, for example, is still careful to create local management opportunities in each of its branches throughout the world.

When student leaders are a visible presence, with a share of the classroom authority, the number of incidents of misbehaviour is reduced because the need for misbehaviour is diminished. The difference between having the teacher check planners, hand back work, assist students, keep track of the restroom pass, present the lesson, pick up completed work and correct behaviour, and having a help desk that handles just two of those things, is substantial. Turning three or more of those tasks over to your Experts changes the game entirely.

Giving it value

The last, and possibly most important, step towards making the help desk effective is to sell it well. We quickly learnt that putting a table in the corner and giving it a name wasn't enough. It had to stand out, to look special. It had to be important. And we had to prove that we trusted the Experts by giving them privileges and authority belying their actual status.

Placing visible value in the help desk and the people who earn the chance to work there also acts as a motivator for many students. Call it the 'career effect'. Few people are motivated to do their best in a job without any hope of advancement, and one of the road bumps in education is that academic learning is a long-term-goal scenario. Arguably, it is the first true long-term goal that people face in their lives. Encouraging the development of authentic intrinsic motivators in those circumstances can be incredibly difficult. Maybe it's our social genetics at work, but the mere existence of advancement potential seems to act as a motivator for further effort.

Placing visible value in the help desk and the people who earn the chance to work there acts as a motivator for many students

After a few years, we even put the Experts in charge of the restroom pass. They have a clear idea as to who is on task and who isn't, and putting the pass at their desk creates a constant flow of traffic. Other students take that as an indication that it's OK to visit the help desk, and they are more likely to seek out assistance. This, in turn, creates a spike in the number of students utilising the desk.

Making the Experts 'important' has had other benefits, too. They perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as student leaders and people of authority. They react to that. They take the initiative in assisting one of us when the other is away; they are involved in management during fire and severe weather drills; and they actively pursue ways to help maintain the classroom. They have also been known (this is particularly helpful) to tell us why they think a particular lesson failed and what we ought to do differently.

One final note: it probably isn't necessary to point out that, in a classroom, there are always exceptions. Inevitably, there are going to be students who (for a variety of legitimate reasons) feel uncomfortable about asking their peers for assistance. It has been our experience that such cases are rare. But it is still worth noting that no teacher should create a help desk with the goal of producing a classroom that does not require them to participate in some substantial way. The presence of the Experts can be seen as maintaining the overall structure of the class, while freeing the teacher (or teachers) to focus their attention on one or two individuals. Modified curriculum, alternate assignments, individual tutoring and assessment of IEP (Individualized Education Program) goals and objectives are just some of the many uses we've found for our time when the Experts are running the show.

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The number of potential benefits created by incorporating a student-run help desk into a reading or writing course is virtually unlimited. It's not hard to imagine that ten different teachers, each running their own version of the Experts' Corner, might come up with ten new innovations. They just have to take the leap, challenge their own authority a little bit, and then wait to see what happens. ETp

Roscoe, R and Chi, M 'Understanding tutor learning: knowledge-building and knowledge-telling in peer tutors' explanations and questions' *Review of Educational Research* 77 (4) 2007



Cory McMillen teaches Language Arts at Bryan Middle School, in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. He has an MA in Secondary Education, and is a member of the editorial review board of the Journal of the American Association of Special Education Professionals.

Cory.McMillen@bellevue.edu



Kara Boyer is a Special Education teacher for the Omaha public schools. She has an MA in Curriculum and Instruction, and has co-published several articles with Cory McMillen.

kara.boyer@ops.org

SCRAPBOOK

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

Where do you think you're going, you **idiom**?

A mark of achievement in any language is fluency, the ability to express oneself readily and effortlessly. There is, however, a step further that can be achieved: being in command of *idiomatic* English, French, Italian or whatever is the mark of a true grasp of communication in that language.

But beginner idiomists tread a tricky path: when idioms are used well, there is a feeling of being at home in a society; used inappropriately, they frequently expose the hapless user as an outsider and source of hilarity.

Many students love idioms because they are colourful and fun – they like the idea that British weather consists largely of cats and dogs falling from the sky. However, disappointment sets in when they discover that British people very rarely use this particular idiom, and that it is one that can quickly label you as an outsider rather than an insider.

So be careful if you decide to teach any of the idioms on these pages to your students: just because native speakers *know* these expressions doesn't necessarily mean they ever use them – or certainly not in their entirety!

Idiom **anatomy**

There are many anatomical idioms in English. How many of these do you know?

1. Pulling someone's leg (or having yours pulled)
2. Having a frog in your throat
3. Having something shoved down your throat
4. Keep your hair on!
5. Picking someone's brains
6. Having butterflies in your stomach
7. Paying through the nose
8. Making your blood boil
9. Doing something in cold blood
10. Give someone the cold shoulder
11. Have a chip on your shoulder
12. Having your head in the clouds
13. Bury your head in the sand



Answers:
1 Misleading someone, usually as a joke
2 Having trouble speaking because of a temporary throat blockage
3 Having an idea or an opinion forced on you
4 Keep calm; don't lose your temper
5 Getting someone else's opinion on something
6 Feeling nervous
7 Paying too much for something
8 Making you very angry
9 Doing something (usually bad) deliberately and calculatingly
10 Snub or ignore someone
11 Have a feeling of resentment about something
12 Being unaware of what is going on around you
13 Avoid acknowledging a situation, when you know very well what is going on around you

Building idioms

When seeking to improve relationships between different people or groups, ***building bridges*** is a good thing to do. And if it all goes horribly wrong, you may find that ***mending fences*** can effect a reconciliation. However, refusing to acknowledge the problems and simply ***papering over the cracks*** definitely isn't the answer. If nothing works, you may find yourself ***beating your head against a brick wall*** in frustration.

© iStockphoto.com / Brian Jackson

Idiom **safari**

Another splendid source of idioms is the animal world – see if you can fill in the blanks:

1. make a ..... of yourself (eat too much)
2. a .....'s dinner (a mess)
3. a dark ..... (someone who hides their true abilities)
4. the ..... of the family (a disreputable family member)
5. a ..... in a china shop (a really clumsy person)
6. a ..... at a gate (a really impatient person)
7. a ..... in sheep's clothing (a dangerous person who seems superficially harmless)
8. the ..... in the room (a subject that everyone is avoiding talking about)
9. smell a ..... (suspect that something is wrong)

Answers:
1 pig, 2 dog, 3 horse, 4 black sheep, 5 bull, 6 bull, 7 wolf, 8 elephant, 9 rat

We also turn to the animal kingdom to express attributes. You might like to ask your students whether these particular attributes would be ascribed to the same animals in their own culture:

*As **strong** as an ox*

*As **weak** as a kitten* (which presumably *couldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding*)

*As **blind** as a bat*

*As **crazy** as a coot*

*As **poor** as a church mouse*

*As **stubborn** as a mule*

*As **busy** as a beaver*

*As **sick** as a dog*

*As **hungry** as a horse*

*As **sly** as a fox*

*As **quiet** as a mouse*

*As **dead** as a dodo*

Finding the **meaning**

Occasionally the meaning of an idiom will be fairly obvious: ***having eyes bigger than your stomach*** clearly suggests over-ambition when helping yourself to food or ordering a large meal. (For me, this expression always brings to mind the sage advice: ***never eat more than you can lift*** – one of my favourite expressions which, I hasten to add, is not a genuine idiom but more of a leg-pull.)

Some phrases, however, are just too obscure to work out. Although you can easily understand that looking like the ***cat that got the cream*** suggests a degree of smugness, being asked ***Has the cat got your tongue?*** when unable to answer someone borders on the bizarre. Similarly, being so disappointed that you are ***as sick as a parrot*** conjures up a strange and unlikely medical emergency. Having ***your ear to the ground*** makes sense when you are tracking in the wild, but having your ***nose to the grindstone*** when busy surely risks another strange and illogical medical crisis!

Obscurity can also arise from a misunderstanding of the origins of a particular phrase. I have often seen the expression ***with baited breath*** used in writing; this makes me think of a large tom cat, its mouth wedged open with a large slice of cheddar, waiting hopefully outside a mouse hole. In fact, the phrase should be ***with bated breath*** – bated being short for *abated*, or held. When you know this, the true meaning – that of waiting in suspense – becomes clear.

Another expression, rather dated now, is travelling by ***shanks' pony***. This means travelling on foot, as ***shank*** is another word for ***leg***. These days the word ***shank*** mainly survives in the butcher's shop, usually with reference to lamb!

Idiom **nationalities**

Some historical expressions sound somewhat disdainful (even though the reasons for them seem, well, reasonable). *Dutch courage* calls to mind the kind of bravery to be found in a measure or two of alcohol, and comes from the early use of Dutch gin by soldiers in battle. Sometimes the disdain is real. A *Dutch uncle* is someone who gives unwelcome advice. And *Scotch mist* is something that doesn't exist. *French leave*, meaning being absent without permission, also sounds derogatory; however, the French have their revenge, as their equivalent is *English leave*.

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So *hold your horses*[1] and don't *get my goat*[2] just because it's a completely *different kettle of fish*[3]. And whatever you do, *don't put the cart before the horse*[4], because up until now, we've *got on like a house on fire*[5]. Actually, I think you're *beyond the pale*[6] and it will be *a piece of cake*[7] to give you *a piece of my mind*[8] – so *pull your socks up*[9]!

1 restrain yourself 2 upset me 3 different thing altogether
4 get things round the wrong way 5 very well indeed 6 unacceptable
7 very easy 8 a telling off 9 sort yourself out

Scrapbook compiled by Ian Waring Green

Raiding the stationery cupboard

Amy Lightfoot offers ten classroom activities for stationery-philes.

I don't know why, but every time I find myself professing my own love of all things stationery, I always get an enthusiastic response: *'Oh me too … I LOVE it.'* I haven't yet managed to figure out exactly why so many people have such an affection for pens, staplers, highlighters and their many relatives, but for the English language teacher there is certainly a lot more to those everyday bits and pieces than meets the eye. There are tons of possibilities for activities based around the various items we can find lying around the teacher's room … or at the bottom of our bags. From the lowly paper clip to the sophisticated neon Post-it® note, as a collection of low-cost aids to language learning they are unrivalled. In this article, we will look at ten of my favourite classroom activities using Post-it® notes, paper clips, string and other items.



Post-it® notes

1 Board games

Mini Post-it® notes make excellent squares for board games. The beauty of it is that you can ask each student in a group to take several Post-it® notes, write a question or word on each one and then stick them onto a shared table in a grid format – *and they don't move*. The students then number them and take turns to throw dice, move their counters and then answer the questions that they land on, or define a word or make a sentence with it, or whatever task you choose that will practise the particular language you are working on. This idea was suggested to me by Françoise Votocek at Bell's Homerton Teacher Campus last summer, and I love the fact that you can adapt the basic principle in so many ways: making a board game suddenly becomes considerably less labour intensive. A similar activity also appears in Mario Rinvolucri's excellent *Grammar Games* book.

2 Review and reading games

These activities need large Post-it® notes to work best. Take nine notes and write the numbers 1–9 in large figures on the front of each (one number per note). On the sticky side of the notes, write a question to review something that the students have been learning in class. This could be a sentence with a gap to fill, a definition of or question about a word they have been learning, a jumbled sentence for them to order – whatever. Stick the notes on the board. The students get into groups and each group nominates a runner and a secretary. The runners come up to the board, take a Post-it® note, return to their group and they all work together

to find the answer, which the secretary writes down. When they have finished writing, the runner returns the note to the board and takes another. You can make the game faster and more competitive by telling them that the group to finish first gets an extra point, and then assign points to each group for correct answers as you go through them at the end. You can also use the same format to set up a reading race, where the students are given a text and the comprehension (or other) questions are given only on the notes on the board. Making it a race encourages the students to develop their skimming and scanning skills.

3 Class gap-fill

As much as some people might yawn at the idea of another gap-fill activity, this one does work very well. Choose up to ten sentences that contain some vocabulary or grammatical items that the students have been studying. Rewrite the sentences with gaps for these words on separate large pieces of paper. Stick these up around the classroom. Put the students into groups of four or five. Dictate (in random order) the missing words to the groups so that they each have one full set of words. They write these on a set of Post-it® notes. Ask the groups to stick their words in the correct gaps on the sentences around the room. If you have different coloured notes for each group, you will be able to see easily which groups have got the correct answers and which have not.

String



1 Grouping

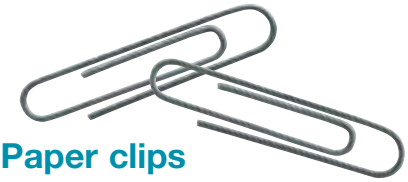
I learnt this idea on a training course while working for the British Council. Basically, you count the number of people in the class and cut one longish piece of string for each one. You then decide how many groups you want, take one piece of string for each member of the group and tie one end of the pieces of string together. For each group, you have one knot at the top and all the ends dangling down below. In the classroom, hold the knots of all the groups in your fist. Each student then comes up and takes the end of a piece of string – it's very important to emphasise at this stage that they must not let go of it. When everyone has one, you let go and they will find the other members of their group: those students who are holding pieces of string attached to theirs. This is a great way of putting students into groups and they always seem to love it, even if they have done it many times before.

2 Group discussion patterns

I discovered this activity many years ago while browsing a new, but now very well-loved, copy of Friederike Klippel's *Keep Talking*, and I have used it regularly ever since with great results. It's particularly good with groups of students who seem to have problems listening to other people and constantly talk over one another. Basically it works like this: you put the students into groups of about four or five and give each group a ball of string. Tell them that they can only speak when they are holding the ball. Give the students a topic or question to discuss. Explain that when they want to speak, they need to gesture for the ball of string to be passed. When they pass it on, they hold on to the string, so that eventually a web of string forms between the members of the group. (You will need to demonstrate this the first time you do it.) Once they get the hang of it, it's an excellent way to show clearly who in a group is dominating, or not contributing to, the discussion. The resulting web shows whether there has been a lot of discussion between two people in a group or whether there have been equal amounts of input from all the members. As a training activity to raise awareness of the need to encourage everyone to share and discuss their ideas, it is fantastic.

3 Showing intonation patterns

I don't know where this idea came from, but it's a good way of helping more advanced learners to develop their understanding of different intonation patterns. You need large pieces of paper for this – A3 or bigger – which the students can write sentences on in large letters. The students work in pairs or small groups and you dictate several sentences to them which you can use to demonstrate the intonation patterns that you are practising. (You could also dictate just one sentence if you wanted to practise contrastive stress, and then say it in several different ways.) The students put a piece of string just above the sentence on the piece of paper. It's important that the piece of string is quite a bit longer than the piece of paper they are using. You say the dictated sentence again, modelling the intonation pattern that you want the students to work on. They listen and move the string to represent the way your intonation (or the sentence stress) changes as you say it. They can then check this physical representation of the intonation with another group before practising producing the same intonation pattern themselves, using the string as a guide. Students seem to like this kinaesthetic and visual approach to learning about intonation patterns.



Paper clips

1 Contributing to discussions

In most classes there are students who love to speak and take part in discussions and those who are very reluctant. One way to encourage more equal participation is to give the students ten paper clips each before they begin a discussion in groups. Tell them that they need to try to get rid of as many paper clips as possible. Every time they make a point or verbally acknowledge something that someone else has said, they can place one of their paper clips in the middle of the table. When the discussion time is over, they can compare the number of paper clips they have left. This can also be a useful tool for students who tend to dominate discussions: if they see that they have used up all their paper clips but no one else in their group has, it should send the message that they might need to focus on allowing and encouraging others to speak. (Thanks to my colleague Chetna Bhatt at the British Council in New Delhi for sharing this idea.)

2 Prediction and probability

This is a good activity for practising the language of prediction and probability – *will*, *might*, *may*, *probably won't*, *could*, *I doubt they will*, *it's pretty unlikely*, etc. The students work in groups and are given a pile of paper clips and a cup or other small receptacle. They place the cup at an agreed distance away from them. They then write some sentences using the language they have been

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Raiding the stationery cupboard

studying about how many paper clips they think they can successfully throw into the cup (eg *I probably won't be able to get more than three in the cup. I doubt anyone in the group will get them all in*). They take turns to throw a set number of paper clips into the cup and check their predictions. Be warned: students can get incredibly competitive while doing this activity!

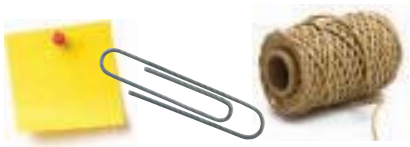
3 Word stress

This activity requires different coloured paper clips or paper clips of different sizes. The students can do it in pairs. They each have several paper clips of either two different sizes or two different colours. They use them to represent the syllable and stress patterns of different vocabulary items that you have been learning. Each paper clip represents one syllable, with a different coloured or larger paper clip standing for the stressed syllable. The students can either listen to you modelling the words and then put the paper clips into the correct pattern on their desk or, for higher-level students, work from a written list, figuring out the stress/paper clip pattern for each one before checking it with either an answer key or another student. If the students have a supply of these paper clips available to them all the time, you can ask them to get them out and use them to show the stress pattern every time you come across a problematic word. Seeing the stress pattern represented visually like this can be a big help for some students who have difficulty hearing it.

And finally …

A longer project

There's an age-old, popular activity that has done the rounds using various items from the stationery cupboard. Basically, it goes like this: the students are given an item such as a rubber band, a paper clip or a drawing pin and asked to think of as many different alternative uses for it as they can. They are encouraged to be creative and sometimes get extra points if their ideas are particularly wacky. I've taken this one step further to make it into a bigger project. As described above, small groups of students get one item from the stationery cupboard and think of several different and unusual uses for it. They choose their most interesting new use, and then design an advertising campaign to bring it to the attention of the public (or the rest of the class). They can do this either by making a poster with a slogan or, if you have time, scripting a short TV or radio advertisement. They can also be encouraged to re-name the item. You can ask the groups either to act out or describe their advertisement to the rest of the class, or record it outside class on a smartphone or camera to show the rest of the class in a final presentation.



These are just a handful of activities using ordinary stationery items – there are countless more possibilities. In fact, there's an entire website devoted to uses for Post-it® notes in the classroom. I hope that while some of the activities above may be familiar, there are others that are new for you to try. More importantly, I hope that I've inspired you to look a bit harder in the cupboard and given you a genuine reason to browse in your favourite stationery shop. ETp

A quick note about the sources of these ideas: I've tried hard to attribute all of the above activities to the people or books I learnt them from, but I apologise if I haven't mentioned the first person to think of or publish any of these ideas.

Klippel, F *Keep Talking* CUP 1985
Rinvolucri, M *Grammar Games* CUP 1985



Amy Lightfoot has a DELTA and an MA (ELT). She has worked as a writer, teacher and trainer for International House, the BBC and the British Council in the UK, Portugal and across South Asia. She is now working as a freelance ELT writer and trainer in Somerset, UK.

mail@amylightfoot.co.uk

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Feedback and correction

Elspeth Pollock has some techniques for keeping her students wide awake.

How often do we just walk into class, get the students to open their workbooks, and correct the homework – to a sea of inattentive, unmotivated faces?

We would probably all agree that written and oral correction, whether of homework or during class, is a necessary and expected part of our lessons; it helps both teachers and students to notice the gaps in learning. But maybe we should question the usefulness of correcting in the same old way, time after time.

Try some of these practical ideas for making spoken and written correction both *motivating* and *memorable*, using some of the many tools at our disposal – from mini-whiteboards to video, MP3 and the interactive whiteboard (IWB).

Teacher-produced techniques

- Make a poster of common class mistakes for the classroom wall to provide a constant reminder.
- Use a free recording program such as *Audacity* or your mobile phone to make an MP3 mini-listening (podcast) of correction of written work to email to each student or, if you have too many, for use as a class listening and correction activity.
- Go one step further and use *Camstudio* or *Jing* to make a video recording of your correction of student writing (especially useful for students who have to produce portfolios of written work). Note: an 'avi' file uses more memory than an 'swf', but is of better quality.
- Make a word cloud (*www.wordle.net*) so the students can put /t/ or /d/ past tense verbs into groups to help with pronunciation feedback, to correct word order or to distinguish between first and third person verbs.
- To help the students make corrections to word order or to find extra words or missing words in their writing, try *www.triptico.net*. This gives easy visual correction which can now be saved on your computer for future use.
- Use booing and cheering sound effects on your computer for competition feedback (not so useful for sensitive students or individual feedback).
- Get your students to redraft their work by writing the same task for a different target reader – concentrate on correcting register and style.
- Hide the answers under the chairs for the students to find.

Student-produced techniques

- Give out the Teacher's Book and allow early finishers to be the teacher and know all the answers! Alternatively, photocopy the answers to be passed round the class. Or divide the photocopy into A and B, and let the students correct each other in pairs.
- Get the students to build up a list of their own common mistakes and corrections to refer to before writing each new composition.
- Use mini-whiteboards for the students to write their answers and hold them up for comparison, correcting word order and identifying extra or missing words.
- Use coloured rods to represent A, B, C, D multiple-choice options for the students to hold up – that way, you can see if they've got the correct answers!
- Get the students to confess their mistakes to each other (Paul Seligson suggested this).
- Go back to compositions to revisit mistakes and encourage the students to do the same after exams.
- Ask the students to record themselves, then use a list of questions to analyse their spoken performance – concentrate on intonation and sounding comfortable, rather than grammar mistakes which may be difficult to spot.
- Put mistakes on the IWB after speaking practice and pass round the keyboard for the students to make corrections. Do the same with grammar exercises.
- Allow the students to give each other feedback on their written or spoken performance by means of an opinion sheet – use boxes they can tick for lower levels. Or ask the students to write pertinent questions on each other's work (*Why are there only two paragraphs?* or *Who are you writing to?*). With younger learners, ask them to draw (even in graffiti style) positive feedback for each other.

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I hope that these ideas will help you provide your students with effective correction which they will assimilate, remember and learn from. ETp



Elspeth Pollock is based in Seville, Spain, and has been teaching and training for over 20 years. She has the Delta, an MA in Linguistics and most recently the Trinity ICT Certificate, which kick-started her current interest in studying how to integrate technology into EFL lessons.

els@eli.es

What does a CELTA tutor do?

Chia Suan Chong

reviews the responsibilities of a teacher trainer.

So you've done the DELTA, attended all sorts of teacher development sessions, and maybe conducted a few yourself. The next step in your career progression seems to be 'CELTA tutor'. Here are some things you need to know …

The very first ELT teacher training course, which became the basis for what is now known as the CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) course, was started at International House in London 50 years ago, with the intention of keeping up the standards of English language teaching throughout the world. Today, the CELTA is one of the most recognised ELT qualifications and the passport to getting a job in teaching English practically anywhere around the globe.

There are some basic criteria that every CELTA centre has to fulfill, and CELTA tutors are externally assessed on every CELTA course they deliver to ensure that the standards of the qualification are maintained, and that the core tenets of the communicative approach are practised. However, there is sufficient scope to accommodate the different beliefs and approaches to teacher training and teaching, and sufficient flexibility to enable each tutor to run the course that they believe will best equip new teachers to face the world of ELT.

This article will explore the role of the CELTA tutor from the perspective of an International House London tutor. However, that role will, of course, differ depending on the institution, the individual tutor and the trainees involved. The table on page 54 illustrates what a typical day may look like.

CELTA tutors are externally assessed on every course they deliver to ensure that the standards of the qualification are maintained

Roles and requirements

The CELTA course is divided into two parts: Input sessions and Teaching Practice (TP).

In the first part, the trainees are given input concerning various teaching methodologies and approaches, ways of exploring, clarifying and offering practice of language (the four systems of Lexis, Grammar, Discourse and Phonology), developing the language

skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, lesson planning, providing language feedback, etc. At International House in London, we have a main course tutor and a second tutor giving input on each course, and input may take the form of demonstration lessons, workshops or discussions.

In the second part, the trainees are given the opportunity to put what they have learnt in the input sessions into practice. They are required to teach eight observed lessons (six 40-minute lessons and two 60-minute lessons). As TP begins very soon after the start of the course, it is important, when drawing up the course timetable, to consider what basics will be needed to enable the trainees to plan and teach a lesson. For their first six lessons, the trainees are given 'Supervised Lesson Planning' time, during which the tutors are available to give support and answer questions. This is particularly important for any trainees who find themselves in a panic about their impending lesson. At the end of TP, the trainees are required to provide a self-evaluation of the lesson they have taught before the group is gathered for TP feedback with their tutor. A good dose of daily liaison with fellow tutors is needed to track the progress of all the trainees in their individual TP groups, to ensure that they are given the necessary guidance and help during the input sessions and the Supervised Lesson Planning.

A good dose of daily liaison with fellow tutors is needed to track the progress of all the trainees

Over the period of the course, the trainees also have to submit four written assignments of about 1,000 words each, which the tutors have to mark. In addition, the tutors have other administrative tasks, such as writing progress reports, timetables and candidate profiles, as well as pastoral care duties, such as providing tutorials for individual trainees. These are all things the tutors need to find time for within their busy schedules.

Recommendations

Here are some suggestions for anyone who would like to become a CELTA tutor:

1. Shadow a teacher trainer you admire or about whom you have heard good things. Observe this person every chance you get. Engage in discussions with the trainer about what you saw. Don't be afraid to ask if you can 'steal' an idea or activity.
2. Think back to when you did your first teaching qualification. What were some of the emotions you felt? What were the issues you faced? How did you overcome them? Remember that intense stress can make people react in strange ways.
3. Don't expect the trainees to copy what you do or to believe in the same things you do. You are there to guide them into honing their own style of teaching, not to churn out clones of yourself. Instead, try employing a coaching style in TP feedback and utilising questions that will guide the trainees towards being better able to help their learners. Teach your trainees to reflect on what they do, and they will be able to continue developing beyond the CELTA.
4. Don't just watch the trainees teaching when doing your TP observations. Observe the students, too, and notice how they are reacting to what is happening in class. Also take note of how the trainees are responding to the students. How sensitive are they to the students' needs and wants? Did they notice a student who was feeling left out? Did they realise that they have just misunderstood a student who didn't have the vocabulary to express himself? Are they able to think on their feet and react accordingly? How can you help them to do these things?
5. You are going to have to deliver bad news at some point. Whether it is a 'Below Standard' mark for a TP lesson, a 'Resubmit' on an assignment, or an overall 'Fail' on the course, the trainee concerned is not going to be overjoyed and might react emotionally. Being critical of someone's teaching style can sometimes be seen as a judgement of their personality, so try to provide feedback in a way that is as objective and as supportive and helpful as possible – and allow time and space for the trainees to be emotional, if necessary.
6. Anticipate what the assessor might ask to see. If you are not sure, speak to more experienced colleagues about the assessor. Over-prepare and make sure all your admin is in order when the assessor comes.
7. Attend teacher development sessions or conference presentations about teacher training.
8. Read blogs like *TeacherTrainingUnplugged.wordpress.com*.
9. Use discussion platforms like #ELTchat on *Twitter* to help reflect on what you believe and what you do.
10. Remember that the CELTA is only a month long. It is not a course to teach trainees everything they need to know about ELT. It is a course to show them how to find out what they need to know about ELT.

★ ★ ★

Being a CELTA tutor is a responsibility that is not to be taken lightly. However, the privilege of being able to play a part in the journey of another teacher is not only intensely rewarding, it also forces you as a tutor to re-examine your own beliefs and attitudes towards language learning and how this is reflected in your teaching practice. In the end, it might be your own teaching that benefits the most from the course! ETp



Chia Suan Chong currently runs general English classes, business English classes and teacher training courses at International House London, London, UK. She is also an active participant at conferences. She loves a good debate and blogs regularly for ETp's website *eltKnowledge*, and also at *chiasuanchong.com*.

chiasuan@live.co.uk

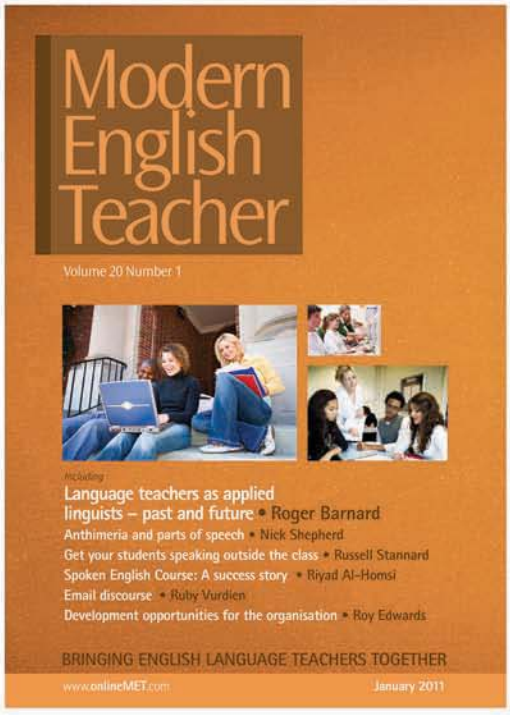
A day in the life of a CELTA tutor

Time	Activity	Notes
8.30 am	Preparation check	I ensure I have everything I need for the input session that day. I also check that I know what my fellow tutors will be covering in their 11 am input session.
9–10 am	Input session	I might do a workshop or a demonstration lesson, but I try to leave plenty of time for discussion. What might seem obvious to an experienced teacher might not be obvious to a new teacher.
10–11 am	Admin and language awareness	This is the time for me to set assignments, arrange for observations of experienced teachers and get the trainees to keep their portfolios up-to-date. My trainees also use this hour to discuss the language they have heard their learners produce and to practise ways of dealing with emergent language, eg understanding how language works, clarifying meaning, form and pronunciation, and correcting and reformulating.
11 am–12 pm	Break	Not really a break. While the other tutor does her input session, I use the time to prepare the following day's input session.
12 pm–12.30 pm	Lunch meeting	The lunch hour is often used to exchange notes with fellow TP tutors regarding the progress of the trainees and the best ways to go about developing them.
1.30–3.30 pm	Teaching Practice (TP)	While the trainees teach, I sit at the back and observe both the trainees and the students. I make notes on their lesson plans and on feedback sheets, in the hope that written feedback will help them reflect. After two hours of non-stop frantic scribbling, my hand starts to hurt.
3.30–4 pm	TP feedback	The TP group gathers together for feedback. Although some trainees see this as a moment of 'judgement', it is a good time to build rapport amongst the group. I encourage group members to bring up any positive points on the lessons taught. I find ways to encourage reflection. Mistakes are good, as long as you realise what went wrong and work on ways to improve on it. Don't focus too much on the grade. It is the development that counts.
4–4.30 pm	Tutors' meeting	The tutors exchange notes on what happened at TP that day.
4.30–5.30 pm	Tying up loose ends	Certain individuals may need counselling or extra help with their lesson planning. I might need to check that the relevant pages of their CELTA folders are organised and kept up-to-date. Folders might need to be brought down to tutors if reports have to be written. I might need to revise the following week's timetable in light of the progress of the group this week.
5.30–6.30 pm	Report writing	Three reports need to be written for each candidate through the period of the CELTA course.
6.30 pm	Go home	I head home, but the day often does not end here. I tend to prefer to mark assignments in the comfort of my own home.

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Get 'appy

Francesca McClure Smith explores the teaching applications you can download onto your phone or tablet computer.

Having finally acquired your consumer dream mobile device, your next question is: Which apps are out there for English teachers? Faced with a sea of options, where to begin in this digital Disneyland? In this article, I will list a number of apps which have proved to be really effective in my classes, and explain how to find them and how to use them. These apps can be downloaded for free or at very low cost from the App Store, if you have an Apple device, or from Google Play, if your tablet or mobile phone uses Android technology.

Reference books

Invaluable to all language teachers are a good dictionary and, in a monolingual EFL context, a translating app. Digital reference books are lighter to carry than their paper counterparts and far quicker to use, enabling you to check things you are unsure about in seconds. They are also updated regularly, which means that there is no need to buy new editions. ***Word Web*** and ***Dictionary*** are both apps that work offline and also act as a thesaurus; they include audio and 'favourite word' features.

From the numerous translator apps available, I recommend ***iTranslate***, which is free and available in 50 different languages. The downside is that it only works when you have an internet connection. However, as wireless environments become increasingly common, this may not be a problem.

Reference apps such as these are well worth recommending to students for their own mobile devices.

Flashcards

Tablet computers are ideal for displaying flashcards to revise and practise vocabulary. Learners working in small groups can share a tablet – and you can share one with your student if you are teaching one-to-one. It is also possible to show app material from a mobile device on a computer screen by attaching the mobile device to the computer using an adaptor cable.

Quizlet is an online tool designed to make personalised flashcards very easily. Images can be found and added quickly, using the 'Search images' button, and there is also an audio feature. Alternatively, you can download ready-made shared card sets. *Quizlet* has an iPhone app, facilitating quick revision on the move for busy students.

Lower levels

When searching for apps in the App Store or Google Play, take a look at related categories, such as *Games and Education* as well as *English Language Learning*, to expand your options.

Speaking skills

Storywheel is another app originally designed for a non-ELT setting. Its aim is to develop children's cognitive abilities through storytelling, but it also works really well to improve English students' speaking skills and to practise narrative tenses.

Players take turns to make a collective story, spinning a wheel which stops on a picture and then recording themselves telling that part of the story for up to 30 seconds. Each contribution should incorporate the picture which has appeared on the wheel into the storyline. The whole class can be involved in deciding the plot, and individual learners can rehearse their part before recording it, thus focusing on accuracy as well as fluency. Once the story is finished, it is played back for the students to hear as the screen shows the corresponding animated images. This type of activity is a great follow-up for work on narrative tenses. It works best with one mobile device per group of four to six students.

Teaching aids

Remember the days when teachers had to haul around aids like realia, dice and recording devices from class to class? Now one small mobile device can hold it all.

Learners love rolling the dice by literally shaking the tablet when using the ***Diceshaker 3d*** app, which comes in very handy for classroom board games. The ***One Stop English*** app has an activity timer, giving students a visible countdown that adds excitement to routine activities. There is also a voice recorder, which comes in handy to record students' dialogues for later analysis and correction, as well as for activities simulating exams like TOEFL, which include recorded samples of speech. Finally, this free app has fun sound effects such as applause for correct answers and a police siren for when students make mistakes.

The mother of invention

There are thousands of apps already on the market. Nevertheless, I admit to being a little disappointed the first time I searched for apps to use in the classroom. It is still early days and, at the moment, there are relatively few games or activities made specifically for English language teachers to use with students in class. Necessity is the mother of invention and, in response, I made a partnership with a couple of students of mine in the software business and we had our own app made. It is called ***GetAcross*** and is a game to practise prepositions and phrasal verbs. It is available for free, so why not give it a try?

★ ★ ★

It is teachers, working hand-in-hand with developers and designers, who will make the ELT apps of the future. So if you have a good idea, why not go for it? After all, it's one more excuse to buy your consumer dream. ETp



Francesca Smith has been teaching English for 22 years. She has worked in Portugal, England and Brazil, where she trained teachers. She has a Masters in TESOL and is interested in computer assisted and mobile language learning.

francesc@portoweb.com.br

Five things you always wanted to know about tagging (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 explains tags and tagging.

1 Tag? Isn't that a game?

Although *tag* is a children's game, when we talk about technology we use it in the sense of 'label'. So just as a clothes tag will give you information about the price and size of a piece of clothing, a tag is a virtual label that gives information about an 'object' on the internet. Adding tags is known as *tagging*.

2 Can you give me specific examples?

Imagine you are an amateur nature photographer who wants to share your work with the world – by doing so you might sell your photos or get some commissions. You upload a selection of your best photos to the photo-sharing site *Flickr* (*www.flickr.com*) to make them widely available. But amongst all the millions of *Flickr* photos, how will people actually find yours? Tagging can help. For each of your photos you add tags – labels or keywords – which reflect the content, such as *nature*, *bird*, *flight*, *lake*, etc. A picture researcher looking through *Flickr* for a specific type of nature photo, and using some of these keywords, is then more likely to find your work.

Let's take this idea into the classroom. Imagine your students have produced slideshows related to a classroom research project, and have uploaded these to the internet. How can you share their work with the world? Tagging each slideshow with relevant keywords will help other teachers or students find it. And imagine that you have a blog and have written a post about this specific slideshow project and how you carried it out with your students. How can other teachers find your blog post and try out your lesson idea with their own students? Again, adding tags to your post will make it much more likely to appear in internet searches.

So, tags provide 'metadata' about online information. This helps categorise or organise the information, and so makes it easier to classify or find. Any piece of virtual information can be tagged. You can tag blog posts, videos, images, software programs, online events, articles ...

3 I've heard of 'tag clouds'. What are they?

Let's look again at the blog example above. You wrote a blog post about your students' project and tagged it with words like *slideshow*, *project*, *ELT*, etc so that other teachers could find it. In fact, you've already carried out several slideshow projects with different classes on various topics and have several blog posts about how to carry each of these out. On your blog you've added a tag cloud 'widget' (or program) that collects the tags that you've used in the posts in your blog, and displays them as hyperlinks in the form of a cloud. Teachers visiting your blog will see the tag cloud and can click on any of the items in it to see a list of the posts tagged with that specific word. If they'd like to read more about your various slideshow projects, they can click on the word *slideshow* in your blog's tag cloud and they will see all your other posts about slideshows.

Here's an example of a tag cloud from my own blog (in this case the posts are mainly concerned with ICT, m-learning, etc). The larger the word in the cloud, the more frequently that tag is used – this means there are more posts on that particular topic in the blog. By looking at a tag cloud, you can quickly and easily see what topics are covered in a blog. By clicking on the tag, you can go straight to the posts carrying that tag. A blog tag cloud will keep evolving, reflecting the tags you add to (or remove from) your blog posts.



4 How do I know what tags to use?

The beauty of tagging is that *you* choose the tags you think are most relevant. You may even want to add tags in more than one language. For your nature photos on *Flickr* (see above), if your photos of birds are from a lake in Spain, you may want to add a few tags in Spanish. Then anyone searching in Spanish (for a Spanish nature magazine, perhaps) will be more likely to find your photos.

You will often find the word *folksonomies* used in conjunction with tagging. Whereas a *taxonomy* is a fairly rigid hierarchy of terms applied to something, a *folksonomy* is created and modified by users. Knowing how to tag and contribute to folksonomies is part of a set of increasingly essential digital literacies, skills needed to navigate our digital world. Tagging literacy includes not just knowing what words to tag with, and what language(s) to tag in, but when *not* to tag. Tagging photos of friends on *Facebook*, for example, may be inappropriate at times, and it may be ethical to get their permission before doing so.

5 How do I get started with tagging?

You and your students could start adding digital photos with tags to *Flickr*. You could set up a class blog and tag each post depending on the topic. You and your students could start saving and tagging webpages in a social bookmarking tool such as *Delicious* (*www.delicious.com*) or *Diigo* (*www.diigo.com*). If you tag all of these online resources with a specially-chosen class tag, such as 'eng101' or 'fce2012', then you can easily retrieve them for a specific group of students. The students themselves can add and tag their own resources out of class, and these, too, will be easy to retrieve. ETp



Nicky Hockly has been involved in EFL teaching and teacher training since 1987. She is Director of Pedagogy of The Consultants-E, an online teacher training and development consultancy. She is co-author of *How to Teach English with Technology*, *Learning English as a Foreign Language for Dummies*, *Teaching Online* and *Digital Literacies*. She has published an e-book, *Webinars: A Cookbook for Educators* (*the-round.com*), and she maintains a blog at *www.emoderationskills.com*.

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

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Webwatcher

Russell Stannard shares a tool that promotes sharing.

Edmodo is a sharing and collaboration site which offers so many interesting features that it could almost be called a virtual learning environment. I find it hard to believe that it is free. If you want to create a quick space where your students can share content and upload files, links, videos, etc, then this is the site for you. It has a similar look and feel to *Facebook*, so your students will be familiar with the format and, in most cases, will immediately take to it without you having to provide any guidance. So what can you do with *Edmodo* and what are the special features it offers?

Multiple features

- You can create an account and separate groups for each class you teach in seconds. Your students can sign up to these groups very easily and don't even have to provide an email address.
- Each class group can share interesting links, files, videos, articles, etc on a central wall – you can upload content and so can your students.
- You can use it for discussions.
- You can upload any files that you want your students to access, putting them in a special folder.
- You have a calendar where you can input important dates on your course.
- You can create quick polls and quizzes.
- You can send alerts.
- You can give students special award badges.
- You can set up assignments.

Don't be put off by the range of things you can do with *Edmodo*. It is quite simple to use and, once you become familiar with it, you will be able to create groups and get content up for each group at the touch of button. Each time you create a group, you will be given a 'group code' which you share with the class. The students then join by simply typing in the group code.

Here are a few simple ideas to start you off:

- Set an essay for the students to write and get them to upload comments, links, videos and pictures onto the wall as a way of brainstorming ideas on the topic. They can then use all the material to write their individual essays.
- Set a weekly discussion topic: the students post their comments on the wall.
- Share a video on the wall. Tell the students to watch it and share their comments on it.
- Upload an interesting article that you want your students to read onto the wall. Tell them to post comments when they have read it.
- Use the wall to create a quick poll. For example, you might offer the students several options for the topic of their next essay and get them to vote on which one they would prefer.
- In class, tell the students to go onto the internet and find an interesting news story in English. Tell them to read it, take notes and then post a quick summary of, say, 100 words on the wall. This way you will create a news feed.

What I like about *Edmodo* is that nearly all the main benefits come from the central wall and once the students are clear about loading files and videos, leaving comments, etc (all these are done in a similar way), they will be up and running.

Multiple uses

Edmodo is a tool that you can make use of both in class and also for homework. If my students are working in groups and discussing something, I can get one person in each group to share the group's ideas on the wall. I can then see the key points that each group is discussing.

I have also found it very useful for teacher training sessions when I wanted a central location where the participants could have easy access to all the content I wanted to share with them, but where they could share useful content that *they* found, too.

It is great for project work as well. Let's say you want your students to discuss the world's energy problems. Tell them to work in groups, go online, find interesting material related to the subject and put it onto the wall. You might provide them with a list of topics (eg *carbon emissions*, *solar power*, *pollution*, etc) to get them started and tell each group to choose one. The students can even tag everything they upload so that you can quickly find content linked to each topic. Just tell them to click on 'tag' each time they load something and then choose 'new tag'. You can then use the wall in all sorts of ways. The students could use the content to create a five-minute *PowerPoint* presentation on their chosen topic or they could write a short article around the main issues, etc. Again, you could get them to upload their articles onto the wall.

There is much more to *Edmodo*. For example, you can create special folders in the library where you can upload larger files for the students to access. You can also create quizzes, perhaps asking the students to watch a video and then do a quiz based on it afterwards. The tool is extremely flexible and, as your confidence grows, you will be able to use more and more of its features.

I have created some help videos to get you started and also to explain the more detailed features:

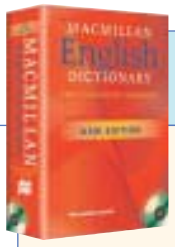
www.teachertrainingvideos.com/edmodo1/index.html

www.teachertrainingvideos.com/edmodo2/index.html



Russell Stannard is a Principal Lecturer in ICT at the University of Warwick, UK, where he teaches on the MA in ELT. He won the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Initiatives in Information and Communications Technology in 2008, TEFLnet Site of the Year in 2009 and a 2010 British Council ELTon award, all for his popular website *www.teachertrainingvideos.com*.

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



Prize crossword 56

ET*p* presents the fifty-sixth in our series of prize crosswords. Send your entry (completed crossword grid *and* quotation), not forgetting to include your full name, postal address and telephone number, to Prize crossword 56, English Teaching *professional*, Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd, Rayford House, School Road, Hove, BN3 5JR, UK. Ten correct entries will be drawn from a hat on 10 February 2013 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 (*www.macmillandictionary.com*).

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

1	2 N	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	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.

VERY FREQUENT WORDS

*** The thing measured by a clock
*** A neutral pronoun
*** A way that buses or trains travel regularly
*** A conjunction used to indicate that something happened during the same time that something else happened
*** Something that is necessary
*** The planet we live on
*** An alcoholic drink made from grapes
*** __ *the Road* (book by Jack Kerouac)
*** To touch something forcefully
*** An informal word for a party
*** __, *Myself, I* (song by Joan Armatrading)
*** Giving out or reflecting a lot of light
*** An informal greeting
*** A word that offers a choice between two or more things
*** A round object with a shell produced by a female bird
*** A pronoun used to refer to a man, boy or male animal
*** To employ something for a specific purpose
*** To make a knot with two ends of a piece of string
*** Used to describe a number divisible by two
*** A group of people who play a sport or game against another group
*** The star at the centre of our solar system
*** An extra room or rooms added to a building

FREQUENT WORDS

** Used to describe a slope that rises quickly
** An exclamation of pleasure or discovery
** A fruit that grows inside a hard shell on some types of tree
** The ability to move smoothly and beautifully
** An action that transgresses religious laws
** A feeling of great happiness

FAIRLY FREQUENT WORDS

* Words from a book or play used by another writer
* An insect or animal that damages plants or food supplies
* A container for cut flowers
* Open and honest even if it causes offence

LESS FREQUENT WORDS

– To sleep for a short time, especially during the day
– So beautiful that it cannot be described
– To twist your face into an angry expression
– A simple home-made bomb
– Used to describe something that is not active now but may become so in future
– Used in writing to indicate you are giving more information about something previously mentioned
– An attitude indicative of the belief that men and women should be treated differently
– A thin smooth cloth made from artificial fibres
– To grow or spread in an untidy way
– To care for and attend to a young child, animal or plant
– To make something increase in length
– Asking a lot of questions about things, especially things people don't want to talk about
– Someone who makes clothes to fit individual customers
– A type of music that developed in Jamaica in the 1950s
– A small aquatic animal similar to a lizard
– Slow and relaxed
– The back of the neck
– To separate groups of people by race, sex or religion

25	9	23	11	■	9	17	■	7	18	15	26	■	18	15	8	8	11	2	17
7	18	9	25	11	■	10	12	4	■	15	14	11	■	5	4	17	10	John Lennon	
22	15	21	9	2	3	■	12	26	18	11	14	■	8	25	15	2	17		



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