

**Where inspiration is born**

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## Where inspiration is born

What is inspiration? We all talk about it, but what exactly does it mean? Among many definitions the best one is the one saying inspiration is “a good idea”. As teachers, we need to inspire on everyday basis - inspire students to fight for a better tomorrow, inspire parents to stick by their children when the going gets tough, inspire other teachers to grow and we certainly need to inspire ourselves not to give up when giving up seems to be the easiest (or the only) thing to do. Everything matters, even if it seems meaningless today. In 1961, Lorenz claimed that a butterfly that flaps its wings in the Amazonia may start a tornado in the USA. This example, although still widely discussed, shows how our actions in life matter. Coming to our conference may have been a bit of a hassle for you - traveling to Topolšica, leaving your family behind, finding coworkers to teach instead of you, covering the costs on your own - but the ideas and notions you share with your colleagues may start a tornado in your classroom and in you as a person. There are many workshops and talks at this conference that will help you find (or even create) your good idea. We want you to enjoy the venue and the people here and do not be afraid to find new friends, be different and get inspired. And we do hope that at the end of the conference you will be able to say: coming here was a good idea.

your IATEFL Slovenia team

# Assessing Large Classes

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## **Summary**

“Given that class size is most unlikely to be reduced in the foreseeable future, teachers need to come to terms with their problems” (Hayes 1997). Large classes are usually seen as a major obstacle to successful language teaching and there are numerous studies to prove that small classes provide better quality education. In spite of this, large classes are a reality in higher education in Serbia nowadays. However, finding right tools for addressing this issue can be time consuming and demanding. Likewise, successful teaching depends on good planning, active engagement by teachers and students and appropriate assessment. It is of great importance to find strategies that allow you to create an exciting and engaging atmosphere in the classroom that would help your students to become active learners. This paper addresses the issues of choosing the right assessing methods during and after the course and the challenges of assessment in these environments. The authors will also try to explain the most common teachers’ concerns such as excessive marking loads, difficulty in assessing learning and providing feedback, inability to assess students individually, insufficient student involvement and learning, as well as the possibility of cheating and plagiarism.

## **What is the large class?**

“We do not have a rigid interpretation of how many students make a class large. What is being taught and what resources, accommodation and facilities are available all have to be taken into account” (Jenkins and Gibbs 2013:16) A large class generally includes 100 students or more, but there is no single definition. In some cases large means a class of 50 students, in others it may include up to 500 students. Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) consider that it is difficult to control what happens when the number of group passes a certain number. There are various reasons for describing a class as large, such as the inability to assess students individually, inability to assess writing and speaking, teacher workload, issues of classroom management, proper and timely feedback and evaluation.

## **Challenges of assessment in large classes**

Hays (1997) classifies the problems associated with teaching in large classes into five categories, as follows:

- 1.** Discomfort due to physical constraint; inability to move and promote student interaction;
- 2.** Control problems; teachers are often concerned about discipline aspects of large classes;
- 3.** Lack of individual attention, inability to assess student individually;
- 4.** Inability to check all of their students work due to excessive workload;
- 5.** Learning effectiveness and inability to check students’ progress;

These problems seem daunting, but it is not impossible to overcome them. It is important not to be discouraged by the size of your class and possible problems, but to make your students participate and change a passive learning environment into an active one.

In large classes teachers face numerous challenges. Some of them are listed below:

- **Avoiding assessment that encourages shallow learning.**

Due to large numbers and excessive workload, teachers sometimes rely on exams with multiple-choice, short-answer questions and lowered word-length requirements on written assignments. Such less demanding assessment may considerably diminish the quality of learning in higher education. Students expect fair and reliable assessment regardless the size of the class. Assessment can be written and oral, but if you develop reliable and valid criteria, assessment can be carried out by other students, i.e. peer assessment. Well-developed written examination with clear assessment criteria can offer a high level of validity and reliability. Instead of writing one long essay student may write a series of shorter writing activities such as reports, journals, student's profiles, minute papers etc. By writing such short writing assignments, students get in the habit of writing and also it gives you the proper feedback. Writing practice called the minute-paper can also be very useful to see whether the material presented was comprehended. The students are given to write a short and concise note, taking one minute, regarding the question presented by teacher. This type of exercise allows students to compare their answers and at the same time it gives them a valuable feedback. Also, in order to improve the quality of students' writing, teacher can use the self-assessment of writing. In such case students should be given a checklist for checking grammar, pronunciation, organization, content and spelling. However, teacher should demonstrate the use of checklist on an example before students start writing their own composition and checking it. Participating in peer and self-assessment activities helps students enhance their learning and also saves teacher's time. Many teachers use rubrics to define their criteria for essay writing and class presentations. They take time to prepare, but when you start using the rubrics, they become a useful guide for students and an assessment tool for a teacher. One more important issue regarding large classes is assessing speaking skills. To solve this problem you can have in-class oral presentations during the semester instead of an oral exam at the end of the year. In-class oral presentations not only motivate students to perform well, but they also introduce them to new topics and ideas. However, teacher should establish the criteria for evaluating presentations and let students know them in advance.

- **Giving proper and timely feedback**

Feedback not only allows students to follow their progress in learning but it helps them see whether they have understood the material. Due to large numbers of students, teacher can find it impossible to check all work that is done in the classroom. Some of the solutions are to keep assessment tasks to minimum and focus on what really counts. Students should be given small graded and ungraded tasks during the semester that would help them adopt feedback and show their understanding of the course material. Also, it can be of great help to use a website with basic assessment information, FAQ (frequently asked questions), test criteria, and the most common or typical problems prior and during the exam. Overall, proper feedback facilitates good performance, develops the self-assessment of learning and also provides useful information to teachers and students.

- **Inability to assess students individually**

To solve this problem teacher can use group work instead. The group work is an essential strategy in large classes and it helps passive students become more active learners. It also increases the amount of time students spend speaking in class, and it encourages learners' autonomy. Harmer (2001) summarizes the following advantages and disadvantages of using group work: on the one hand, it helps teachers respond to individual student differences, it is less stressful for students to work in groups, it develops learner autonomy and it also helps restore peace and tranquility in the classroom. On the other hand, it does not help in developing a sense of belonging, does not encourage cooperation and it takes more time to prepare class material. The easiest way to form a group is to ask students to work with students sitting closest to them. However, there are few concerns regarding the group work such as the fairness of assessing the group work, using L1 (the first language) most of the time and the noise reduction. Firstly, when we discuss the fairness of assessing the group work we must say that it is not necessary to evaluate all work that is carried out in groups. You can ask students to reflect what they have done in the groups. Secondly, teacher should be moving around, pay attention to the students and check that they do not use their mother tongue, and thirdly, if you notice that noise level is too high try lowering your voice. Also, it is very important that criteria used in group work are very clear

and concise. Hence, we can say that group work is the most effective if they are given short assignments that help the understanding of the lecture and add variety to it.

- **Preventing cheating and plagiarism**

It is usually considered that cheating and plagiarism is more common in large groups. The reason for this can be found in the fact that students feel anonymous in such large groups and they feel they are unlikely to be caught. To prevent cheating teachers should move around during exams, make few different exam groups, form smaller groups that are easier to monitor, establish class standard practice, and check students identification cards before the exam. Then, it is also important to explain criteria for grading prior to exam. You can provide the examples of question types, type of vocabulary you typically use, and as well as the examples of acceptable and unacceptable answers. After handing out the exam papers you should read over instructions and ask whether there are any questions.

- **Issues of classroom management**

Harmer (2001) states in his study that large classes bring difficulties not only to teachers and students but also to such environment, interrupting the process of teaching and learning. Firstly, it is usually impossible for students to get individual attention from the teacher, especially if they sit at the back of the classroom. Secondly, it is challenging to organize efficient class activities due to large numbers. And finally, teachers need to find proper teaching methods to provide equal chances for all students to participate. To solve these problems teachers have to change traditional teaching methods and apply student-centered teaching methods instead of promoting students autonomy, task-based language teaching, group work, peer assessment etc.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching in large classes brings numerous difficulties and this paper addresses a number of ways of solving the problems associated with teaching in such environment and choosing the right assessing methods during and after the course. Although teaching English in large groups of students is rather challenging and sometimes daunting, especially for inexperienced teachers, it should not be the excuse for not using more innovative teaching methods, task-based language teaching, group work and peer assessment. Hence, considering the fact that teaching in large classes is becoming the reality in higher education nowadays, teachers should find out the most effective and the most efficient teaching methods and types of assessment and use them in their classrooms accordingly, making their teaching effective and interesting.

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# Re-negotiating the Basics: Learner Autonomy

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Striving to be autonomous seems to be a natural urge in our daily lives. We can observe it in little children struggling to tie their shoelaces without the help of their parents or trying to hold a bowl and a spoon on their own. Encouraging autonomy allows children to explore and push boundaries, build self-confidence and become more assertive, and develop their own personalities. Fostering autonomy in our learners brings the same, and many more, benefits. Therefore, it should be taken for granted that development of learners' capacity to become autonomous deserves to be listed as one of the aims of education. However, many teachers and many education systems worldwide still promote the teacher-centered model which deprives their students of the right to take responsibility for their own learning.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to "re-negotiate the basics" and argue in favor of the fundamental right to provide students with conditions ideal for developing their autonomy. To this end, it will first examine the concept of learner autonomy and the roots of this approach and will then focus on the reasons for and ways of implementing it. This paper is going to suggest that the implementation of the syllabus and the learning objectives should not come to the expense of the learners' initiative and creativity; rather, the taught material should be the starting point for the inventive exploration of the issues raised in class. Each student will use their distinctive personalities and skills during the course of that exploration. As a result, the teacher and the students are no longer confined within a rigid structure of the lesson, but there is space for learner autonomy and the 'magic moments' in teaching can be truly addressed and realized. In this direction, the paper draws on experiences and examples from courses offered by the English Studies Department of the International Faculty of the University of Sheffield, CITY College.

Learner autonomy in education is a mindset, a way of perceiving learning as a personal quest of self-realization and self-fulfillment. It is not an entirely new concept; on the contrary, it was introduced by Henri Holec as early as 1981 and has remained in the limelight of debates concerning language teaching and learning ever since. In 1993, Paulo Freire argued that "education is suffering from narration sickness" (1993: 52). What this means is that the student is reduced to a passive recipient of information. As a result, the roles of the teacher and the student were viewed as very distinct, and lacking any form of interaction. That approach rendered the students as mere containers to be filled with information originated only by the teacher who, in turn, was considered the sole source of knowledge and expertise. However, the particular approach has been followed by models and methodologies of English Language Teaching which are centered on the idea of a student being actively engaged in the teaching and learning processes.

The idea of active engagement, capacity for critical reflection and independent action are among the basic principles of autonomous learning. It is noteworthy that the key word in many definitions is "capacity" which indicates that, given the right conditions, the learner is able to achieve, both individually and in cooperation with others. A bulk of research emphasizes the notion of responsibility and defines learner autonomy as: "... an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his own learning" (Dickinson 1995: 167). Therefore, guiding a learner towards autonomy empowers the learner to achieve not only in the academic environment. By transferring the skills and capacities developed during the process of independent learning, the students can become a successful professional in the future.

In more practical terms, developing learner autonomy solves two common problems existing in many classrooms: it motivates the students and it bridges the gap between the content and the learner (Little 2004). More specifically, learner motivation depends on the level of engagement with the material and on the degree of involvement on the part of the student: "If learners are involved in the management of their own learning and are able to shape it according to their developing interests, they are exploiting but also nourishing their intrinsic motivation" (Little 2004). This, in turn, leads to narrowing the gap between the learner and the content. As a result of such a gap, according to Little, and because of "learner alienation", students may perform well on exams, but are not able to apply their knowledge in practice. This problem does not exist, or is not as evident, whenever the students themselves choose the content and the way in which they want to learn it and "what they learn becomes part of what they are" (Little 2004).

In this spirit, in the past few decades, there has been a radical shift from traditional teacher-centered perceptions of foreign language teaching to more innovative approaches in the design and delivery of lessons. Focusing on the needs and demands of the student has resulted in teaching and learning environments characterized by ever-growing learner autonomy and student-centered tasks. But, how is this learner autonomy accomplished, and to what end?

Cotterall (2000: 111-112) provides five basic principles for language course design aiming at fostering learner autonomy and supporting the transfer of responsibility for decision making from teacher to learner:

1. The course reflects learners' goals in its language, tasks, and strategies.
2. Course tasks are explicitly linked to a simplified model of the language learning process.
3. Course tasks either replicate real-world communicative tasks or provide rehearsal for such tasks.
4. The course incorporates discussion and practice with strategies known to facilitate task performance.
5. The course promotes reflection on learning.

To this end, the International Faculty of the University of Sheffield, CITY College employs several practices which promote learner autonomy, both in the classes offered by the English Language Support Unit and the English Studies Department. More specifically, various technological tools and games have been integrated into daily teaching practices in order to attract students' attention, actively engage them in the learning process and offer an entertaining and stimulating academic experience. For example, a PowerPoint presentation based on the well-known TV game show 'Who wants to be a millionaire' as well as clickers are used for revision purposes. A more traditional game which aims at enhancing grammar skills is 'Mystery Stories'. Students are provided with the end of the story and ask yes/no questions in order to unravel the plot. Through this interaction with the teacher, students practice the use of tenses, auxiliary verbs and question formation.

The use of online videos is another integral part of teaching which offers a wealth of resources contributing to the development of learner autonomy. For example, TED Talks and the TED-Ed platform allow students to access online lessons, respond to questions and engage in a dialogue with the instructor. Teachers, on the other hand, have the opportunity to customize videos into lessons in order to meet the needs of different learners. Moreover, websites such as Film English constitute an invaluable resource for teachers who wish to use short videos in their classrooms. 'How-to' videos can be employed to develop students' presentation skills aiming at increasing students' awareness of the different presentation styles (e.g. Pecha Kucha, TED talk) and providing advice on the design and delivery of oral presentations.

More importantly, students are able to enhance different skills and act as autonomous learners through a number of assessed and non-assessed tasks. For example, students are asked to deliver group or individual oral presentations which require ample practice and good organizational skills. Moreover, students who engage in group oral presentations have to submit a Peer Assessment Form evaluating the performance of themselves and their peers. In this way, they obtain a holistic approach to learning, they identify their mistakes and level of contribution. Another form of assessment which contributes to learner independence and promotes conscious learning is reflective writing. Students produce a reflective essay commenting on their in-class experience (i.e. oral presentation or TED Talk viewing), sharing their feelings, hopes, fears and future plans. Reflective writing does not only make students increasingly aware of the learning process but offers teachers a unique opportunity to experience learning through the eyes of their students. To the same pur-



pose, students are also asked to complete a Personal Development Portfolio Plan (PDPP) at the end of each academic year. Through the PDPP, students reflect on their learning experience, become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, pinpoint and develop their academic and personal goals.

Other activities include journal writing, student participation in social media and online platforms, as well as in-class debates. Journal writing enables students to reflect on and revisit the various steps of the learning process. Social media interaction through a secret 'Methodology of Language Teaching' Facebook group, allows students to share their thoughts on taught material, exchange ideas and build on the discussion in a different, classroom-free environment. Finally, debates increase opportunities for public speaking, foster group or pair work and engage students actively – and in some occasions even passionately – with the course content.

Finally, learner autonomy is also achieved through 'magic moments'. All teachers have experienced moments of unexpectedly increased student participation which resulted in hourly discussions. It is important for teachers to diverge from the lesson plan, save room for those moments and allow the 'magic' to transform their classroom.

However, in the wake of such implementation of practices and rather radical changes, tension, conflicts, as well as feelings of anxiety and frustration emerge. Concerning teachers, six challenges have been identified; a) traditional beliefs, b) fear of losing control, c) classroom management, d) lack of confidence and expertise, e) social expectations, and f) radical changes. This set of categories is not exhaustive, and some of these categories may be interrelated. More often than not, a teacher's ideological or practical orientation towards learning and teaching practices is shaped by the educational experiences they have received in the past, which are largely based on the social and ideological environment pertaining to the experience. This is not to state that there is a need for dismissive tendencies but rather, to demonstrate the importance of constantly updating one's approaches and methods, complementing one's skills. Another major challenge for teachers is their fear of losing control. Our perception of "control" thus needs to be radically transformed so as to enable those loopholes to constitute a space for magic moments, empowering student perception and performance. The issue of class management also demands a renewed understanding of the role(s) of the teacher, involving an awareness of sharing responsibility and providing space for students to demonstrate their skills in managing their fellow students - via group-work activities for instance - as well as themselves. Confidence and expertise on the part of the teachers are essential so as to implement such radical practices; enriching one's academic and professional skills will solidify a teacher's knowledge, ensure their awareness of the contemporary debates in the discipline, broaden their academic horizons, hence bridging the gap between the past and the present, and resulting in a confident academic performance. The drive to engage in what are perceived "unconventional" practices in learning and teaching is often impeded by social expectations. It is not the role of the teacher to impose these perceptions since any act of imposition can naturally result in resistance and further introvertedness; but rather to inspire changes by showing how such perceptions belong to the past. Finally, it is important to note the fact the radical changes require a certain state of mind and educational practices should be in the forefront of the social practices addressing social complexities of race, gender, and ethnic shifts in dynamics, by resisting narratives of division and rather embracing narratives of opportunity.

The challenges to these changes though are to be found also in the students. These comprise a) cultural concerns, b) need to adjust to a new mode of learning, c) personality traits, d) stress, e) assuming new role(s), f) short-term vs. long-term objectives, and g) critical thinking. Cultural concerns are very often linked to traditional perceptions about teacher and student roles, and are also related to the social expectations mentioned above. Students should overcome their traditional perceptions and be inspired to embrace and follow the academic practices that boost their performance and development. The rewarding result will overcome the initial resistance or hesitance to embracing the new modes of learning. Personality traits can greatly influence this process, however, it is important that any student is open-minded so as to be exposed to these practices in learning and teaching. Considering stress a natural stage in the re-formulation of new perceptions about learning and teaching, it can be overcome by the teacher's confidence in the practices they implement. The new roles should be introduced smoothly and gradually so as not to overwhelm students. In this direction, setting both short-term and long-term objectives is essential. A sense of achieve-

ment via the short-term objectives, which will then enhance students' confidence in the new roles and boost their performance towards achieving their long-term objectives, such as that of critical thinking. In a media-dominated environment of the 21st century, critical thinking constitutes a central skill in the students' ability to position themselves within the world and critically engage with it. This skill can be developed and enhanced via authentic material, the students' immersion into the learning and teaching process via assuming new roles and responsibilities, and their exposure to social and cultural issues. Hence, the development of critical thinking is viewed as symptomatic of the previous processes.

By interrogating and re-negotiating the basic ideological and theoretical assumptions towards learning and teaching, this article sketched an academic environment where the long-term objective of learner autonomy is pursued via the sharpening of students' skills and their creative engagement within and beyond the classroom. The suggested practices will thus contribute to a dialogue, resulting in an enhanced understanding of the contemporary learning and teaching experience in academic environments.

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# Creative uses for songs and song lyrics in the EFL classroom.

**Chris Walklett**

'Music is the most eloquent language' suggested minimalist composer Philip Glass. I would contend that the lyrics within music are often, although by no means always, an eloquent, perhaps *the* most eloquent, example of language in use.

## **Song lyrics verses poetry**

If, as many consider, poetry, is a medium that is best brought to life, then song lyrics are the ultimate performance poetry. The power of songs surely goes beyond merely the words themselves – the power is in the way the lyrics and their delivery fuse together and the atmosphere that this fusion creates. At their best, songs are a heady brew of sound and mood and word.

The driving force behind songs is the lyrics themselves: for the handful of classic instrumentals that exist, such as; *Green Onions*, *Apache* or *Soul Sacrifice* there are thousands of gems that contain lyrics. Song lyrics however, *need* the accompanying music, for when just read, without the musical accompaniment, they tend to have little impact especially if one has never heard the lyrics in context (i.e. sung in the song) before.

Lyrics are a more up-to-date and also more relevant form than poetry. For half a century or more song lyrics have formed the mental soundtrack to many ordinary (not to mention extraordinary) people's lives: indeed it has been argued they are the most important words you will ever hear (Walklett, 2016). As contentious as this claim might be, there can be little doubt that songs and song lyrics are a resource that have an abundance of possible uses in EFL and thus are a very desirable and motivational tool. The question arises though, as to how they can be used in creative and innovative ways. This paper will put forward some ideas in relation to this.

## **Mind the Gap?**

Gap-fill is one of the more traditional ways of using songs and song lyrics especially in coursebooks, but it, and its variant *cloze*, has a poor reputation. What is clear is that without considerable thought gap-fill can be pretty meaningless. It is clearly not OK to conduct a practice that amounts to little better than the random tippexing out of words, hoping that this achieves some kind of learning outcome. And yet this is not far off what a lot of coursebooks seem to do (Walklett, 2014). This seems unfathomable given how complex copyright issues make it troublesome to get permission to use song lyrics in printed material in the first place.

If song texts *are* gapped, the validity of using just single word gaps needs to be questioned. How often, we need to ask ourselves, do we need to understand just a single word in an utterance? Generally speaking it is gist understanding that is needed and that tends to emanate from a variety of different lexical/linguistic sources rather than individual words. Therefore it might well be better practice blanking out whole phrases and concentrate on activities such as chunking.

### **Something in the way she moos!**

Dictation using song lyrics is an interesting activity which can be made to fulfil a variety of linguistic purposes. It is also, due to elements of connected speech, such as liaison, elision, assimilation, and juncture, extremely challenging.

Such features of connected speech give rise to 'mondegreens' (a mishearing/misinterpretation of lyrics – the origins of this term lay with the line "and lay her on the green" misheard as, 'Lady Mondegreen'. The most famous example of a mondegreen, is perhaps Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze* where the line 'excuse me while I kiss the sky' is misheard as 'excuse me while I kiss this guy'. It is not hard to envisage the kind of fun classroom activities that could result from this linguistic phenomenon. Mark Hancock ([www.hancockmcdonald.com](http://www.hancockmcdonald.com)) has been reinterpreting Beatles lyrics for classroom usage, the lyrics for *Something* for example being reinterpreted as 'something in the way she moos... attracts me like udder lover'!

Given that it's not very likely, in class at least, that you will get students to sing lyrics, one extension activity might be to get your students to try lip synching a song. Lip synching has gained popularity in the UK and the US with programmes such as *Lip Sync Battle* and was evidenced to spectacular effect at IATEFL Slovenia 2016. Lip synching enables the 'singer' to mimic the intonation patterns of speech, to literally get their lips around the words until they are familiar with the sound. This is just one step away from actual production albeit in 'silent mode'.

### **In theory**

There is a lot of theory out there on the merits of using songs and song lyrics in EFL. It is hard to argue with those including Engh (2013) who contend that songs and song lyrics are fun to work with and 'motivating'. Songs and song lyrics can, says Keskin (2011), help learner's attention and assist them with 'on task' behaviour, enhancing, stimulating and facilitating learning. They are a source of authentic/natural language including 'everyday' colloquial vocabulary: this picking up of essential words & phrases is something Irish polyglot Benny Lewis calls "language hacking". Wassink (2011) maintains that 'in addition to the support provided by the melodic and harmonic structures, there are certain characteristics of song lyrics themselves which make them easy to work with'. So the question arises as to what one can do with a song? Actually, it might be more of a case of what can't you do with a song, as the options are numerous.

### **Spoil for choice**

Gap-fill, dictation and phonemic work have already been discussed but there are also many other options for using this invaluable resource. Prediction activities can work well: before listening you can try to guess what the song is about based on the title and/or what is known about the artist. The first listen could be either with or without the lyrics. The choices made at this early stage are very important as they will affect the applicable activities afterwards.

After the song has been listened to one could for example be given the challenge of summarising the content of the song in a certain number of words. Also, a further verse could be added or inserted. If the video hasn't already been viewed, one could discuss what video could be made for the song and perhaps work on a storyboard for it. If the song is from a personal perspective one could write a diary entry from the viewpoint of the songwriter or reply to the songwriter. Additionally one could play the part of an Agony Aunt (or Uncle) addressing the issues within the song.

Whatever is done with a song it is vital to mix it up and not get too formulaic. Don't think 'I'm going to do x or y with a particular song' - let the song dictate the activity/activities. After all, the last thing you want to do is bore the students or scare them off the use of this amazing and flexible resource.

### **Nice and simple - just like English!**

For EFL purposes it is sometimes argued that songs and song lyrics used in the classroom should be nice and clear. I would take issue with this on several grounds most notably on grounds of authenticity - do we really think the student is likely to come across nice and clear English all the time? True, it is sometimes desirable, especially at lower levels, to have simple, clear lyrics to play with but at higher levels at least, difficult to decipher lyrics lend themselves to a multitude of activities.

The mysterious nature of what some artists are singing can be made into worthwhile activities. The lyrics in Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* for example could be 'untangled' and perhaps made into a dictogloss type reconstruction activity where the student notes down the words they can make out and reconstructs from there. This works nicely when not all the words can be made out and is thus a 'real-world' activity as learners often have to piece together what is being said from clues. Early R.E.M and even Cocteau Twins lyrics, which are often more akin to phonetic pronouncements than words, might make for interesting 'word hunting' activities. It is sometimes said that rap is best avoided in the EFL classroom, although of course one must be politically and culturally sensitive, the delivery and slang that define well selected rap tracks are extremely fertile grounds for lexical and phonetic work.

With the types of artists mentioned above what they *might* be saying is intriguing and can, due to mondegreen type misinterpretation, lead to much debate and discussion.

Word clouds are another option. Various activities can emanate from such patterns such as crossing out words heard and intensive vocabulary work on those items as well as synonym and antonym work. 'Word clouds' create the opportunity to really expand one's vocabulary within a particular context. A wordle.com produced word cloud for Joy Division's immortal *Love Will Tear Us Apart* is shown below.



#### Double (or triple) whammy

When one *can* actually decipher the lyrics, the meanings behind them are sometimes obscure – this can be fertile ground too. This is true of much of the Beatles later, more psychedelic, output. Be it the severity of the actions of the narrator in *Norwegian Wood* or the obscurity of the story of *A Day in the Life* or *Come Together*. Or the Eagles *Hotel California*, which proclaims in what appears to be an oxymoronic manner 'You can check out any time you like but you can never leave'. Some songs have double meanings, take the Stranglers *Golden Brown*, for example. Is it simply a paean to a girl's beautiful dark eyes or skin, or as others suggest, an ode to heroin? Such a duality could be said to fit Lou Reed's *Perfect Day* too. Sometimes songs have triple or multiple meanings. Do, for example, the lyrics in The Beatles track *Happiness is a Warm Gun*, 'Bang, Bang, Shoot, Shoot, Mumma', also a celebration of injecting drugs, or does it allude in a literal way to killing (or suicide) - after all these were the times of Charles Manson? Or are they, or are they, as seems the most likely, an ode to male sexual contentment?

### Themes and memes

One thing to celebrate about lyrics is their diversity of theme. Thematically they vary so much which lends itself to a wide range of activities. Of course after (or even before) a listen you can focus on the topic or subject area of a song, discuss or debate the themes therein. I have always found it helpful to find a few songs focusing on different aspects on the same theme. For example a theme on ecological/environmental issues could use as source material Marvin Gaye's *Mercy, Mercy Me*, or other tracks like; *The Last Resort*, *Big Yellow Taxi* or *Surf's Up*. Or even the Osmonds' rant against 'carmageddon' - *Crazy Horses*.

Thematic work can be done as a freer, 'après listening' activity. Songs that have narratives or tell stories are fertile grounds for EFL application. For example the relationship that is played out in Squeeze's *Up the Junction* or the mystery inherent in Bobby Gentry's *Ode to Billie Jo* - a classic 'whodunnit and what did they do' mystery.

Songs can also be social commentary and contain cultural themes that allow some kind of *way in* to the culture of a country be it linguistic or thematic which is often quite elusive to the learner, Lily Allen *LDN* (text message speak for London) for example.

### Songs are what you make them!

As Talk Talk ventured in 1986 'Life's what you make it' and the same is certainly true of the use of songs and song lyrics in EFL: they are, quite simply, what one makes of them. Time and thought should be given to their use as they are linguistic gems. In terms of generating ideas, I have found that 'crowd sourcing' is a productive technique, enabling both colleagues and students to suggest suitable ideas for how to use them.

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# Using Literature in EFL Classroom

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“Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English.”  
— **Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (Adiga 2008)**

Obviously, the quotation applies to our students and not to the teachers. Or at least the first part of it. Nevertheless, one cannot avoid the fact that learning to speak English (or any other foreign language) is far more than mere reproducing the complex structures of lexis, syntax or grammar. This is exactly where literature can come in handy as an endless resource of different meanings, contexts hidden behind the very text. It can simply be said that in only one sentence this quote justifies the complementary role of language and literature, reminding us that no literature can come to life without language, just like no language survives without literature. Perhaps this is why the use of literature in EFL classroom has been gaining momentum in the recent years (Duff and Maley 2007). Consequently, such a situation has led to the flourishing of new and creative ideas as well as fresh methods and practical solutions on how to make the process of language learning an exciting process, but at the same time it has provoked a hot debate as to how, when, where and why literature should be incorporated in EFL curriculum (Hismanoglu 2005).

### **The advantages of teaching literature in EFL classroom**

In *Literature and Language Teaching*, Lazar (1996) states that literary texts are in fact rich sources of classroom activities which can be very motivating for language learners due to the content they have; she also claims that providing student with literary texts familiarizes them with the culture of the language they are learning, which helps him/her to understand and become aware of the background and all the aspects of the language itself.

In addition to the authenticity and the obvious cultural aspects of the text, and especially with the aim to prompt the other teachers to start using this powerful resource in their classrooms, we feel it is important to stress all the advantages of using literary materials in any EFL classroom as they:

- **are a source of valuable authentic material**  
Exposing students to authentic language samples of real life situation, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and hidden contexts specific for the language they are learning.
- **enrich learners vocabulary**  
Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing – in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary.
- **develop and increase the learner’s understanding of the culture of the target language**  
Learning both verbal and nonverbal aspects of the communication is crucial to the understanding of language especially in the cases where visiting the target country is not possible. For such learners literary works such as novels, plays, short stories etc. facilitate understanding of how communication really takes place in that country and makes them aware of various social codes that shape its society.

- **encourage personal development of the learners**

Literature educates the whole person. We are all aware that reading teaches us to develop our own attitudes towards the world around and that they relate to the world outside the classroom. Furthermore, while reading, the students becomes unaware of the language enrichment (which they acquire subconsciously) as often they get enthusiastic to find out what happens next.

- **are very motivating**

Literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books and understanding a piece of literature can produce a real sense of achievement in students.

### **Potential challenges of using literature in EFL classroom**

In his funny article *Get lit up: Literature as the teacher's best friend* O'Connell (2009) describes the challenges any teacher is faced with when considering to introduce literary text in his/her usual curricula only to refute them in the end by listing their many advantages. However, he starts his article by asking: 'Why not use literature?' and gives four usual answers a certain number of the teachers normally use to shield themselves from welcoming the chance to use the literature in their classrooms:

- 1) 'You need to be an expert'
- 2) 'It must be a proper literature'
- 3) 'It's too hard for the students'
- 4) 'There's not enough time!'

All these obstacles, although unreal, come from the teachers' misunderstanding of what literature in the language classroom can be. The key point is that literature can be a very flexible tool for any language teacher because as O'Connell concludes:

- it requires no specialist training;
- it can be brief, contemporary and relevant;
- it can be used to enhance, supplement and complement the curriculum;
- it can aid students' speaking as well as reading skills;
- it can engage the class in aspects of critical thinking that text books rarely do and open minds onto the world;
- it can assist with specific language learning and it is an ideal tool for revision purposes.

Still, there are a few practical issues that need to be considered more elaborately. Before introducing the literary materials in your class, it is always a good idea to ask yourself the two questions. The first, for many the most challenging is: Where do you find the material? The answer is simple: the Internet. Of course, one must not forget the well-known readers, or even an extract from the book you find appropriate. The crucial factor here is that the texts need to be appropriate to the level of the students' comprehension and this is also where the Internet can come in handy with the plentitude of material adopted to different levels of language learning.

The other question to consider is: How do you choose material? The trick about successfully answering this question is trying to answer another set of questions:

- Is there enough time to work on the text in class?
- How does it fit with the rest of your syllabus?
- Is it something that could be relevant to the learners?
- Will it be motivating for them?
- How much cultural or literary background do the learners need to be able to deal with the tasks?
- Is the level of language in the text too difficult?

Although this might seem as a lot of work, it really is not. The abundance of materials nowadays available on the Internet makes it very easy for teachers to find anything; whether it is the extract from the play, short story or a well-known novel, whether it is adopted to the level of the students' comprehension, or whether it is short and interesting enough to fit the regular flows of the class.

### **Novels and Readers: How to do it?**

Although we all know that is very difficult to make our students read the whole novel, extensive reading is really one of the best ways of improving English and can be very motivating. Of course, the main problem with the extensive reading is that it is intended for advanced learners only and it also requires more of their time and interest.



Tim Bowen and Jonathan Marks, in their book *Inside Teaching* (1994) recommend the following ideas for extensive reading of literature:

- hold brief classroom discussions on what learners have been reading (progress reports).
- ask learners to describe a book they like in such a way to make others want to read it.
- select a short novel which has been recently made into a film or TV series and which your learners are familiar with.

The other option that is now available is the wide range of simplified and inexpensive versions of literary texts, known as readers (easily found in English bookstores or online). They also contain reading comprehension, vocabulary exercises, and usually come with an audio version of a native speaker. Setting up a class library of novels and readers, if you have the resources, is an excellent idea.

### Some practical examples

Here are some practical advice of how to incorporate literary texts in your classroom which we found very useful in our experience (whether they are short stories, poems, extracts from literary texts or drama). The process of incorporating them into your classroom can be divided into three stages:

#### 1) Pre-reading tasks

It is always good to maximize pre-reading tasks to make the reading comprehension easier. You can:

- get students thinking about the topic of the extract or poem in the form of a short discussion in pairs/with a whole class;
- play a guessing game;
- brainstorm vocabulary around the topic;
- find out what the students already know about the author or the times he/she lived in;
- give some background information – explain why this piece of literature is well-known;
- pre-teach difficult vocabulary;
- play a predicting game (give students some words from the extract and ask them to predict what happens next);
- read the first bit of the extract.

#### 2) Reading comprehension

After the reading:

- set comprehension questions;
- ask students to explain how they understood the text or do a pair work (students explain to each other what they have understood);
- teach difficult vocabulary;
- refer to specific elements of culture or social contexts in the text.

#### 3) Follow-up activities

These activities will differ whether we are dealing with short stories, extracts from literary texts, poems, readers, novels, or extracts from plays.

Here are some suggestions:

#### *Extracts from the short stories or novels*

Students can write what they think will happen next or just before; describe the character and his/her actions or say if anything similar happened to them; or they can do a role play of the two/three characters from the text.

#### *Poems*

Students could read each other the poem aloud at the same time, checking for each other's pronunciation and rhythm; write or discuss the possible story behind the poem or have a discussion on the issues the poem raised and how they relate to the students' lives.

#### *Extracts from plays*

Most of the above mentioned ideas from stories could be applied here, but obviously, this medium gives

plenty of opportunity for students to do some drama in the classroom. The students can act out a part of the scene in groups; read out the dialogue but to give the characters special accents (very “foreign” or very “American” or “British”); re-write or modernise the scene (this can be done with Shakespeare) by setting it in a completely different location or time and then they read it aloud.

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#### Some useful links

##### **To find appropriate texts:**

[www.world-english.org](http://www.world-english.org) offers (free access to a number of British and American titles)  
[www.bibliomania.com](http://www.bibliomania.com)  
[www.bookbrowse.com](http://www.bookbrowse.com) (excerpt from a multitude of recently published books)  
[www.readersread.com](http://www.readersread.com) (the first chapter of many recently published books)  
[www.classicshorts.com](http://www.classicshorts.com)  
[www.dailylit.com](http://www.dailylit.com)

##### **Stories for younger children:**

[www.eastoftheweb.com/](http://www.eastoftheweb.com/)  
[www.apples4theteacher.com/](http://www.apples4theteacher.com/)

##### **English teaching websites will all reading comprehension and follow-up exercises:**

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/>  
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk> with an extensive materials, lesson plans, “BritLit” materials, “BritLit” e-book on using literature in classroom, practical advice for teachers and many more.

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#### SUMMARY

*The growing popularity of using literary materials in EFL classroom has been justified by its numerous advantages. They provide a rich source of linguistic context which can help students consolidate all four language skills with the exemplifying grammatical structures; they develop students' cultural awareness, encourage critical thinking and enhance their creativity. The article also tries to investigate the best ways of how to incorporate literature in a normal EFL classroom but also to provide some practical advice which has been helpful in our experience. Accordingly, the authors address some of the major challenges teachers are faced with in this process such as: finding the appropriate text which will interest the students; adapting it to the students' language level, their cultural and literary background and choosing the right length of the material for the time available. In addition, the article will present some practical advice of how to exploit various literary materials through pre-reading tasks, interactive work on the text and follow up activities together with some very useful links where teachers can find the appropriate literary materials for their own students.*

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