

Selected Proceedings of the

29th International IATEFL Slovenia Conference

EMBRACE YOURSELF

7th–10th March 2024, Terme Vivat, Slovenia

Editors

Nina Rainer Klančnik and Bernarda Leva

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Dear readers and authors,

In a world of constant change, English language teachers must adapt to new challenges and seize the opportunities presented by the 21st century. This volume presents a collection of selected papers from the 29th IATEFL Slovenia International Conference, held from 7th to 10th March 2024 in Terme Vivat under the motto “Embrace Yourself”. The conference theme highlighted the importance of teacher well-being and personal growth, which is reflected in the diverse range of topics covered in the conference proceedings.

Twenty-eight authors from various backgrounds and levels of education share their experiences, ideas, and reflections on teaching English in the 21st century. The articles in this volume offer insights into various aspects of English language teaching, with a focus on creativity, student motivation, and the use of modern technologies. Authors explore how to create more dynamic, interactive, and effective learning environments that enable students to develop their language skills, creative expression and critical thinking.

Several contributions focus on the use of modern technologies in the classroom, presenting practical examples of using tools such as Moodle, digital storytelling, online resources, and artificial intelligence to create a more engaging and personalised learning environment. Authors emphasise the importance of digital literacy, which is becoming an essential skill in the 21st century. They also highlight the challenges associated with using technology in the classroom, such as ensuring digital well-being, critically evaluating online content, and providing equal opportunities for all students.

Another important theme is promoting creativity in English language teaching. Authors present innovative methods, such as using visual stimuli, gamification, and project work,

that enable students to express themselves authentically, develop their language skills, and strengthen their motivation to learn. They emphasise that creativity is a key competence of the 21st century that needs to be developed in all students, regardless of their age, prior knowledge, or learning styles.

The articles also highlight the crucial role of the teacher, who is not only a knowledge mediator but also a motivator, supporter, mentor, and co-creator of the learning process. The authors emphasise the importance of a positive and supportive learning environment where students feel accepted, safe, and motivated to learn. They point to the importance of routines, clear rules, supportive assessment practices, and content-based teaching methods for strengthening student motivation and learning success.

The volume offers a range of valuable ideas and insights that can help English language teachers at all levels of education improve their practice. Among the key findings are the importance of using pedagogical tools and gamification to increase student motivation and engagement; the effectiveness of teamwork and collaborative learning for developing communication and social skills and promoting mutual cooperation, the role of intercultural learning in broadening horizons, developing tolerance, respect for diversity, and intercultural competence; and the importance of developing critical thinking in students of all ages to become responsible and active citizens.

The 29th IATEFL Slovenia International Conference provided an excellent opportunity for English language teachers to exchange experiences, knowledge, and ideas. We believe that these selected proceedings will be a valuable source of information and inspiration for all those who strive for quality English language teaching and learning in a constantly changing world. The volume is accessible to all interested parties and represents a significant contribution to the professional discussion on contemporary approaches to English language teaching.

We thank all reviewers for their valuable time and expert advice that contributed to the quality of this volume. Special thanks also go to all authors for their articles, which are the result of their knowledge, experience, and dedication to teaching English.

We wish you enjoyable reading and great success in applying the presented ideas in practice!

Your 2024 editorial team,
Nina Rainer Klančnik and Bernarda Leva

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1

BREAKING THE ICE, FILLING THE GAPS, AND COOLING DOWN: ENGAGING ACTIVITIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Adela Krois

Abstract

In language teaching, creating an engaging classroom is key to learning. This article covers ice breakers for a warm start, fillers for ongoing engagement, and coolers for a reflective end. We start with icebreakers to build rapport and make learning fun. Then, we look at fillers to keep students engaged and use all class time for learning. Lastly, we discuss coolers, which help students relax, reflect, and solidify their learning.

Keywords: icebreakers, warmers, fillers, coolers, engaging activities, language learning

1 Introduction

Learning a language involves more than just knowing words and grammar. In ESL teaching, fostering an engaging and supportive classroom environment is significant for student success. It is important to have a classroom where everyone feels supported and excited to participate. This helps students talk more, feel good about learning, and stay interested. To create this kind of environment, employing various activities such as icebreakers, fillers, and coolers is essential and a key part of a teacher's toolkit. These activities help at various points in the lesson and meet the different needs of students. They serve multiple purposes, from breaking the ice during the initial stages of a class to maintaining energy levels and reinforcing learning throughout the session.

2 Icebreakers: Establishing Connection and Rapport

Icebreakers are an important part of any language classroom. They are also known as team-building activities or warm-ups. They allow students to get to know each other, build relationships and create a comfortable learning environment. They make students less anxious, encourage them to talk to each other, and help them feel like they are part of the class. Icebreakers can also help students practice their language skills in a fun and engaging way, and they do not have to be related to the topic of your lesson. Icebreakers make students more excited to learn and help them get along better (Patil 2020).

Some fun icebreakers are games like *Two Truths and a Lie*, *Find Someone Who*, and team activities where they have to work together.

Icebreakers can help establish a positive rapport between the teacher and students and among the students themselves. Building rapport in the ESL classroom is crucial for fostering a comfortable environment where students feel free to express themselves and make language mistakes. This is particularly important for today's learners who have grown up as digital natives, accustomed to constant internet, social media, and smartphone use. To build rapport, we need to know who our learners are. Jeremy Harmer (2007) emphasises the importance of rapport, defining it as the positive and respectful relationship between teachers and learners, as well as among the students themselves. He explains that a class with good rapport is "a class where there is a positive, enjoyable, and respectful relationship between teachers and learners and between learners themselves" (Camacho 2022).

2.1 Icebreaker Games

The Equation

The teacher writes the equation $1 + 9 + 8 = 1$ and asks whether it is correct. Students should think outside the box, not as mathematicians. The solution is: one + nine + eight = one

$$1 + 9 + 8 = 1$$

one + nine + eight = one

Image 1: Image from the personal archive.

The Number Game

Two or more groups of students have a set of numbers from 0 to 9. The teacher calls out (large) numbers or years, and the students arrange them. The quicker team gets a point. Make sure you do not have any duplicate number in anything you call out.

Feelings Scale

The teacher prepares a line with words expressing feelings, from *absolutely awful* to *excellent*. Students line up according to their feelings. They share with the person next to them why they feel that way. Then, they tell the next closest person how the previous person is feeling. This can also be done in a frontal manner so that everyone listens to each other. You can do the same for expressing your favourite food, sport, days of the week, colours, etc. Students explain why they have chosen the word they did.



Image 2: Image from the personal archive.

Inventors - Things to do with a potato

This activity is a wonderfully straightforward icebreaker exercise that stimulates creative thinking. The goal is to encourage students to think outside the box and come up with as many imaginative and unconventional uses for a potato as possible. This activity not only stimulates creativity but also promotes lateral thinking and problem-solving skills. Start by presenting a potato or any other object to your students. Challenge the students to brainstorm as many unique and unconventional uses for the potato as possible. Students might suggest ideas such as using the potato as a paperweight, a toy, a stamp, a science experiment subject, or a component in a craft project. The student or group who generates the longest list of ideas wins the potato (Seymour 2003: 55).

3 Fillers: Seamlessly Transitioning and Reinforcing Learning

Fillers are important for keeping the energy up and everyone involved during a lesson. They help move smoothly from one part to another, fill any sudden gaps, or go over important ideas again. These activities are useful for making the most of class time, keeping things running smoothly, and getting all students to participate. Studies show that good fillers can help students pay better attention, remember what they have learned, and practice using language in useful ways (Nuñez 2023).

Some examples of filler activities are word games (e.g. word ladder, mystery word, biting your tail, etc.), brief quizzes (e.g. honeycomb), and quick topics for talk.

Anagrams

Using the letters from the given word students (in groups) create as many new words as possible in one minute. They may not add letters that are not in the word. It is advisable to give them a longer word.

Example:

uncomfortable:

table - blame - unable - aunt - fur - run - tour - or - room - count - moon - fortune - man etc.

Image 3: Image from the personal archive.

Clap-Clap-Word

The teacher and students stand in a circle. The teacher introduces a clapping rhythm: “clap - clap – pause”. Once students grasp the rhythm, they need to say one word on the chosen topic during each pause, for example, animals. It is always the next person in line in the circle’s turn, and words cannot be repeated. Whoever makes a mistake, i.e., misses the pause or repeats a word, is out of the game.

Hot Seat

One student sits on the hot seat with his back to the blackboard. Other students describe the written word while the student in the hot seat listens and guesses. Alternatively, the student in the hot seat can ask yes-no questions to determine the word on the board. This activity is excellent for reviewing and reinforcing vocabulary.

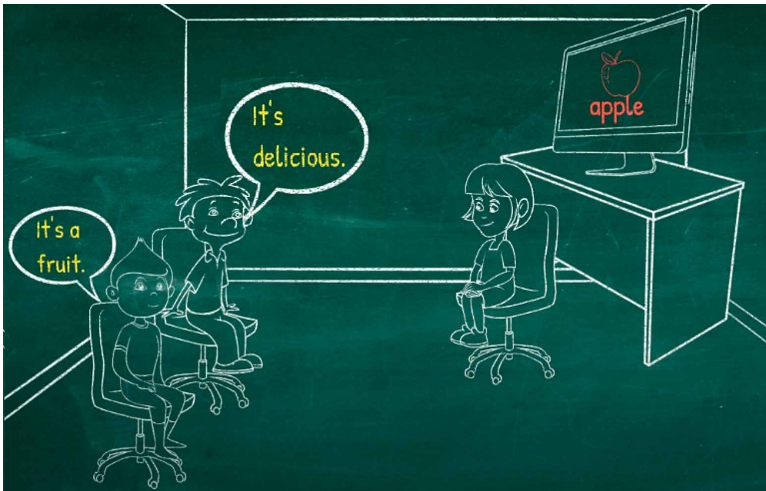


Image 4: Games4ESL (2019).

Change Places If...

It is an engaging activity that encourages students to get up and move while practising language skills. Ensure there is enough space in the classroom for students to move around safely. Students sit in a circle on chairs. Make sure there is one fewer chair than the number of students. The student in the middle (or the teacher to start) makes a statement that can apply to some or all of the students, starting with "Change places if..." For example, "Change places if you have a sibling," or "Change places if you're wearing blue today." All students for whom the statement is true must stand up and find a new seat that is not immediately adjacent to their original seat. The student in the middle also tries to find a seat. The one student left standing without a chair after the movement ends is the next person to make a "Change places if..." statement. This activity can be adapted to practice specific grammar points or vocabulary. For instance, use it to practise the present perfect tense with statements like "Change places if you have ever travelled to another country." It is a versatile game that gets students moving and encourages them to speak English in a fun setting.

I'm Going on a Picnic and I'm Bringing a...

This is a rule-based guessing game. The objective is to establish a rule that determines which items are allowed on the picnic. For instance, the rule could be that the item must have six letters or start with a vowel or letters of the first name. In this scenario, the rule is that the word must be an uncountable noun.

Example:

Teacher: "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing milk."

Student A: "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing eggs."

Teacher: "No, you can't bring eggs."

Student B: "Can I bring orange juice?"

Teacher: "Yes, you can bring orange juice."

Continue adding items to the picnic list until a student correctly identifies the rule. The items do not need to make logical sense in the context of a picnic (e.g. love, information, air). Once the game is completed, encourage students, either individually or in pairs, to create their own rules and lead the game themselves (ESLGames 2017).

4 Coolers: Reflecting, Reviewing, and Concluding

Coolers mark the conclusion of the lesson by providing opportunities for reflection, review, and consolidation of learning objectives. Coolers are activities designed to wind down the lesson, consolidate learning, and give students a positive sense of accomplishment. Coolers may include summarising activities, quick quizzes, the story ending, vocabulary relay, gratitude circle, exit tickets, or reflective journal prompts (Paul 2021).

Word Clouds

Ask students to write down key vocabulary or concepts from the lesson on sticky notes or in an online word cloud tool (e.g. Mentimeter, Free Word Cloud Generator). Discuss the words as they are added, highlighting connections and reinforcing their meanings.

Two Stars and a Wish

Students think of two things (“stars”) they liked or did well in the lesson, and one wish for something they would like to improve or learn more about. This can be shared with the class or written down privately.



Image 5: Twinkl.com (n.d.).

Flash Art

This activity helps students relax and reinforce what they have learned through creative expression. Ask students to think about the key concepts or ideas they learned in the lesson. Allow students to draw a scene, symbol, or abstract art that represents what they have visualised and learned during the lesson. This activity allows students to wind down while still engaging with the material in a meaningful way.

5 Conclusion

Using icebreakers as warmers, fillers, and coolers well means thinking about the class setting, who the students are, and what the lesson aims to achieve. Teachers should choose activities that fit the lesson’s goals, match different ways students learn, and get everyone involved. Being able to change plans based on what students need is also important. Activities should also be adapted to students’ age and language proficiency.

Icebreakers, fillers, and coolers are essential to successful language teaching, boosting engagement, interaction, and learning in ESL classrooms. Other benefits also include motivation, language practice, review and reinforcement, and classroom management (establishing rapport). Overall, incorporating these activities into an ESL class can contribute to a more dynamic, engaging, and effective learning experience for students.

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2

SO MUCH FUN! BUT DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING?

Andreja Benčina

Abstract

Introducing modern technologies into the classroom can be a challenge. Students either do not feel confident using ICT for schoolwork or they see it as entertainment. Considering the challenges teachers face in the classroom, it is important that this be a well-thought-out process. Using ICT in preparation for an assessed assignment made it possible to achieve valuable and considerable student output. This article is a case study which aims to motivate teachers to meaningfully include the use of ICT in their teaching and potentially recognise the adaptability of the selected example in other contexts.

Keywords: technology, motivation, differentiation

1 Introduction

Including information and computing technologies in the classroom is not a new phenomenon. For more than a decade, the push has been steady with the growing expanse of new technologies. After the period of epidemic lockdowns, it has intensified. Meanwhile, teachers have come to see the large gap in students' skills necessary in the use of technology for learning (Thompson 2023). This comes only second to the adeptness levels of us – teachers.

Students enjoy using new technologies but with the purpose of entertainment (Jokić 2023). Some students, therefore, resent the idea of using ICT for learning. Some view such activities as not having a learning purpose and welcome the 'downtime' provided by the teacher. They may also consider themselves experienced users and spend time for inappropriate use when not adequately motivated. Using a concrete example in a classroom setting, this article aims to offer some insights into a possible teaching practice using ICT with minimal teacher intervention and maximal student output.

2 The State of the Classroom

Some years prior, announcing interactive worksheets, an introductory video material or a topical film for discussion brought joy and excited murmur to the classroom. Not anymore. Students are passive and do not seem to engage with the materials. Most of the time, they consider this a relaxing activity, and there simply is not enough learning output a teacher might expect. While relaxing activities are also needed, such response to any ICT-supported materials does not encourage me to introduce more of them into my teaching. At the same time, there are growing demands of ICT-supported education. Students have also been self-reporting that they consume content all the time, and it has somehow become a background noise in their lives. Constant swiping left and right has dulled the experience.

There are also teachers' expectations. Our aims are linguistic; we attempt to focus on content but cannot since many students still exhibit technological illiteracy. In my example, students still struggled with turning on the computer or identifying the internet browser icon. These situations do not exclude students who consider themselves tech-savvy. The reason was primarily in having to interact with a device they were not used to.

From the classroom management standpoint, students attempt to engage in inappropriate behaviour even in a common classroom situation. Combining that with the 'opportunities' of the internet seems to be a recipe for disaster. For this reason, many schools have installed monitoring software that enables teachers to see what each student is doing on the computer at the time.

An additional consideration is regulation. School and school materials are regulated, as is the teacher. The internet is not. Verified materials provide quality content that eases the students into the language, with little exposure to all the deviations. The internet makes the teacher a content moderator who must reassure students that what they know is correct no

matter what they might encounter. The other option is quality control so that students do not simply grab what is out there without properly understanding and thus misusing it. With all reservations in mind, there was a persistent question. How can a teacher monitor student progress, assist with learning and achieve content goals with all these distractors present?

3 Boldly into the Unknown

The process of ICT-supported learning needs to be foremost well thought out. Therefore, the use of ICT was incorporated into a graded assignment. To justify the purpose, students were given individualised projects. In class 6, they were asked to provide a description of a house. Then, the students were randomly assigned a house type. Similarly, in class 7, the topic was sports. In classes 8 and 9, the research included gathering information for an essay about living in the countryside or jobs of the future, respectively.

Students were excited about getting to use computers and tablets but were rather surprised when informed there would be a preparation lesson. This was not the approach they were commonly used to in any class. They would generally be expected to engage with the task immediately.

In each class, a mock example of the assignment was used. Students were required to find specific information, e.g., a definition of a word. My role was to type in the suggested search prompt, and then we would comment on the results. Naturally, initial searches were a failure, and the search strategy had to be amended. All students were invited to participate. Language use was not restricted to English. Seeing how a correctly formed search prompt brought better results, students began taking notes very quickly.

Promising results were no less problematic. Students were aware that they could use any information, provided they were able to explain or translate it. Many became demotivated with results that were well above their proficiency level. They realised this meant two choices – expand a little or handle an abundance of new vocabulary. Those considerations were left to them. Students then offered ideas on how to look for simplified versions of searches.

Students were allowed to use online translation tools. Quickly, students themselves pointed out the mistakes. They independently discovered the limited potential of these tools. They were challenged to verify the correctness of their results.

Finally, they listed solutions for potential issues they might encounter at the computer lab. Their list included the following: ask a student who knows more than you do, do a picture search of what you have just found, try the dictionary, ask the teacher, etc. Students were expected to exhaust all other options before the final one listed.

At the computer classroom, they were further informed that their time was limited. They were free (and encouraged) to advance to the next stage in their project whenever ready.

4 The Output

This resulted in students being very motivated for their assignments. They were engaging with content, testing out troubleshooting techniques we agreed on, cooperating, brainstorming, advising and more.

What was even left for the teacher to do? Plenty. Plenty of *teaching*. Some students could find very little quality information and were redirected to their student books. Students could get overwhelmed by the amount of content and needed refocussing on the task. Others needed reminders that they were using phrases in inappropriate contexts. Finally, some lost confidence in their own skills and were about to copy everything they saw. Those had to be guided to the realisation that they could say what they wanted correctly and well enough.

5 Adaptation

Additionally, teachers who provide out-of-classroom aid to students with learning deficits were consulted about the project. These students could do this lesson with the teacher present in the classroom (and revise information later) or be completely independent in computer use. Students with lower proficiency were offered remedial classes. There, they could work in small groups on a single device, sharing ideas and feedback.

6 Conclusion

Admittedly, what motivated students to work so actively was the awareness that their final output would be assessed. However, preparation was still a key factor. Using a mock example and having students consider possible problems greatly contributed to the teacher being able to focus on the issues of language and content.

Disciplinary problems normally occur when a task is too challenging or not enough. Here, student skills were differentiated by the condition to produce an output that matched their skills and proficiency. Setting a time limit while also allowing students to progress at their own pace set an atmosphere of motivation but also cooperation among students. Using the same method of preparation as well as clearly defined goals to achieve, a student could potentially be using any type of software. This, however, requires the teacher to be closely familiarised with what they intend to use. As the students become more familiar with the process and their skills develop, the teacher would also need to consider possible time reduction or providing a new context for using these skills.

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MY PRESENTATION

Priprava na delo z računalnikom (Computer work preparation worksheet)

a) Katere podatke moram vključiti v svojo predstavitev?
(Which information must my presentation contain?)

b) Kako bom poiskal posamezne podatke? Kaj vpišem v iskalnik?
(How will I look for the information I need? What will I type into the search bar?)

c) Kako bom rešil težavo s seznama? Glej primer.
(How do I handle a problem from the list? See example.)

1. *Pozabil sem, kako se imenuje prevajalnik, ki ga potrebujem. Rešitev:* _____

Težava: _____

Rešitev: _____

Težava: _____

Rešitev: _____

Težava: _____

Rešitev: _____

Težava: _____

Rešitev: _____

3

THE FINAL EMBRACE: REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING, WELLNESS, AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Barbara Lukač Patarčec

Abstract

During professional development courses and conferences, we soak in loads of knowledge and information. At the end, what is left for us, educators to do, is to turn those insights into real-deal classroom magic and share some of that fairy dust with our students and fellow teachers. So let us reflect on our experiences, newfound wisdom, self-care all teachers are starving for and look at the future.

Keywords: professional development, educator reflection, teacher wellness, collaborative learning

1 Introduction

Professional development serves as a cornerstone for educators, providing opportunities to expand their knowledge, refine their skills, and connect with peers in the field. In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, staying abreast of the latest research, pedagogical approaches, and technology tools is essential for fostering student success. However, the true value of professional development lies not only in the acquisition of knowledge but in the transformation of that knowledge into meaningful action within the classroom.

As educators, we aim to turn insights gleaned from conferences and workshops into tangible strategies that enhance student learning and well-being. This process requires reflection, collaboration, and a commitment to ongoing growth. In this article, we will explore the reflective journey of educators, examine strategies for integrating newfound wisdom into classroom practices, discuss the importance of nurturing teacher wellness, and envision the future of education in a rapidly changing world.

2 The Reflective Journey

Reflection is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth. By taking the time to critically evaluate our experiences, we can uncover insights, identify areas for improvement, and celebrate successes. Consider the following scenario: A teacher attends a workshop on differentiated instruction and leaves feeling inspired by the presenter's innovative approaches. Through reflection, they might consider how they can adapt these strategies to meet the diverse needs of their own students.

Reflection can take many forms, from journaling and peer discussions to formal self-assessments. Regardless of the method, the key is to engage in a process that prompts deeper understanding and meaningful change. By reflecting on our practice, we can continually refine our approach, experiment with new ideas, and strive for excellence in teaching and learning.

Here are some ideas on how to effectively reflect on a conference or your work:

- a) **Write a journal:** Set aside time to write in a journal about your experiences at the conference or your recent work projects. Reflect on what you learned, what surprised you, and how you might apply new insights to your practice. Consider what went well and what challenges you encountered, along with potential solutions or areas for improvement.
- b) **Set goals:** Set specific and achievable goals based on your reflections. Determine what you want to achieve from attending the conference or your work efforts, and outline what steps need to be taken to reach those goals. Regularly revisit and revise your goals as needed to stay on track and adapt to changing circumstances.
- c) **Self-Assessment:** Engage in self-assessment exercises to evaluate your skills, knowledge, and competencies in relation to your conference experience or work projects. Reflect on your strengths and areas for development, and identify concrete steps you can take to enhance your professional growth. Be honest and objective in your self-assessment, recognising both your achievements and areas where you can improve.

- d) **Create an action plan:** Create action plans based on your reflections. Outline specific steps you will take to apply what you've learned or areas for improvement. Break down larger goals into manageable tasks, set deadlines, and determine resources needed to support your action plan. Regularly monitor your progress, adjust your approach as necessary, and celebrate achievements along the way.

3 Integrating Newfound Wisdom

Translating conference learning into classroom practices requires intentional planning and implementation. One effective approach is to create action plans that outline specific steps for incorporating new strategies into daily instruction. For example, a teacher who learns about the benefits of project-based learning may decide to design a project-based unit for an upcoming lesson. This might involve selecting a relevant topic, designing engaging activities, and assessing student learning outcomes.

Additionally, fostering collaboration among colleagues can enhance the implementation process. By sharing successes, challenges, and resources, educators can support one another in their efforts to integrate new practices effectively. Professional learning communities, grade-level teams, and subject-area groups can provide valuable opportunities for collaboration and peer support.

Here are some ideas for cascading knowledge:

- a) **Conference debrief sessions at teacher's school:** After attending a conference, teachers can organise debrief sessions to share key insights, strategies, and resources gathered during the event. These sessions can be structured to highlight the most relevant and impactful information presented at the conference and demonstrate new methods and materials that were used in classes.
- b) **Action planning workshops:** Organise workshops where teachers collaboratively develop action plans for implementing new ideas and strategies learned at the conference. Teachers can discuss how to adapt conference concepts to their specific teaching contexts and set goals for integrating them into their practice.
- c) **Peer presentations:** Teachers who attended the conference can take turns leading presentations or workshops for their colleagues, summarising key takeaways and discussing how they can be applied in the classroom. This peer-led approach allows for the dissemination of conference knowledge in a collaborative and engaging manner. Teachers who have already tried some of the new methods or approaches presented at a conference can show what they found useful or outline specific issues encountered while trying out the new approaches.
- d) **Resource sharing sessions:** Create opportunities for teachers to share resources obtained at the conference, such as handouts, presentation slides, and recommended readings. This allows colleagues who were unable to attend the conference to benefit from the knowledge and materials acquired by their peers.

- e) **Peer coaching and mentoring:** Pair teachers who attended the conference with colleagues who did not have the opportunity to participate. The conference attendees can serve as mentors, providing one-on-one support and guidance to their peers on implementing conference insights in their teaching practice.
- f) **Student engagement projects:** Involve students in projects or activities inspired by conference learnings, fostering a culture of student engagement and empowerment in the learning process. For example, students can collaborate on projects related to themes or topics discussed at the conference, applying new knowledge in creative ways.

By focusing on cascading knowledge received at a conference through these strategies, teachers can maximise the impact of professional development opportunities and create a culture of continuous learning within their school community.

4 Nurturing Teacher Wellness

Teacher well-being is essential for creating a positive and productive learning environment. Educators often face high levels of stress and burnout due to the demanding nature of their work. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise self-care and wellness practices that promote physical, emotional, and mental health.

Simple strategies such as practising mindfulness, setting boundaries, and seeking support from colleagues can make a significant difference in overall well-being. Schools can also play a role in promoting teacher wellness by offering wellness programs, flexible scheduling options, and access to mental health resources. By prioritising self-care, educators can cultivate a culture of wellness that benefits both themselves and their students.

5 Envisioning the Future

The landscape of education is constantly evolving, presenting both opportunities and challenges for educators. As we look to the future, it is essential to stay informed about emerging trends and developments in the field. Collaboration and knowledge sharing are key components of this process. By participating in collaborative projects, mentorship programs, and online communities, educators can stay connected with colleagues and exchange ideas. Technology tools and resources can enhance our ability to adapt to changing educational needs. By embracing innovation and collaboration, educators can continue to drive positive change in the field of education and prepare students for success in a rapidly changing world.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey of professional development extends far beyond the walls of the conference room. It is a continuous process of reflection, growth, and collaboration that empowers educators to make a lasting impact on student learning and well-being. By integrating newfound wisdom, nurturing teacher wellness, and envisioning the future of education, we can create a brighter future for ourselves and the students we serve.

4

YOUTH IN ACTION: THE CHILDREN'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPERIENCE

Barbara Čatar

Abstract

The aim of sharing the Children's General Assembly (CGA) journey is to inspire fellow teachers to step out of their comfort zones and embrace opportunities for experiential learning and global engagement. By participating in projects like CGA, educators can play a vital role in empowering youth voices and shaping the future leaders of tomorrow. Through such experiences, teachers can enrich their teaching practices, develop empathy and global citizenship among their students, and contribute to creating a more inclusive and sustainable classroom. The paper includes a description of the project and its value in extending English language learning beyond traditional classroom settings and supporting the holistic development of English proficiency.

Keywords: English language learning, authentic language use, collaborative learning, the children's general assembly

1 Introduction

In the heart of youth empowerment, my student (fourteen years old at that time) and I embarked on a transformative journey through the Children's General Assembly project (CGA). This article aims to demonstrate how the project provided a unique platform for authentic English language learning inside and outside the classroom. By engaging in this global initiative, my student and I encountered various opportunities to develop language skills through real-world contexts, collaborative activities, and meaningful interactions. Furthermore, I hope to inspire fellow educators to seek out and participate in similar projects more often. The Children's General Assembly showed me that stepping beyond the traditional curriculum and engaging students in global initiatives can be a transformative experience. It challenges both students and teachers to use language in meaningful ways, fostering a deeper connection to the content and enhancing language proficiency in authentic contexts. By embracing these opportunities, we can create dynamic learning environments that not only teach English but also empower our students to think critically, collaborate globally, and become active participants in society. Our journey with the CGA began unexpectedly through a casual conversation with a colleague who took part in the project in the previous year. Drawn by the idea, I became eager for my students to become part of this global movement. Initially, four students from our school applied but only was accepted and invited to take part in this project.

2 Researching the Capital of Children and Understanding the Children's General Assembly project

Before submitting our application at the beginning of the year, we decided to do some research, exploring the Capital of Children website to gain a deeper understanding of the initiative. Founded on the belief that children should be at the centre of urban planning and development and with the help of major sponsors such as Lego, the Capital of Children aims to create cities that prioritise the well-being and happiness of young residents. We found this interesting, so we continued learning about The Children's General Assembly. The Children's General Assembly, a flagship project of the Capital of Children initiative, is a global platform dedicated to amplifying the voices of young people and empowering them to become active participants in shaping their communities and, consequently, the world. Through a series of workshops, events, and collaborative projects, CGA seeks to foster dialogue, build connections, and inspire action among children from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Intrigued by all the information, we delved into the application process. All the students tried their hardest to create an application form that would express their passion for creating a better world for children and outlining their vision for the future.

3 Application Process as a Language Learning Tool

The CGA experience began with an application process that required my student to articulate her vision for a future shaped by and for children. This task was not just an exercise in writing; it represented an authentic context for language use, demanding clarity of ex-

pression, persuasive argumentation, and effective organisation of ideas. Engaging in this process allowed my student to use a range of linguistic skills, from vocabulary selection to complex sentence construction, which is critical for developing advanced writing competence in English. According to Swain (2005), authentic language tasks such as this application process are essential for developing both linguistic and cognitive skills, as they require learners to use language meaningfully and contextually.

4 Development of Real-World Communicative Competence Through Online Workshops

Our acceptance into the CGA was announced in March 2023, which marked the beginning of an unforgettable experience. My student participated in workshops, engaging with children from diverse backgrounds to discuss different important societal issues. These online meetings, facilitated by experts, provided a platform for collaborative problem-solving and the exchange of ideas. During these workshops, children worked tirelessly, creating vision boards, drawing pictures, writing texts, and brainstorming ideas for the manifesto that would later be presented at the main event in Denmark. My student said that it was interesting to witness how these workshops expressed solidarity among participants despite geographical distances and cultural differences. She also said that she found herself inspired by the creativity, resilience, and enthusiasm of her peers from diverse backgrounds. Through active participation, she gained a deeper understanding of global issues and the role that young people can play in effecting positive change in their communities and beyond. Moreover, the workshops provided a dynamic, communicative environment where my student could practice speaking and listening skills in real-time. They facilitated the development of turn-taking, clarifying, paraphrasing, and expressing agreement or disagreement - skills essential for effective communication in any language. Furthermore, these interactions enhanced her fluency, confidence, and ability to adapt her language use to different audiences and contexts. As Vygotsky (1978) posits, interaction in a sociocultural context is crucial for language development, highlighting the importance of communicative competence gained through such collaborative activities.

5 From Practical Language Application in Navigating Logistics to Cultural Immersion in Denmark

The logistical preparations for our trip to Denmark offered a rich context for applying English in practical scenarios. This phase required us to manage various administrative tasks, which were pivotal in demonstrating how language skills can be utilised beyond traditional classroom settings. Our initial task involved researching and booking flight tickets. This required careful reading of airline websites, understanding booking procedures, and comparing options - all in English. We needed to navigate terms and conditions, identify relevant travel details, and ensure accurate entries for names and dates. The language used in these contexts ranged from formal and technical to conversational, providing a comprehensive practice of English. Communicating with the CGA organisation about travel refunds necessitated formal email correspondence. We crafted detailed inquiries and responses, addressing spe-

cific concerns about the reimbursement process. This task honed skills in writing clear, polite, and professional emails, essential for effective communication. My student learned to articulate requests, provide the necessary documentation, and follow up on responses, all of which reinforced practical language application. In addition to managing travel arrangements, we coordinated with the school, parents, and an insurance company to ensure all logistical aspects were covered. This involved drafting and submitting forms, discussing safety plans, and arranging insurance. English was the medium for these communications, requiring precise language to convey information about safety protocols, insurance coverage, and travel details. Furthermore, managing travel logistics exposed us to various cultural and procedural differences, requiring us to adapt our language use accordingly. Understanding and adhering to different organisational procedures, interpreting policies, and adjusting to varying communication styles enriched my student's ability to use English in diverse contexts. This adaptability is a crucial skill in global interactions and professional settings.

Our arrival in Denmark marked the beginning of an immersive experience where English served as a lingua franca among participants from around the world. The detailed program provided by the CGA organisers included separate schedules for children and adults, allowing for targeted activities that facilitated language development in different contexts. The CGA organizers had planned every aspect of the event, providing participants with a detailed program for both children and accompanying adults. From workshops and discussions to leisure activities and city tours, each day was filled with opportunities for learning, networking, and fun. Outside of the official program, we had the chance to explore the charming city of Billund, visit the mayor's office, and get to know the local community. Evenings were filled with lively group activities, which aimed to form friendships among participants. Engaging in dialogues with peers, facilitators, and local community members during the event enhanced my student's intercultural communicative competence, a critical aspect of language learning that goes beyond linguistic proficiency. The highlight of our time in Denmark was undoubtedly the live-streamed event on September 21st, where the children's manifesto was presented in front of policymakers. Major politicians and other prominent faces from the European Union were present as the manifesto, crafted by the young participants, was read aloud. It was a proud moment for all involved, a testament to the power of youth in driving positive change. The event also provided a powerful platform for my student to use English in a high-stakes setting. This experience reinforced the importance of effective public speaking skills and offered invaluable practice in presenting ideas clearly and confidently.

A notable aspect of our experience was a visit to Legoland, for which Lego generously provided free tickets to all participants. This visit exemplified how informal learning environments can complement formal education by offering low-pressure, engaging contexts for language practice. Whether reading signs, interpreting maps, or interacting with other visitors, my student utilised her English skills to navigate a new environment, thereby reinforcing language learning through experiential activities.

6 Implications for English Language Teaching

The CGA experience accentuates the value of integrating real-world experiences into English language education. It illustrates how projects like CGA can create authentic contexts for language use, fostering both linguistic and intercultural competencies. Such initiatives can also enhance students' motivation by connecting language learning to meaningful global issues, encouraging active engagement and personal investment in the learning process. Educators are encouraged to explore opportunities that align with the principles of experiential learning, as outlined by Kolb (1984), and communicative language teaching, which emphasise the importance of using language for authentic communication. By incorporating global projects into the curriculum, teachers can create a rich environment for language acquisition, encouraging students to develop both linguistic skills and critical thinking abilities.

7 Conclusion

Our journey with the Children's General Assembly was transformative for me, as well as for my student. From the initial spark of inspiration to the days spent in Denmark, it was an experience that left a lasting impression on both myself and my student. Through CGA, we discovered the power of youth voices, the importance of collaboration, and the potential for positive change in the world. As we reflect on our adventure, we are filled with gratitude for the opportunity to be part of this global movement and excitement for the future it holds. Participating in the Children's General Assembly also provided invaluable insights into the potential of real-world experiences to enhance English language learning. This experience highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for authentic language use, cultural exchange, and collaborative learning. By stepping out of our comfort zones and embracing innovative approaches, we can provide our students with meaningful learning experiences that extend far beyond the classroom, preparing them for an increasingly interconnected world.

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5

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY FOR A MORE CREATIVE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Bojan Kašuba

Abstract

The article deals with concepts such as creativity, digital tools, and AI and attempts to put them into the context of English teaching and learning. It explains in some detail why and how these concepts matter in the scope of English teaching. Furthermore, it provides practical ideas on how to best use digital tools in an English classroom environment. While the examples have been tested and have shown excellent results, they can also be modified to one's needs.

Keywords: creativity, digital tools, AI, English language

1 Introduction

Developing creativity in an English classroom is one of the more important things we do. It is a skill that needs to be nurtured and cultivated. There are many ways in which English teachers develop students' creativity, such as creating alternative endings to a story, writing poetry or solving problems. Using digital tools helps us foster students' creativity in ways that were previously unimaginable. This article will examine how different digital tools can be used to make teaching and learning more fun and creative. Additionally, a few real-world examples will be provided, which will bring theoretical aspects and practical applications into a coherent unity.

2 Creativity Is the Key

While teaching vocabulary, grammatical rules and developing language skills is at the heart of teaching English, we must never forget that teaching skills for life is of equal importance. One of the most important skills to teach and develop is creativity. The European Union recognises creativity as one of the most essential skills. It is mentioned in the *EntreComp into Action* (McCallum et al. 2018), a European entrepreneurship competence framework, as well as in *DigComp 2.2* (Vuorikari et al. 2022), a digital competence framework for citizens. We must put a lot of effort and time into developing creativity. Luckily, an English classroom is the perfect space to do just that. There are numerous ways and activities where creativity can be fostered and nurtured. Four examples will be provided in the chapter below. Students who have creative minds bring a lot to an English lesson and can push their classmates to do better as well. It is up to us, the teachers, to make sure students get the opportunity to explore their creative minds, find new ways of expressing themselves and come up with creative solutions to difficult problems.

3 Digital Tools in the English Classroom

Using digital tools can greatly benefit English teaching and learning. It can assist teachers in creating and adapting materials for their classrooms, and it can help students with learning English and developing digital competencies. There are many ways in which digital tools make learning more interactive and engaging. Gamified platforms like Kahoot and Baamboozle allow students to participate and compete in quizzes, making learning fun and exciting. Technology can also enable personalised learning. Students can progress at their own pace in areas where they need improvement. These include services like Duolingo, BBC Learning English and Babbel. Another benefit of using digital tools in an English classroom is that digital tools can provide instant feedback on language performance. Students receive corrections and suggestions immediately, enhancing their understanding. The Internet offers a wealth of resources such as videos, podcasts, articles and interactive exercises. We can use these diverse materials to cater to different learning styles and can adapt them to our own needs and the needs of our students. By using such materials, students are exposed to authentic language use. This exposure helps them develop language skills for real-life situations.

4 What's the Deal with AI?

There is not a single technology that has shaped the 21st century more than the rise of AI and its language models. It has become the go-to tool for professionals and enthusiasts alike. Its use in education cannot be understated. It opens many opportunities for teaching and learning English that were previously unimaginable. Using AI can enhance students' learning experience and foster creativity and critical thinking. However, using AI, and any other digital tool for that matter, must have an educational purpose. If AI or other digital tools do not provide any additional value, it is best not to use them. It is important to evaluate AI and its use for specific tasks before applying it in the classroom. This is best done by consulting the SAMR model developed by Ruben R. Puentedura (Jisc 2022). SAMR stands for substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition. If we just substitute pen and paper with AI and other digital tools, then it is better not to do so. There is no benefit to it. However, if we can redefine tasks so they are impossible to finish without AI or other digital tools, then such an undertaking is worth taking.

5 Benefits of AI

AI or LLMs (large language models) can offer great benefits to teachers and students. Teachers can use AI to help them plan and adapt lessons to meet the needs of their students. They can create and grade assignments using AI. Additionally, AI can be used to instruct teachers on how to ask open-ended questions, engage students, and provide suggestions on creating problem-based tasks, creating new materials and other things. The possibilities of AI are endless. It is wise to make AI your teaching friend, not your enemy.

6 Activities in the Classroom

The following chapter deals with real-life examples of how to use various digital tools, such as Canva and ChatGPT, in your classroom. A scenario and two possible use cases will be provided with each example.

History

If we are examining history, there are better ways to talk about the topic than traditional reading or listening comprehension. While the first part should certainly involve a reading part, the follow-up activities can involve the use of various digital tools, such as Canva or Prezi. Students can create an interactive Prezi presentation that zooms in on key historical events and figures. This tool allows students to collaborate on a single presentation. Alternatively, students can also use Canva to create posters about different historical events and figures. We can use these two tools for other topics as well. However, we must make sure students know how to use them. If students are not proficient in using digital tools, a lot of time is wasted on technical things.

Poetry

Students can use AI or LLMs to create poems. Two best-known examples of LLMs are ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot. It is important to give students somewhat detailed in-

structions on how to write prompts and provide a few examples, e.g. create a poem with four stanzas; the poem should not have any rhymes, etc. Writing effective prompts is becoming one of the most essential skills in the 21st century. We should create a shared Microsoft Word or Google Docs document where students write their poems when they are satisfied with the results the tool has created. They can read other classmates' poems or songs and comment on them. Alternatively, students can create videos by selecting images, overlay them with lines of poetry, and add background music. They can do this in Canva or use an app such as CapCut.

Creative writing

One way of fostering creative and collaborative writing is to use Microsoft Word or Google Docs. The teacher starts a story by writing a short beginning. Each student adds a paragraph to the story. The whole class votes on the best continuation of the story. After the class has voted on the best continuation of the story, they again add another paragraph to the story. We repeat the process until the story is finished. It is a fun way to engage students in creative writing and peer feedback. However, it is important to give students a time limit for each paragraph, or things can get out of hand, and they will not be able to finish the story. The activity can also be done in groups, where each group writes a story and the whole class comments on the stories and votes for the best one. The tool to use for this activity is Padlet.

Podcast

Another great way of using AI and digital tools in an English classroom is to create podcasts with famous people, present or past. Students look up information about a famous person. They can use websites or AI. After the pair or group of students have found the necessary information, they record the interview. The students take roles; one is the famous person, and the other is the interviewer. Students can use their smartphones to record the interviews. They can also do podcasts on different topics. It is a great activity which can last the whole school year. At the end of the year, the class can listen to all the podcasts they have recorded, or they can even upload them to the school website.

7 Conclusion

As daunting as it might seem to many, digital tools and AI do provide great benefits to teaching and learning English. However, there needs to be careful consideration when and how to use digital tools. If done correctly, it can bolster students' engagement, enhance their creativity and make learning more fun. This article dealt with concepts such as creativity and digital tools and attempted to put them into a coherent unit. It provided some practical ideas on how to incorporate digital tools into an English classroom. To conclude, digital tools offer a lot to teachers and students alike. It is up to us, the teachers, to decide when and how to use them in the most appropriate way.

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6

BRACE YOURSELVES, ALIENS ARE COMING

Using Diversity in the Classroom to Empower Students for Lifelong Learning

Breda Banovšek

Abstract

Being a teacher has never only been about teaching your subject but also about empowering younger generations to think critically, stand up for themselves, look for solutions to their problems and be proactive. This might sound like an impossible job, as teachers deal with their own struggles and limitations by the government, but developing emotional intelligence with a focus on empathy, raising awareness that not everything foreign and unknown is bad and how variety and differences enrich us, can restore our faith in humanity. There have been many studies and surveys focusing on the teacher-student rapport that suggest teachers spend a significant amount of time with students, particularly during school hours, and sometimes through extracurricular activities, tutoring or other engagements, which leads me to believe there are many opportunities for a teacher to at least try to incorporate the most important values for life into their curriculum by listening to their students and reacting to their behaviour. The following paper provides examples of good practice I use in my classroom.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, empowering students, learning for life

1 Introduction

The complexities of our everyday lives in contemporary society have led to a dynamic and rapidly evolving world. We are bombarded by threatening political affairs, natural catastrophes, violent protests, an increase in mental health issues, and the list keeps getting longer and longer. Every generation has its challenges, and being a teenager in the era of social media apps has most certainly created new adversities students have to deal with. Relaying knowledge is only a fraction of an inch that presents a teacher's role in the educational system and society. In addition to following the school curriculum, teachers strive to develop a good rapport with the students that would, hopefully, cause greater engagement in classroom activities and would subsequently lead to students' acquisition of knowledge. It is safe to assume that getting students' attention for 10 minutes is difficult, let alone for 45 minutes. One might wonder how a teenager can spend hours and hours being completely immersed into a world of video games where they are able to strategically achieve a goal, not being bothered by anything or anyone, but on the other hand, cannot manage to read instructions on the test. You do not need to look far for answers, as video games can motivate and challenge children anytime and anywhere (Ang and Wang 2006). A teacher cannot compete with all the elements of excitement and anticipation of a videogame when it comes to school lessons; however, there is a way to invite students to participate and learn something meaningful and valuable that will help them become confident and educated adults.

My main goals, alongside the ones by the school curriculum, are encouraging students to think critically, gather information, and express themselves in a safe environment where they respect each other, teachers, and boundaries. A teacher should always react to bigotry and prejudice and acknowledge differences among students. There is no recipe for success when it comes to teaching as we are dealing with new situations every day; however, establishing a good rapport with students and reacting to inappropriate behaviour has proven to be effective. In the following chapters, I will present some practical ideas of how I have dealt with some issues that arose in my classes. It is important to bear in mind that they do not work for all classes the same. First and foremost, teachers should listen to themselves and their class and react accordingly.

2 Empathy

We are all sometimes too quick to judge, and teenagers tend to escalate that even more. It is of great importance to teach empathy to students, and one of the ways this can be done is by educating them on different life conditions faced by their peers worldwide. In grade 7, we learn about children's rights and child labour as part of a grammar unit on modal verbs. Every year, students would talk about how unfair it is that they have to go to primary school, whereas, in some countries, primary school is not obligatory. As we go through "The Convention of the Rights of the Child" (UNICEF 1989), some students cannot comprehend how the right to have free time and to relax is not self-evident for all children. I use this topic to show students a few short videos of children from third-world countries tell-

ing their own stories about why they do not go to school, what their day looks like, how difficult their job is, etc. Students start to realise that not every child has the privilege of accessing education as a given. Some are compelled to engage in labour to support their families' basic needs. Among other things, we also discuss stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. It gives students an insight into the lives and situations of children around the world and encourages them to appreciate what they have.

3 Critical Thinking

Teenagers are bombarded by various information at every step of their everyday lives. Smartphones and social media have brought the world right into our hands, and not everything teenagers watch and read online is appropriate for their brain, which has not yet developed to process critically all the information they are exposed to. It is challenging for a teacher to compete with various TikTok influencers when conveying a message to their students. We are, after all, no match for an influencer with 50 million followers. Nevertheless, we can still try and immerse ourselves into their world by asking them who their favourite influencers are and making an activity or a whole lesson plan based on that influencer. When we get the students to listen to us through the topic they are interested in, we can teach them about the importance of being critical of their influencers and checking facts before blindly following them and accepting their workout tips or make-up hacks.

4 Discrimination

We can never put too much emphasis on discussing stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. Teaching a foreign language gives us many opportunities to talk about other cultures and customs, therefore teaching students that exploring other cultures will enrich them and broaden their horizons. It is not only the culture of English-speaking countries that is relevant when teaching English. The world has become multicultural, and English has become an important bridge between our mother tongue and other languages. There is a phenomenon called *K wave*. It describes the popularity of South Korean music, technology, movies and food that is also present among teenagers in Slovenia (Adams 2022). I first heard about a Korean group from my students. They talked about it with sparks in their eyes and told me they had even learned some Korean words. I was thrilled to see such dedication in my students, so I decided to dig deeper. It has brought me to the world of K-pop (or Korean popular music), where fans empower and embrace each other by sharing the same love for music and dance. Once I started to include Korean culture in my lessons, I noticed that most of the students made fun of the topic, saying all Korean people are Chinese or look Chinese, and they all eat dogs, etc. As this was something I found utterly inappropriate, I started educating my students on Asian culture and, through that, the importance of learning about new cultures before accepting prejudice they had heard from adults or seen on social media. One Korean person I always like to include in my lessons is a football player Son Heung-min. Not only do some students find him interesting as they are football fans, but he is also a humble and wholesome person who shares positivity and kindness wherever he goes, thus being a great role model for teenagers. Our

school went even a step further and allowed us to prepare an event that would educate not only students but also their parents and our local community on Korean culture. The event was a success and brought different generations together to challenge and dismantle Asian stereotypes (Banovšek and Urankar 2023).

5 Mental Health Issues

The post-Covid era has brought an increase in noticeable mental health issues among students. Students struggle with anxiety, depression and self-harm. Even though it has become less of a taboo theme, some students still do not understand the impact mental health issues can have on an individual and their family. On the one hand, students are more willing to talk about their own issues and seek help; on the other hand, we still see students bullying their classmates and belittling their problems. One might feel that we always talk about mental health issues and that students find this topic passé, but the real problem lies in how they perceive these issues. Social media has desensitised teenagers, and it is difficult for them to comprehend the harsh reality that might occur when a struggling voice is not heard. The tragic story of Amanda Todd (2012), a teenage girl who was struggling with depression after being taken advantage of by a person she met online, shows students how a stupid and innocent mistake can lead to irreversible consequences. The story might trigger intense emotional response in some students, which is why a teacher must be well prepared before bringing it into the classroom and discuss it appropriately with follow-up activities.

6 Positive Environment

A positive environment is key to making sure students like coming to school. We know that elementary education is obligatory, and we never fail to mention that to students on a weekly basis, but what will make them learn better is if they like going to school. A positive environment is not only a classroom filled with cute posters, relatable memes and inspirational quotes but also an environment where they are not being judged by teachers, where their voice is heard and where there are adults who will not give up on them. Sometimes, it is enough for a teacher to compliment a student's new haircut, ask them about their day, show them their teacher planner with stickers of Star Wars, rainbows, K-pop bands, memes, etc. My motto as a teacher is *'Be the teacher you wanted to have when you were younger.'*

7 Conclusion

It is not the school's curriculum or the increasing administrative tasks that drain teachers' energy and motivation to plan innovative and engaging lessons, but the students' disruptive behaviour, lack of empathy and unkindness. Besides the interruption of the teaching process, the teacher can feel discouraged and indifferent (Kazak and Koyuncu 2021). In some cases, student's parents or guardians will not comprehend how disruptive behaviour can affect the lesson outcome, therefore leaving a teacher to handle the situation on their own. Needless to say, classroom management can sometimes become overwhelming, and

no school rules will bring about positive changes in students' behaviour. However, I believe there is always something new a teacher can try. It may be exhausting and time-consuming, but I believe that giving students an opportunity to become better by accepting them for who they are, listening to them and trying to understand them, and at the same time teaching them about the importance of respecting ethical and moral values, will in the long run help you form meaningful relationships with most of them, resulting in mutual understanding and respect. And only a student who sees you as a trustworthy person who never gave up on them but also held them accountable for their actions will be able to learn from you and strive to become a responsible adult.

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7

A PARENT AT SCHOOL

Darja Urh

Abstract

Teachers take on a variety of roles within the classroom, one of them being a class teacher. A role you are not ready for when you finish your studies. It takes experience, wisdom and the ability to adapt to a group of students. The aim of my workshop is to share my experience of being a mentor teacher and show how I learnt to work with a group of students, each student as an individual and the students' parents. It is not an easy role, but with the right attitude, it can be very rewarding.

Keywords: class teacher, class hour, debate, critical oracy, parent teacher, consultation hours

1 Introduction

When you become a language teacher, you are full of ideas and theoretical aspects towards teaching, the desire to teach students and reveal a whole new world to them by helping them express themselves in another language. However, the job of a teacher is much more than lesson plans and carrying them out. It is indeed the peak of an iceberg hiding a whole mountain under the surface. I remember being trained to teach but never to be a class teacher. And there you are at the beginning of your career with a bunch of students everyone at school considers yours. You are starting anew with very little theory and very much depending on your life experience, care and personal traits. There are, in fact, many skills a good class teacher should possess. Diving into a school year with your own group means planning and being aware of the fact that there are three fields you need to work in: working with parents, with students as individuals and with students as a group. Each field requires its approach and skills. It is, in a way, being a parent of those students at school. They turn to you, and your colleagues expect you to solve the problems they have with your students themselves. You help them grow and mature and become aware of the consequences of their actions. Very much parent-like.

2 Working with Students as a Group

The class teacher is supposed to act as a bridge between the school, the home and the class. He is to twin the strength of the school, the home and the society's education. It sounds like a challenging task. Teaching students when they are in their teens means you do not get to see them all the time. They learn with teachers of different subjects. Thus, you only teach them English and are their class teacher at the same time.

I always become a class teacher of students when they are twelve or thirteen. This means the group has already been formed and has a common history of marvels and oddities. My key role as a class teacher is to help the group work together and share, learn, play, and accept one another. The latter can be quite demanding if there are students who cannot stand one another and are simply too different to be able to cooperate. Therefore, teaching them to gain and show respect to one another proves to be the most important piece of the class puzzle. "A lesson spent interacting with your students and getting involved in the debate yourself is worth its weight in gold" (Newman 2020: 13).

There are many books with detailed descriptions of class hours and lesson plans already written, but it all starts with knowing the group well. By knowing their highs and lows, you, as a class teacher, must make a plan of what value to stress the most to balance the energy within the group. You need to make your students enjoy the activities. "If we want to stress the idea that students are important, that what they have to say is interesting and should be shared, then we should arrange the classroom space to allow them to talk to each other and to work together" (Crawford 2005: 7). Some fall for simple conversations while sitting in a circle, some would need to be active and perhaps even go outside to feel free and be able to connect. It is a matter of being capable of adapting to a group that may not al-

ways match your personality. I have had groups of students who enjoyed sharing their memories, revealing their fears and finding a safe place by just being themselves. "Participating in debate and critical oracy and developing these skills can lead to advantages in many areas of education and wider society" (Newman 2020: 9).

But as well groups in which I would try out activities that did not work out at all and only made me disappointed and even insulted, not being able to read them – what they need and how to achieve it. Consequently, I tried other activities like making a pizza together, inviting someone special for a visit, getting to know a society, visiting an old people's home nearby or sometimes just heading to the gym so they could play dodgeball and enjoy themselves. The main goal should be connecting and working together. All the roads should get you to Rome anyway.

3 Working with Students as Individuals

Showing interest means gaining trust. "Teachers pay close attention to what students are learning and how they are thinking, investigating and communicating as they go about learning" (Crawford 2005: 7). Forming a bridge to each student can be inspiring, especially because working as a teacher means it is even more difficult to switch off your personal side. This thus means that there are students you can easily relate to and those who turn out to be difficult to come close to. But problems can always be seen as opportunities to learn different perspectives and broaden your horizons. Having an individual conversation with students at the beginning of the year is something I believe indeed does the trick. It is all about the dual. With the teacher alone, the student may feel a little frustrated or embarrassed for the first time, but once he sees the real interest of the teacher in who he is as a person and how he changes and matures during the ages, the ice between both starts melting and the bond can be created. It is extremely important that the questions of the interview are adapted to the age and even more so that they help get to know a student. I always ask questions and then jot down their answers. When parents come to the consultation hours, I present this interview to them, and they get to have another point of view of their child as well. Knowing students better, you can understand their behaviour and reactions to certain events. You can also help them better, channel their thoughts, and make suggestions. Being close to them makes your words more relevant for the student. They might take them into consideration by seeing that you are truly there to be a scaffold.

During the conversation, I try for them to set goals for the school year. One goal has to do with school, meaning they choose a subject in which they want to improve the most. The other goal must not have anything to do with school. It can be family, friends, love, hobbies related. They learn to plan and work for things. Dreaming big is never a problem, but working hard can be. At the end of the first term, we meet again and check how they are doing in being part of the group and if they are about to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. Having a closer look into each one of them makes me understand the dynamics of the group a lot more.

4 Working with Parents

I believe most teachers are afraid of parents, annoyed by them, or find them too involved in the school life of their children. It is difficult to know what teachers really expect from parents. On one hand, it makes them angry if parents are not involved and don't help their children. On the other hand, teachers believe parents should let students do their job and trust them more. But how to do it just right? Parents are also learning how to be parents, balancing independence and care. The key glue between parents and teachers should be trust. If parents trust teachers, this means they believe their words and will act according to them, trying to help the child learn from their mistakes. They need to, however, understand that the behaviour of their child at school is very much under the influence of his schoolmates. Being part of a group and feeling accepted is the primary source of happiness and self-confidence. Consequently, I strongly believe that working with parents is not something teachers should avoid at all costs; rather, they should learn more about it.

Consultation hours are also like individual conversations with students, a dual thing. All teachers who are also parents can understand that sitting on the other side of the desk is usually less pleasant than handing out information about a student. Most teachers tend to say very little about students who are successful and prefer to give a long speech on the students who break the rules and have poor grades. But why? All parents attending consultation hours have taken their time and showed interest in seeing how their child is doing as a student. Class teachers should have enough knowledge about the student to present the highs and lows and prove to be the third angle in the pedagogy triangle. It is crucial to be respectful and not judgemental and help the parents understand the situations their child is involved in. By gaining their trust, you can both help the child get back on track and teach them to obey and comprehend rules.

Parent-teacher meetings do not happen often but are a wonderful opportunity for the class teacher to see the dynamics of the homes in which his students grow up. Making parent-teacher meetings a lecture builds a wall between the teacher and the parents and does not contribute to positive feelings and seeing the teacher as someone important in a child's life. Turning the meetings into a workshop can release the tension, bring parents closer to one another, give voice to parents and make them play an important role in their children's schooling.

5 Conclusion

When you become a parent, you do not get a manual for your children, and also, when you become a class teacher, you do not get a manual for your students. Learning from mistakes, going step by step and relying on your personal traits, as well as making the three vertices of a triangle indeed become a shape, makes an inspiring class teacher.

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8

LET'S TAKE A BREAK

Janja Androić

Abstract

Students not paying attention, daydreaming, staring, or even being disruptive are all familiar situations in everyday classrooms. Students (and adults) often struggle to stay focused for long periods of time, leading to wandering minds as their brains need a break. Brain breaks are short, planned activity shifts using physical movement, mindfulness exercises, or sensory activities, which can be done individually or as a group. They give students a brief respite from their work, helping their brains shift focus and return ready to work and learn. These breaks are usually a few minutes long and do not require any special equipment. There are three main categories of brain breaks: breathing or relaxation activities, activities involving high-intensity physical movement between portions of a lesson, and focusing on mental exercises. Studies show that using these simple activities improves student behaviour, focus, and engagement, while also reducing stress, anxiety, and frustration.

Keywords: brain breaks, focus, ESL

1 Introduction

Do your students seem disengaged, yawning, or disruptive? Many teachers often notice that students tend to become inattentive and distracted in the second part of the 45-minute class, and the first two or three classes are much easier to manage than classes toward the end of the school day. That is because their brains need a break. Brain breaks - short, planned activity shifts - can help you give your students a brief rest from what they are doing to help their brains shift focus/reset and return ready to work and learn.

2 What Are Brain Breaks?

Activities such as Simon Says, Classmate Swip Swap, Jumping Jacks, breathing exercises, hand movements, etc., are examples of brain breaks. Brain breaks are an important part of learning. Typically, they get students moving and allow oxygen and blood to flow to the brain. They give students a small reset in the day and enhance energy and relaxation. Brain breaks are good for students of all ages (Kiser 2020).

The frequency of brain breaks should vary depending on students' ages and developmental focus. Some research suggests that doubling students' chronological age is comparable to their attention span. As a general rule, 10 to 15 minutes of concentrated study for elementary students and 20 to 30 minutes for middle and high school students call for a three- to five-minute break. It is crucial for students to engage in these activities before they become distracted or fatigued. Therefore, too much, too fast, won't last (Willis 2016).

3 How Do Brain Breaks Work?

According to Willis (2016), for new information to become a memory, it must pass through the amygdala, an emotional filter, and then reach the prefrontal cortex. When students' brains become anxious, highly confused, or overwhelmed, the activation of the amygdala increases until this filter becomes a stop sign. New learning no longer passes through to reach the prefrontal cortex and sustain memory.

Brain breaks also activate unused networks in children's brains, shifting the workload away from regions blocked by work or stress and giving them the time they need to reset and refocus. Neurotransmitters, which carry messages from one nerve cell to the next, are in limited supply and can deplete after as little as 10 minutes of continuing the same type of learning activity (attentive listening, practice drills, note-taking). Brain breaks, by switching the type of mental activity, shift brain communication to networks with fresh supplies of neurotransmitters. This intermission allows the brain's chemicals to replenish within the resting network (Willis 2016).

4 Types of Brain Breaks

- a) *Breathing exercises* generally involve some kind of deep breathing. They are recommended to maintain focus and increase student well-being. Breathing exercises are often coupled with stretching exercises, such as neck rolls, to relieve stress and relax students (Weslake and Christian 2015).
- *Pretend to breathe like an animal* – students pretend to breathe like their favourite animal. The snake breath involves hissing while slithering from side to side, while the whale breath involves students pretending to breathe out through a blowhole (Wild Life Yoga 2020).
 - *Bubble breathing exercise* – students sit in a relaxed position and breathe in slowly through their nose, hold and breathe out slowly (NYS OMG 2023).
- b) *Physical brain breaks* have a vigorous physical component. Incorporating a physical element into brain breaks gives students an opportunity to relieve stress, improve physical fitness, and develop fine and gross motor skills. Eric Jensen, an expert in brain research and brain-based teaching strategies, claims that movement should be integrated into everyday learning but suggests that not all breaks must be high activity as even standing up or stretching adds value to learning (Weslake and Christian 2015).
- *I am a music man* is a fun dance song and a great brain break which gets children to move. It is appropriate for younger students (TheLearningStation 2015).
 - *Tooty Ta* is a growing pattern song. Students get some fun physical activity while they rejuvenate their body and brain (Hartmann 2018).
 - *We're going on a bear hunt* is a fun and engaging movement song based on a book by Michael Rosen (Walker Books 2018).
 - *Chair triathlon* is a fun and energetic activity designed to refresh and reboot the brain (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life 2021).
- c) *Mental brain breaks* take a variety of forms and may be used to increase focus and/or improve fine motor skills. These brain breaks may or may not involve movement and generally take the form of a learning game or similar activity (Weslake and Christian 2015).
- *Ear nose switcheroo* – students touch their left ear with their right hand and, at the same time, touch their nose with their left hand. Then, they switch their hands and touch their right ear with their left hand and their nose with their right hand (Ballard 2020).
 - *Pinky and thumb* – on one hand, students stick out their thumb. On the other hand, they stick out their pinky. Then, switch back and forth.
 - *Tap and sweep* – students tap their right fist on the right side of their chest while sweeping their left hand on the left side. Change hands.
 - *Triangle and circle* – students draw a circle in the air with their left hand and a triangle with their right hand and then switch (Brain Education TV 2019).

5 Benefits of Using Brain Breaks

Brain breaks should be incorporated into everyday teaching. The benefits include improved behaviour, increased productivity, enhanced comprehension, creative thinking, and increased time on task. They help students pay attention and are as important as the skills being taught. Teachers should plan their classes so that students are not focusing on one task for too long and thus becoming counterproductive. Brain breaks, including music and movement, positively stimulate their brains.

Brain breaks increase efficiency and performance in the classroom and are valuable for students and teachers. Movement, music, and humour are all great ideas to incorporate into brain breaks. They reduce stress and frustration and increase attention and productivity. Physical activity has many benefits, and incorporating small bursts of these kinds of activities during lessons has real advantages (Kiser 2020).

6 Conclusion

To sum up, brain breaks are a necessary and enjoyable element of any learning environment. They should be used anytime students feel restless, stressed or struggle to pay attention. They only take a few minutes, and they allow students to reset, relax, and regain focus. Countless studies state that brain breaks increase efficiency and productivity, reduce stress, improve behavior etc. They are simple to use, and students love them.

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9

MINDFULNESS 101

Jasna Šebez

Abstract

This article deals with some mindfulness techniques that can be of great value for teachers when they need a mindful break from the chaos of the classroom, school, and the educational system in general. The techniques include some basic mindfulness exercises, which can be used without any or much preparation in advance but can certainly bring peace of mind. They are useful to help anyone dealing with daily stress and show how to respond to it in a mindful, stress-less way.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindfulness techniques, daily stress control

1 Introduction

Mindfulness, at its simplest, is a practice that intentionally focuses on our sensory experiences as it unfolds moment by moment. This means that you intentionally choose to stop yourself from falling into autopilot mode and missing your own life. To do this, you need to be more mindful and become aware of your surroundings, enjoy the life you are leading and listen to what your body is telling you (Claire 2023). How do you bring your awareness to what is present and happening in this very moment without judgment or needing to change anything?

There is a lot you cannot control, major changes to the education system being one of them. But there is a lot you *can* control – like your response to daily stress in the classroom. Here are some great mindfulness practices for teachers, all of which you can do within a few short minutes a day. Mindfulness is a tool: use the techniques to empower you to manage stress better and tackle the demands of the classroom. It is not a stretch to say that your personal well-being affects the future of our world. Take care of yourself so that you can be a mindful role model to your students (Zupančič 2023).

2 Centering

1. Before class, take a moment to get centred.
2. Stand with your feet about shoulder width and relax your knees; don't lock them.
3. Bring your attention to a point in your abdomen about two inches below your navel and about an inch into your body.
4. Spend a few minutes focusing on this point and feeling gravity connecting your body to the Earth.
ASK YOURSELF: What is your centre? How do you get centred amidst loudness and chaos?

3 Mindful Walking

1. Choose a flat, open path of 10–20 paces.
2. Stand still, taking a few moments to feel your body.
3. Walk at a comfortable pace, perhaps slightly slower than normal. You want to feel the direct sensations of your feet and legs moving.
4. Feel the changing sensations in your feet as you walk: heaviness, pressure, movement, temperature. With each step, feel the steady contact with the ground.
5. When you notice your mind engaged in thoughts or stories, allow it to return to the sensations of walking.
6. When you reach the end of your walking path, stop and stand still again. Take a few moments to feel the body standing in a neutral state of rest.
7. When you're ready to turn around, include the movements of turning in your awareness. Take another break to stand before beginning to walk in the other direction.
8. Try this for a period of 10–15 minutes, increasing the time as you like.

4 Breathing Exercises

If you already pause for a few deep breaths when you are feeling stressed, you are on the right track. Deep abdominal breathing can slow your heartbeat and lower or stabilise blood pressure. This natural physical response will give you a clearer head. It also gives your brain the time it needs to make a better decision. When a student disrupts a class by expressing anger or frustration, our instinct is to act immediately before the situation gets worse. Instead, take one or two breaths, using the time to survey the situation and the environment. Those precious seconds could provide critical information. But practising mindful breathing does not have to be in the moment of stress. You will find that by practising regularly, it becomes a more natural response in a difficult situation. The best way to start is with belly breathing. It's easy to do and very relaxing. You might want to do it at the beginning and end of your day to see how it feels.

6-step breathing exercise:

1. Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out. Your chest should not move.
4. Breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. Feel the hand on your belly go in and use it to push all the air out.
5. Do this breathing 3 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath.
6. Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

5 Body Scan

Try pairing the belly breathing exercise with a body scan. It is common to carry stress in your body. It might be in the form of tense shoulders, clenched jaw, or upset stomach. However, most of us are not aware of it. The body scan is a simple practice that helps you experience how each part of your body feels without trying to change anything. You slowly move your attention from head to toe, noticing any sensations. According to the Greater Good Science Center, the body scan practice may increase our general attunement to our physical needs and sensations, which can, in turn, help us take better care of our bodies and make healthier decisions about eating, sleep, and exercise. Some are designed for a quick check-in, like the three-minute meditations found on various internet sites, podcasts, or even apps. Others are much longer and focus on each body part for an extended time. These are excellent for listening at bedtime.

6 Journaling

Journaling is among the best mindfulness practices for teachers because it can help you process emotions and learn from experiences. You could write about your emotional responses to events that happened throughout the day. Or you might write a journal about a particular issue that has been causing a lot of stress.

Mindfully recognising our emotional responses toward students may help us understand why they are behaving the way they are. If we feel annoyed, the behaviour is likely attention-seeking. If we feel threatened, the behaviour is likely a bid for power. If we feel hurt, the behaviour is likely an attempt at revenge, and if we feel discouraged, the student is likely to give up. These feelings can help us respond more appropriately to the underlying issues of our students, and help us shift from a negative appraisal to a state of compassion.

For example, here is a good journaling exercise (Jennings 2015):

1. Think about a student you find challenging.
2. Recall the last time they did something that made teaching difficult.
3. What emotions does the memory elicit? Do you feel annoyed? Frustrated?
4. How does your body feel? For example, are your shoulders tense? Is your stomach tight?
5. Don't try to stop the feelings or change them. Just sit with them.
6. Listen to the thoughts that come from these feelings.
7. This practice is helpful because it will enable you to learn how your emotions function. This will help you to respond consciously, rather than unconsciously, to misbehaviour.

As you can see, journaling can uncover unconscious reactions, helping you notice patterns in your thinking that may or may not be serving you well.

7 Take Time (Jennings 2015)

If we rush because we are anxious, we may miss these opportunities to deepen learning. Mindfulness can teach us to wait, be patient, and time our pauses appropriately.

Example:

1. Explain to students, "We know that kids learn better and teachers teach better when we give ourselves time to think about a question before answering it. I will wait about three seconds after I ask a question before I call on anyone to answer. This will give you time to think about how you'd like to answer. I will also give myself some time before I respond."
2. Each time you do your three-second wait time, use it to mindfully take a nice, deep breath.
3. If you are standing, notice the weight of your feet on the ground.
4. Allow your awareness to broaden so that you can take in the entire class.
5. Scan the class, noticing each student as they raise their hands, and choose one you may not have called on much lately
6. As the student answers, listen mindfully and spend time considering it.

8 Conclusion

Mindfulness exercises can be a valuable tool in today's world of hectic, constant rushing and daily stress. The so-called "5 A's Technique" to manage stress is therefore essential in responding to it and dealing with it in the right, reasonable and thought-through way. If you want to change the situation, AVOID or ALTER the stressor. If you want to change your response, ADAPT or ACCEPT the stressor by being ACTIVE.

Following a daily mindfulness routine, step by step, we as teachers (and as human beings) can become much calmer at our daily tasks, and we can learn how not to give in to stress, daily demands and pressure but to accept what is coming by being aware of what is going on around us and within ourselves.

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10

BENEFITS OF USING DIDACTIC TOOLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Jure Petić

Abstract

The article is based on more than 20 years of experience working in the field of education as well as on numerous attended conferences, meetings and discussions. It covers the use of didactic tools in foreign language teaching and various ways of including them in lessons. There are some ideas for acquiring, using, and arranging didactic tools in the classroom, including some unconventional ones. When included in the teaching process, some short-term and long-term benefits can be achieved.

Keywords: didactic tools, foreign language, benefits

1 Introduction

Welcome to the magic world of (unconventional) didactic tools! I believe didactic tools are a “MUST” in the field of foreign language teaching, especially in the early stages, ages 3–14. There are various ways of using them in class, no matter the stage. They can be very useful when dealing with new reality and having numerous foreign students in the classroom as well. By using your imagination, you can get them at absolutely no cost in different sizes, shapes and colours. When placing them in your classroom, it becomes a magical place for children and a very stimulating environment. Therefore, some ideas on arranging the classroom with didactic tools according to different grades and levels of knowledge will be presented, as well as the activities you can do with them. To sum up, short-term and long-term benefits of using didactic tools will be provided.

2 Why Everyone Should Include Didactic Tools in Foreign Language Teaching

There are two perspectives when it comes to using didactic tools, one focusing on students and the other one on teachers. When it comes to students, didactic tools definitely have an inspirational and motivational effect, and they can provide a diversity of activities in class. Once they are put in the children’s hands, their imagination runs wild; they stimulate students’ creativity and productivity increases. On the other hand, let us consider the well-being of teachers while at work as well. They may escape the everyday routine by using didactic tools and spice up the lessons. Dealing with exertion and stress, they can make their lessons a pleasant journey, not only work. Last but not least, in the last ten years, didactic tools have helped teachers deal with completely new situations and have proven to be an effective instrument for teaching foreign students, especially the first year after their arrival. According to my experience, their English is usually insufficient for them to function in class, and they do not speak a single word of Slovene either. At that point, didactic tools become very handy.

3 Various Ways of Using Didactic Tools in Class

A teacher can take a lesson to another level just by using didactic tools for various didactic activities or games. Let me just point out a couple of them. By passing the ball to students and getting it back when the question is answered, you have them focused, you have them active, and you make them think. By using a ball, you can revise the alphabet in grades 1–3. In grades 4–9, you can revise vocabulary while playing the game *I say... you say...* demanding translations, synonyms and opposites. In grades 1–3 students like stories, so there is that magical tool – a ladybird glove as well as other toy animals you can use for storytelling. Numbers can be used for counting in grades 1–3 and for a very popular game *Hopscotch* while in grades 4–6 you can do English Maths with them. In grades 7–9, you can have students arrange large numbers following your dictation, or they have to say the arranged large number. Letters can be used for revising the alphabet in grades 1–3 and for arranging different words (the longest, the shortest, as many words as possible) in grades 4–9, where you can also use them for spelling. You can teach vocabulary, including body parts, clothes, footwear, headwear, accessories and descriptions of physical appear-

ance by using life-size cardboard cut-outs, standees and large posters. You can include and name all didactic tools in the classroom by playing the game *Simon says*: "Point to the..." or the game *I spy with my little eye* something beginning with... (a certain letter) or its variation *I hear with my little ear* something beginning with... (a certain letter). Lately, we have been dealing with an increased number of immigrant students. By teaching foreign students from 13 different countries, I have come to the conclusion that toy animals can be very useful when there is a language barrier. By setting an example, you can play the game *Find and name the animal* in grades 1–3; in grades 4–6 you use toy animals to teach animal body parts, and you can upgrade the activity in grade 6 by naming the habitats and animal classes they belong to. Including all of the above, we have a basis for the animal presentation in grade 5 or grade 6.

4 How and Where Can You Get Didactic Tools for Free?

There are some common ways of getting didactic tools for free. You can have a presentation at your school or attend a conference. Publishers will offer and provide some materials to get you informed about their products. You can also order a new book set and get free samples to go with, usually flash cards. If using imagination, just anything can be a didactic tool, sometimes an unconventional one. You can check the fashion stores and ask for a mannequin they do not need or use anymore, place it in the classroom and dress it up. Next, you can visit the cinema and get life-size cardboard cut-outs, standees and large posters. Another way of getting free stickers and puzzles is to check the deals at the supermarket. When you purchase products for a certain amount of money, you get free stickers of animals, plants, sights, athletes or puzzles. Students can stick a sticker into their notebooks, create a mind map around it with all the available data and in the case of an athlete, there is a biography coming. Finally, toy animals are very practical to use. So, when there is not enough space in your apartment/house, when your children have grown up, when you do not need them anymore, bring them to school and make them didactic tools.

5 Arrangement of Didactic Tools in the Classroom According to Different Grades

Nowadays, with the ICT world prevailing, it is pretty challenging to get students' attention, interest and their focus. One of the ways to make your classroom different, let us say special, is by creating a magical world full of various didactic tools mentioned above. It is advisable that you arrange didactic tools in the classroom according to different grades, stages of students' development, their level of knowledge and, of course, topics covered in compliance with the curriculum. Therefore, I would suggest the classroom to be divided into three sections: "The world of animation" for grades 1–5 covering animals, plants and fruit, "Science-fiction area" for grades 6–7 covering superheroes, special items of clothing and weapons and "Social club" covering celebrities and entertainment for grades 8–9. It makes it much easier to function since students know immediately what to focus on, where to get didactic tools, help themselves and put them back after they have used them. Once you have arranged your classroom, you keep them in one place and don't have to bring them to school all over and over again, carrying all those big bags and taking them back afterwards.

6 Conclusion

Using didactic tools throughout my professional career has proven to be very effective and beneficial, short-term and long-term. When discussing short-term benefits, I have to stress the immediate attention you get from students. Once you start using didactic tools, students are focused, motivated and ready to go. It is a completely different experience when you listen to the teacher and look at the photo or when you get involved and get to hold them, especially when it comes to didactic games. Involvement provides a joyful experience, and for students, there is no better way to learn than through games and activities. When you put them in a classroom arranged with various didactic tools, their environment becomes very stimulating. This way, the lessons become upgraded, and students memorise better and faster. Therefore, they achieve better temporary knowledge. On the other hand, there are long-term benefits, too. The fondness of the subject grows lesson by lesson, year by year. Students achieve better scores, and this claim is supported by results on national exams, national competitions and reading competitions when compared to results on a national level or to other subjects within the same generation. They assimilate permanent knowledge for life, which they can use in different situations. Last but not least, the growth in fondness for languages and the growth in knowledge can provide more English teachers with a “mission” in the future.

#TRACES – ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH GAME-BASED ACTIVITIES

Maja Osterman

Abstract

The game #TRACES was developed by members of IATEFL as a tool to help include media literacy in EFL classes and sent out to members of IATEFL Slovenia in the autumn of 2023. The aim of this paper is to explore the #TRACES game's adaptability across different educational settings and its impact on enhancing language skills through engaging and interactive methods. It offers ideas on how to adapt the game to other, already-established games or use it as inspiration for longer projects.

Keywords: #TRACES, game-based learning, interactive learning, student engagement

1 Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, two things about teaching English to high school students have become apparent to me. First, media literacy is on its way to becoming a necessary skill for students as well as teachers in all classroom settings. Since students have a much different experience navigating and especially critically evaluating digital content to which they are exposed, they might not be aware of various kinds of dangers that are lurking within. I believe that is one of the reasons the game #TRACES was thought up at the Media Literacy Symposium in 2022 by some of the members of IATEFL – to help teach students how to react in various situations while at the same time support the development of English language proficiency.



Image 1: Image from the personal archive.

Secondly, I have found numerous benefits to including playing games in my classes. Playing games has increased motivation, enhanced student participation and improved speaking skills, especially when the students are more introverted. I have used similar mysteries with my students before, which is why I was really excited when I was asked to help test out #TRACES and help expand its use since teachers are otherwise limited to using the game a maximum of 4 times in any class before the students become too familiar with the details of the scenarios. Considering the game was distributed among members of IATEFL Slovenia along with the autumn issue of the magazine, I wanted to share some of my ideas.

2 How to Play

One of the things I love best about #TRACES is its versatility. Depending on the students' language skills and the time available to play the game, it can be adapted to any upper-elementary or high school setting. An important choice you have to make before playing is whether you want to keep your classroom a screen-free place or encourage your students to interact with the digital content. I have tried to summarise as many of these possible variations in three different lesson plans – a 45-minute plan that works best for impromptu substitution lessons, a 90-minute plan that requires a bit more planning in advance, and a few ideas on how the game could be expanded into a longer project. The main difference between the 45-minute and 90-minute lesson plans is the length of time you allow the students to mingle, which is why they are less likely to correctly identify the culprit.

However, I find that the biggest benefit of using #TRACES in your classroom is to expand it to a longer research project, where the students explore subjects like cyberbullying, on-line privacy or digital ethics. A second option would be to turn the situations students are put into as inspiration for creative writing assignments. Since media literacy is such an essential skill, the students could be interested in developing this skill in different contexts within the same environment as cross-curricular projects. Through connecting with teachers of vocational subjects, the students might be encouraged to come up with their own evidence (in photography or animation classes), illustrate additional characters in art classes or write a play about the events in Slovene classes.

All the lesson plans are available on the IATEFL Slovenia website, along with a video with instructions on how to play the game.

3 Additional Resources

Next, I want to focus on providing an additional resource that benefited my students most when tackling the game. In a high school setting, the students might be familiar with all the vocabulary necessary to play the game. Still, I have found that providing them with a list of words they are expected to learn and be able to use gives them a feeling of having been productive, instead of just having spent a lesson or two having fun.

Additionally, through playing the game with the students, I have come to the realisation that some of the students need additional materials in order to play the game better. Especially weaker or more introverted students benefit from having a list of discussion questions so they can more easily start the conversation with other students.

All of the resources are available in a PDF and an editable form on Google Drive – for access, contact me at maja.cebela84@gmail.com.

4 Can You Use the Game in Other Ways?

After playing the scenario with my students, they started asking to play other games, especially during substitutions where only half the class was present. This prompted me to think of ways to use the cards to play different, already-established games. Having only ten to fifteen students in the classroom at a time made it easier to test out different ideas. One of the games my students liked best was *Mafia*.

It is important to understand the roles before you start playing. The role of the narrator is the most important, so I suggest one of the more talkative students take over that role (or the teacher, at least for the first time playing the game). The narrator's job is to assign the roles to other players, tell the group when to sleep and when to wake up, create the story and sanction votes. When they do the job right, the game is kept grounded, and the players reasonable, so it is vital they remain unbiased throughout the game. Otherwise, the conversation between the students can get too loud, or the narrator could unintentionally give away information about the players. The mafia's aim is to "kill" other players during the night and convince other players of their innocence during the day, while the civilians should utilise every deduction skill they possess to figure out who is doing the killing before they all die. What makes the game more fun is the inclusion of the doctor, who can choose to save one life each night (the civilians' or themselves), and the sheriff, who can check one person's identity with the narrator each night, which can be instrumental in determining the mafia's true identities.

The success of the game usually depends on how invested the narrator is in telling the story and how well the characters can act, but what I love about the game is how much talking the students do without realising they are practising English when you choose your narrator well.

Once the cards have been distributed and everyone is familiarised with their character, the game is played in intervals of night and day, with the narrator guiding the characters through each phase. During the night, everyone is "asleep" (keeping their eyes closed) except when they need to communicate with the narrator. Each night, the mafia characters choose to kill someone, the doctor chooses to save someone, and the sheriff chooses to check someone's identity. When dawn breaks, all the characters must deal with the aftermath of the events of the night. The game ends when the civilians have found all the mafia or when the mafia have worked their way through all the civilians.

We used only the #TRACES character cards to play *Mafia*. Obviously, you can play *Mafia* using any cards you want, but my students liked how colourful the illustrations on the #TRACES cards were. To adapt the game, I marked them with tiny different-coloured stickers. Each colour represents a specific role (narrator, mafia, civilians, doctor and sheriff) in the game, and the colour code was usually written in a visible place in the classroom.

If working with lower-elementary students, you could try to adapt a different game. By using two sets of character cards at the same time, you can play the game *Guess Who*. It gamifies the monotonous practice of asking and answering grammatically simple questions (in the Present Simple tense with *to be* and *have/has got*) while using appearance-related vocabulary (clothes, accessories, body parts and expressions). The purpose of the game is to ask questions about a character's appearance in order to correctly identify the opponent's chosen character first.

Again, I suggest only using the #TRACES character cards, but two sets this time. In a classroom, divide the students into two groups and have them arrange the character cards on the desks. Have each group decide on the character they want to be, then take turns asking questions. What I like to do is have the students pass a ball between the two groups and have whoever catches the ball ask the next question. The first team who guesses the other team's character wins.

5 Conclusion

Throughout my years of teaching, I have learned that using games in the classroom actively engages the students and makes it easier for them to practice speaking and listening skills in an enjoyable and interactive experience. Additionally, I have found that playing games helps them develop critical thinking and promotes collaboration between students who might not otherwise interact, which then develops essential social and cognitive skills. These are just some of the reasons why I think both teachers and students would benefit from using the #TRACES game in their classrooms.

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12

READY, STEADY, GO!

Maja Primožič

Abstract

In recent years, students have been less physically active than they used to be. They spend a lot of time in front of screens, drive to school, spend their free time on social networks, and spend less time socialising with their peers in nature. The same trend can also be observed in the school environment.

Physical activity is a key factor in brain development, brain function and learning. Not only does it affect a person's physical health, but it also motivates the individual and speeds up the learning and memory process. When we are active, we can concentrate better. Physical exercise also has positive effects on mental health, as stress is reduced, and feel-good hormones are released.

Students were mostly sedentary in my English lessons. They showed signs of low motivation, they were restless and reluctant to actively participate in the learning process. Therefore, various movement-based activities such as charades, relay races, learning the English alphabet with hopscotch, activity cubes or slightly different mind maps were introduced in the fifth grade. Observation and feedback from the students showed that those exercises not only enriched the lessons but also improved the classroom climate and had a greater impact on attention, motivation and the revision process. As they were well received by the students, I have adapted them slightly, and they are now particularly suitable for the upper classes of primary school.

Keywords: physical activity, learning, movement-based activities

Introduction

It is now generally recognised that exercise is extremely important for a person's physical and mental health. We know that it improves circulation, strengthens muscles and bones, helps to maintain weight, reduces stress and prevents many diseases. What is less well-known is that regular exercise has a positive effect on learning and memory, attention, memory and language skills (Prjić 2018).

Furthermore, the need to move and play are children's fundamental needs. Most children enjoy exercise and like to take part in spontaneous or supervised sports activities. A welcoming and trusting atmosphere also contributes to their motivation. Activities should be tailored to the children's needs, interests and abilities (Videmšek 2014).

Recent research shows that appropriate physical activity can have a stimulating effect on cognitive development. In other words, there is a significant link between physical activity and the acquisition of new knowledge or concepts. The results of a study conducted in the context of early mathematics education suggest that physical activity is important for understanding basic mathematical concepts and for solving mathematical problems. This research also showed that the use of physical activity in the classroom increases student achievement. These results indicate the need to introduce an integrated teaching approach in all subject areas (Zurc 2008).

Roth (2005) also believes that regular physical activity improves children's motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, academic achievement, socialising, school discipline and, ultimately, health, which results in better attendance at school.

Planinšec and Fošnarič (2006) conducted a separate study, in which they investigated whether the amount of daily physical activity is related to grades in Slovenian, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education and general academic performance. The results showed that learning performance increases in direct proportion to the amount of daily physical activity. The most active students were those who achieved excellent results, while the least active students were those who achieved adequate results.

A systematic review of global research in this area is presented by Zeng *et al.* (2017). The results show that increased physical activity had significant positive effects in 80% of the studies that assessed motor skills and cognitive development. Notably, no study found that increased or more frequent physical activity had significant adverse effects on young children's motor skills and cognitive development. Overall, this systematic review confirms the effectiveness of physical activity.

Despite all this, I notice that my students spend most of the day sitting down. They only have a few hours of PE a week, and in the other subjects, they spend most of their time sitting at their desks. When they get home, they often lock themselves in their rooms,

where they lie or sit again, spend time on their phones or computers and also study sitting down. After school, there is less socialising with friends than before, and students often rush home or to extracurricular activities and catch up with friends on social media.

Sport is a role model for an active lifestyle, and it is advisable that teachers introduce children to sport through positive experiences and by example. Exercise must be safe, fun and enjoyable for children if it is to have a positive impact (Retar 2019).

Therefore, I decided to introduce some movement into my lessons. The ideal students for experimenting were the fifth-grade students, who found it difficult to sit still for the 45 minutes a school lesson lasts. However, it turned out that older students also liked such tasks. They may have been a little reluctant at first, but they quickly learned to love these activities. Now, they often ask me if we can spare a few minutes for one of these tasks. This article presents five movement-based activities that are often used in my lessons.

2 Activity 1: Charades

I often use this activity to revise vocabulary. It is fun and does not require much preparation. I write the vocabulary I want to review on a piece of paper, and then the students perform the activity in front of the board without speaking. The other students guess what their classmate is representing. When they have guessed it correctly, another student comes to the board and demonstrates the next word.

This exercise is suitable for revising vocabulary and practising words related to current activities. In addition to vocabulary, the present continuous tense is also practised. It is suitable for all age groups, but for older primary school students, the level of difficulty can be increased by introducing more challenging vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures, such as the present perfect tense, in which students state what has just happened or what experiences they have or have not had.

3 Activity 2: Activity Cubes

This activity can be done in different ways. Initially, I used it to reinforce new vocabulary, but as such, it was not a movement activity. Since the students enjoyed it, I thought about how to adapt it to include movement. I wrote different activities on the sides of the cube, such as “run around the chair”, “do five push-ups”, “do ten sit-ups”, and so on. This adaptation brings movement into the classroom and livens up the lesson, especially after a long writing period. After the activity, the planned lesson can continue. I find that students are more relaxed after such a task, and their motivation to work increases. However, it can also happen that they become more playful after this activity, especially younger students.

This exercise does require a little more preparation, as more cubes need to be made, depending on the number of groups the students are divided into. A thicker paper is needed to make the cubes as this makes them more durable, and they can be reused several times.

4 Activity 3: Slightly Different Mind Maps

You can use this task in many different ways. You can use it to test students' prior knowledge of a particular topic or use it for revision purposes. To do this, put up some posters with specific topics. I used this in the fifth grade when we were talking about food and drink. First, each student got a picture. There were pictures of vegetables, fruit, desserts, other foods and drinks. Then they got up and talked to their classmates to find out what their food items had in common. They quickly realised that some pictures represented fruit, others vegetables and so on. The children with pictures of vegetables were in one group, with fruit in the other, etc. Then I put up posters somewhere in the classroom with these headings: Fruit, Vegetables, Drinks, Other foods, Desserts. The students had a limited time (30 seconds) to write down the words they knew, and then they had to move on to another poster, read the written words and add new ones. And so it went on until they came back to their original poster.

It was a little more time-consuming when I used it for revision. I tried this in the seventh grade when we were talking about the universe. It was a continuation of a previous lesson where the students had to work in groups. Each group was assigned a topic, e.g. the solar system, stars and constellations, UFOs, etc. They had to prepare a short presentation on their assigned topic and present it to their classmates. To check how much they had memorised from all the presentations, I prepared this task with mind maps in the next lesson. They were in the same groups as in the previous lesson, but now each group member was asked a question – the questions now related to different topics. They had to consult with their group members, find the correct poster, and answer the question. In this way, all topics were revised.

This is a dynamic activity that is very popular with students. It keeps them active and can be used to introduce them to more difficult and challenging topics.

5 Activity 4: Hopscotch with the English Alphabet

This activity is suitable for slightly younger students. Instead of the classic hopscotch game with numbers, I have used the hopscotch game with the letters of the English alphabet. This exercise can be used when learning the letters of the English alphabet or when reviewing previously learnt material. It is fun and relaxing for the students, and it focuses their attention on a specific task at the same time.

If the weather is nice, the last ten minutes of the lesson can be used for this activity; it can also be part of an outdoor lesson or an educational activity during an extended stay. The students can also prepare it themselves, as they usually like to draw on the asphalt with chalk. The teacher should simply give them instructions on how to write the letters for the students to practise. Draw several patterns with different letters and let the students take turns. As they jump, they are asked to say the letters out loud. When they get to the end, they can be given an additional task, such as spelling their first or last name or spelling any word the teacher or a classmate chooses.

6 Activity 5: Relay Races with Irregular Verbs

This can be an outdoor or indoor exercise. I usually practise it indoors because there are two blackboards in my classroom and there is enough space. There are different ways you can do this task. You can divide the students into two teams, or two students can choose their teams. The activity is suitable for seventh, eighth or ninth-grade students. On each board, I write down the infinitives, and they have to write down the past tenses and the past participles. The teacher can also write down the meanings in Slovenian, and the students have to write down all three forms. If some students do not play along, they can help choose the verbs or even write them down themselves.

The first student runs to the board and writes down the forms, then runs back to the group and passes the pen to the next student. The next student runs to the board to write down another verb, and so on. I measure the time with a stopwatch, and there is a time deduction for every mistake. The fastest team, even after deductions, wins.

You can also hold relay races outdoors. In this case, I write the verbs on pieces of paper. I prepare two small boxes for each group and place them a few metres from the starting point. I give the first student in the group a piece of paper. They have to say all the forms and then run to the boxes, put the piece of paper in one box and take another piece of paper from the other box. They run back to their team and pass the piece of paper to their classmate. The classmate then recites the forms, and so on. The fastest group wins. The indoor version focuses on spelling, and the outdoor version on pronunciation. It is, therefore, useful to try out both versions if possible.

7 Conclusion

Knowing the positive effects of exercise and sport, I have incorporated some movement-based activities into my lessons. They were chosen to promote engagement through physical activity, and they have proven to be more than just an enrichment for my lessons. The students were more motivated to work, they looked forward to these tasks, they were more focused after such activities, and we were able to achieve more of our goals.

Movement-based activities can be used for revision, to assess students' prior knowledge, and for reading or listening comprehension. We can even take just a few minutes to do this, but these minutes will be well spent. Charades, relays, and hopscotch do not require much preparation from the teacher, and the exercises are not difficult to carry out. The mind maps and activity cubes require a little more preparation but are well worth the effort. In addition to the above-mentioned short-term effects of incorporating such tasks into lessons, there are some long-term effects as well. Since students were actively engaged in the learning process, they were able to retain information more effectively and achieved better exam results. Therefore, I would strongly recommend that educators incorporate movement-based activities into their lessons more frequently.

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13

ENGAGING MINDS: THE ROLE OF WARM-UP ACTIVITIES IN ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Martina Kobal

Abstract

The benefits of classroom warm-ups are to motivate students to participate in classroom activities, to activate students' background knowledge, to help teachers introduce a new topic, or to capture students' attention. This initial engagement can carry over into the main lesson, making students more receptive to new information. The following paper focuses on some quick warm-up activities that can be adapted to different levels of English and tried out in the classroom.

Keywords: students, warm-up activities, attention, curiosity, motivation

1 Introduction

Warm-up activities, i.e. short, engaging tasks that prepare students mentally and emotionally for learning, play a crucial role in the English language classroom. Students often come to class tired or unfocused. It is, therefore, important to introduce them gently to the learning environment rather than confronting them directly with challenging grammar or vocabulary tasks. A well-designed warm-up activity can arouse curiosity about the new topic so that the students immerse themselves in the lesson with greater enthusiasm. It can also serve as a review of previously learned material, making it easier for students to integrate the new information. In addition, these warm-up activities can be used as go-to fillers for those moments when the lesson plan wraps up early, ensuring a seamless classroom experience for both teachers and students. This paper examines different warm-up activities for everyday use in the foreign language classroom.

2 The Benefits of Warm-Up Activities

There are several advantages to using warm-up activities in the classroom. For example, they are the “extra ingredients” that make lessons more varied and interesting; they make students curious, focus their attention, motivate them and are a good way to introduce a new topic in an interesting way.

Mario Rinvolucri states: “Musicians tune their instruments up, athletes never sprint until their bodies are prepared, people in a choir do vocal exercises before singing. Our students, too, need to warm into the target language” (2002:11).

Teachers are often heard describing teaching their students as “trying to lead a horse to water and force it to drink”. However, if you modify this proverb to say: “You can’t lead a horse to water and force it to drink, but you can give the horse salt, and it will drink voluntarily,” it becomes clear what should be done to arouse students’ curiosity and motivation.

The salt can be anything that brings the students “out of the energy-saving mode” and anything that puts their minds into the “discovery mode”, which is when they learn best. Quick warm-up activities at the start of the lesson, such as mind-bending lateral thinking puzzles, *BrainBox* brain challenges, short miming or dictation activities, *Sort it Out!* game, *Rub-outs*, *Name 5 or Look, No Spaces!* activities, quizzes, questionnaires, jokes or short poems with blanks, etc. play an important role in establishing motivation at the start of each lesson. In addition, they can be seen as the right tool for the teacher to begin the lesson in a meaningful and memorable way and set the tone for what is to follow.

3 Warm-Up Activities

The following warm-up activities, related to the lesson topic, can be used at the beginning of the lesson to stimulate the student’s imagination, humour and creativity, arouse their curiosity about the upcoming lesson and increase their motivation to learn something new.

3.1 Fill in the Blanks (Poem)

Warm-up activities are usually low-pressure and give students the opportunity to participate without fear of being wrong. This can be particularly helpful in reducing anxiety, especially when introducing challenging new material.

Shel Silverstein's poem "Whatif" (1981) can be used to introduce if-clauses. This activity helps students to familiarise themselves with the structure of the subordinate clause of first conditional sentences, which is usually *if/when* + present simple. As this warm-up activity is relatively easy to do, this early success can build confidence so that students are more ready to tackle the more difficult grammar points that follow.

Divide students into pairs and give each pair a copy of the poem "Whatif" with some words in the text rubbed out. Ask students to read the poem and fill in the gaps with their suggestions. When your students have filled in the missing words, ask two or three of them to read out their poems. Finally, show them the original poem.

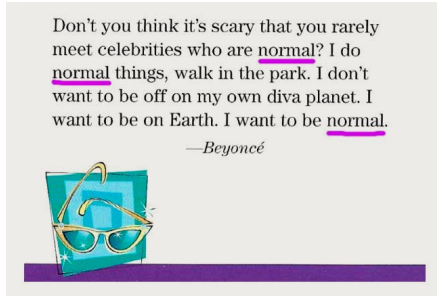
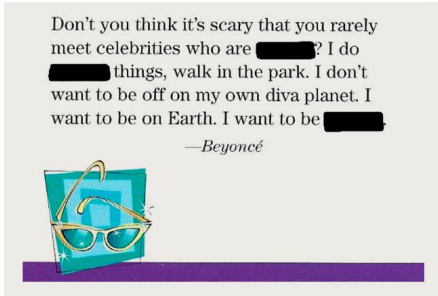
WHATIF	WHATIF
Last night, while I lay thinking here, Some Whatifs crawled inside my [redacted] And pranced and partied all night long And sang their same old Whatif song: Whatif I'm [redacted] in school? Whatif they've closed the swimming pool? Whatif I get beat up? Whatif there's poison in my [redacted]? Whatif I start to cry? Whatif I get sick and [redacted]? Whatif I flunk that test? Whatif green [redacted] grows on my chest? Whatif nobody likes me? Whatif a bolt of lightning [redacted] me? Whatif I don't grow taller? Whatif my [redacted] starts getting smaller? Whatif the fish won't bite? Whatif the [redacted] tears up my kite? Whatif they start a war? Whatif my parents get [redacted]? Whatif the bus is late? Whatif my teeth don't grow in [redacted]? Whatif I tear my pants? Whatif I never [redacted] to dance? Everything seems swell, and then The nighttime Whatifs strike again!	Last night, while I lay thinking here, Some Whatifs crawled inside my <u>ear</u> And pranced and partied all night long And sang their same old Whatif song: Whatif I'm <u>dumb</u> in school? Whatif they've closed the swimming pool? Whatif I get beat up? Whatif there's poison in my <u>cup</u> ? Whatif I start to cry? Whatif I get sick and <u>die</u> ? Whatif I flunk that test? Whatif green <u>hair</u> grows on my chest? Whatif nobody likes me? Whatif a bolt of lightning <u>strikes</u> me? Whatif I don't grow taller? Whatif my <u>head</u> starts getting smaller? Whatif the fish won't bite? Whatif the <u>wind</u> tears up my kite? Whatif they start a war? Whatif my parents get <u>divorced</u> ? Whatif the bus is late? Whatif my teeth don't grow in <u>straight</u> ? Whatif I tear my pants? Whatif I never <u>learn</u> to dance? Everything seems swell, and then The nighttime Whatifs strike again!

Images 1 & 2: "Whatif" with blanks and the original poem (Silverstein 1981: 90).

3.2 Fill in the Blanks (Quotations)

The following warm-up activity with some missing quotations encourages students to think critically and contextually about language and, at the same time, introduces them to new topics, such as celebrities. By guessing the missing words, students engage with the material in a way that develops both their curiosity and language skills.

The students read the quotation and guess the missing words. They should think of the same word with which they could fill in the gaps.



Images 3 & 4: *Women's Wit 2008 Calendar (2007)*.

3.3 My Personal Story (The Passive)

The following warm-up activity enhances students' understanding of the active versus passive voice by making the learning experience personally relevant. This short task, which most students find entertaining, grabs their attention and prepares them to learn about the different functions of the two grammatical voices in English. Working in pairs or groups encourages collaboration and allows students to learn from each other's insights, which can lead to a deeper understanding of new material.

Distribute the passive/active list and ask the students to work individually. In each pair of sentences, they underline the one that best fits their personal story. Ask them to change any verbs that do not fit, e.g. *loved* might become *ignored*. If any of the sentences do not suit them at all, students can leave them out. Form pairs or groups of four to explain their choices.

PASSIVE / ACTIVE LIST

I was born.	I pushed out of my mother's womb.
I was taught to yawn.	I gave my first yawn.
I was shown how to crawl.	I crawled all over the floor.
I was loved by my Mum.	I loved my Mum.
I was toilet-trained.	I used a potty.
I was told to fight my brother/sister.	I fought with my brother/sister.
I was taken to nursery school.	I went to nursery school.
I was befriended by other kids.	I made friends with other kids.
I was loved by my Dad.	I loved my Dad.
I was sent to 'big school'.	I went to 'big school'.
I was taught to read.	I learnt how to read.
I was taught how to write.	I got myself writing.
I was made to feel happy at school.	I felt happy at school.
I was given homework.	I did school things at home.
I was sometimes punished.	I sometimes provoked them into punishing me.
I was fed at school.	I ate at school.

© Cambridge University Press

Image 5: The passive/active list (Rinvolutuci & Davis, 1995: 74-75).

3.4 BrainBox Brain Challenge (Air Travel)

To introduce the topic of air travel, play the following *BrainBox* memory game. *BrainBox* is a fun card game that tests memory and observation skills. It consists of a set of cards with pictures on one side and questions related to these images on the other side.

This memory game activates students' prior knowledge and makes connections between familiar concepts and new vocabulary related to air travel. It also improves observation and recall skills, essential for language learning.

Project the picture on the board. Ask the students to study it carefully for twenty seconds and then answer the questions based on visual memory. Show the picture again to check the answers. The students receive one point for each correct answer.

Air Travel

Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first powered flight in 1903

The first flight was made by the Montgolfier brothers in 1783, in a hot air balloon

Spitfires were fighter planes used in WWII

Concorde, developed in 1969, was the first supersonic aircraft

Air Travel

1. What is the main colour of the hot air balloon?
2. Which WWII fighter plane is shown?
3. In which year was Concorde developed?
4. What colour are the stripes on Concorde's tail?
5. Which brothers made the first flight in a balloon?
6. What were the Christian names of the Wright brothers?
7. Was the first powered flight made in 1903, 1908 or 1913?
8. Could Concorde travel at over 1000 miles per hour?

www.brainbox.co.uk

Images 6 & 7: Brainbox Board Game (2014).

3.5 Unscramble the Text (Graffiti)

The following three warm-up activities turn reading comprehension into an engaging puzzle, enhancing students' attention to detail. By decoding the text, students gain a deeper understanding of the language structure and the topic.

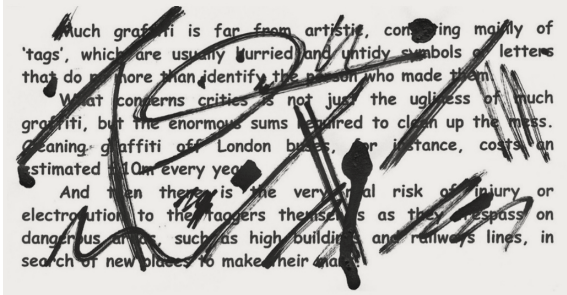


Image 8: Image from the personal archive.

Choose a narrative text from the coursebook and make a copy of it. Doodle all over the text. Ask students to unscramble, read the text, and finally copy it into their notebooks. (Acknowledgement: I learnt this activity from Silvia Stephan, a teacher trainer at the Pilgrims Teacher Training Course in 2008.)

3.6 Behead the Words (Technology)

This activity introduces the topic of technology and smartphones and focuses on spelling and vocabulary in a creative way.

Select a reading passage from the coursebook and rewrite it, leaving out the initial letters, but leaving space for the students to add them. Ask the students to fill in the missing letters and compare their text with the original in the coursebook.

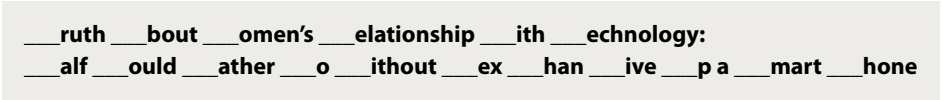


Image 9: Image from the personal archive.



Image 10: Headline from the Daily Mail (Bates 2013).

To learn the truth about women's relationship with technology, students should read the article by Daniel Bates from 2013. (Acknowledgement: The idea for this activity comes from *Humanising Your Coursebook* (Rinvoluceri 2002).)

3.7 Look, No Spaces! (Addictions)

This activity challenges students to reconstruct a text, which helps them understand sentence structure, punctuation, and the importance of spacing in written English. The focus on a serious topic like addiction also encourages critical thinking and discussion.

Rewrite one or two paragraphs of the text from the coursebook you want students to work on, deleting all the spaces between words. Ask the students to space and punctuate the text correctly and copy it in their notebooks. Ask them to compare their version with the original text. (Acknowledgement: The idea for this activity comes from *Humanising Your Coursebook* (Rinvoluceri 2002: 54).)

Formeaddictionisadiseaseanillnesseverybitasvalidandasdevastatingascancerpossiblymoresobecause
thebehaviouralsymptomsofthesufferercausedevastationtoallthosearoundtheminfactithasbeenestim
atedthatupto30peoplefamilyandfriendsarenegativelyaffectedbytheactionsofefullyfledgedaddictinth
eirmidstinafurthersicktwiththankstooneofitsmostinsidioussymptomsdenialitisalsotheonlydiseasewhi
chconvincesyouthatyoudon'thaveitaddictiongraduallyinvadesapersonbodyandsoultotheextentthatt
heybecomesomethingelsetheyarenolongerthepeopletheywere

Image 11: Image from the personal archive.

The Standard

For me, addiction is a disease, an illness, every bit as valid and as devastating as cancer... possibly more so, because the behavioural symptoms of the sufferer cause devastation to all those around them. In fact, it has been estimated that up to 30 people - family and friends - are negatively affected by the actions of a fully-fledged addict in their midst. In a further sick twist, thanks to one of its most insidious symptoms - denial - it is also the only disease which convinces you that you don't have it. Addiction gradually invades a person, body and soul, to the extent that they become something else. They are no longer the people they were.

Image 12: The original article (McConnel 2014).

3.8 Sort it Out! (Animal World)

Sort it Out! is a fun game where the aim is to put things in a particular order. The students surprise each other with their guesses and hunches. The winner is the student who is the luckiest and smartest at putting five interesting items in the correct order.

By ranking and ordering items, students practise logical thinking and factual recall. The competitive element increases the student’s motivation to learn new interesting facts about animals. First, read the question aloud to the students. They rank their choices, write down the things in the order they believe is correct and check their answers. If a student writes down all five things in the correct order, they receive five points.

Sort these animals according to the length of their tongues.	
SHORTEST 1 > 5 LONGEST	
long-tongued bat	1 long-tongued bat 1.18 inches - 3 cm
giant anteater	2 flap-necked chameleon 4.7 inches - up to 12 cm
Indian python	3 Indian python 5.9 inches - 15 cm
flap-necked chameleon	4 giraffe 18 inches - 46 cm
giraffe	5 giant anteater 23.6 inches - up to 60 cm

Sort it Out!
© 2009 University Games Corporation 44

Images 13 & 14: Sort it Out! card and the answers (2008).

3.9 Guess the Ad (X-sports)

This activity taps into students’ curiosity and creativity, encouraging them to make inferences about the ad’s content and its connection to the lesson topic. It is a fun and engaging way to introduce new vocabulary and concepts related to x-sports and usually puts a smile on students’ faces.

Show the students an interesting cut-out of the advertisement. They explain what they think is shown in the advertisement and try to guess the topic of the lesson that is related to the ad. The students can be given a clue (e.g. that it is about one of the water sports).

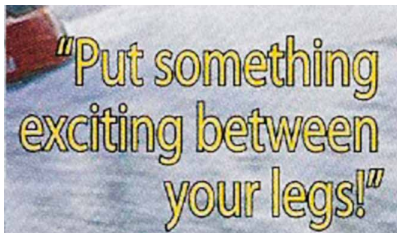


Image 15: Image from the personal archive.

<p>Present this coupon for</p> <p>\$25 OFF</p> <p>ULTIMATE ISLAND TOUR</p>	<p>KEY WEST WATER TOURS Private & Semi-Private • Airline Transportation • Photo Instruction</p> <p>305-294-6790</p> <p>"Best Rates in Key West!"</p> <p>Ultimate Four Times Includes 1½ hours, 150 ft GP Includes 1½ hours GP Includes 1½ hours GP Includes 1½ hours GP</p> <p>FREE PARKING</p> <p>BOOBY BERTALS ALSO AVAILABLE</p> <p>Put something exciting between your legs!</p> <p>www.KeyWestWaterTours.com</p>
	<p><small>*Special Package Only. Not valid with other promotions. Expires 12/31/10. Subject to availability. ©2010 Key West Water Tours, LLC</small></p>

Image 16: Image from the personal archive.

4 Conclusion

“Beginning the lesson in a meaningful and memorable way can harness attention, instil motivation and pave the way for effective learning” (Dudley 2019: 30). Quick warm-up activities used in English language classes play an important role in this regard, as they set the tone for the lesson and often prompt students to recall what they already know, which helps create connections to new information. In addition, they keep the students engaged and stimulate their imagination, as well as create a sense of enjoyment for them. As Mario Rinvolucri explains, “A brief investment here [at the start of the lesson] brings huge dividends in terms of energy released, anxiety calmed, and the linguistic unconscious opened up and made ready to go” (2002: 11). By incorporating such warm-up activities into lessons, teachers can create a supportive, engaging, and motivating learning environment that encourages students to embrace new challenges.

To sum up, Antoni Porowski’s original quotation (n.d.): “Salt is so, so, so important. If that’s the one thing everyone remembers, every step of the way, whenever I cook, I try to incorporate salt,” could be rephrased as follows: “Salt is so, so, so important. If that’s the one thing everyone remembers, every step of the way, whenever I teach, I try to incorporate salt”.

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TEAM-BASED ACTIVITIES FOR THE ESL CLASSROOM

Mateja Trebec

Abstract

Learning a language is a dynamic process that thrives on collaboration. As students engage in authentic interactions, they share knowledge and skills and exchange ideas. Teamwork plays a pivotal role in developing language proficiency, allowing students to negotiate meaning, express opinions, and solve problems collectively. Effective negotiation, active listening, and respect for diverse viewpoints are essential skills needed for life. Through teamwork-oriented activities, students develop resilience, adaptability, and strong language abilities. This article introduces four successful team-based activities that can be customized for various classroom settings and proficiency levels: Photo Stop, odd one out, Rate List, and egg race.

Keywords: teamwork, communication, language skills, team-based activities

1 Introduction

Learning is “a social, collaborative activity. We don’t learn inside a vacuum; we learn by mimicking and engaging with others” (Nottingham 2017: 9). When students collaborate, they not only share their knowledge and skills but also exchange ideas. Working in teams allows students to engage in authentic conversations, negotiate meaning, express opinions, and even solve problems. They need to learn how to effectively negotiate, practice active listening, and respect diverse viewpoints. Team members from diverse backgrounds often interpret problems differently. Students of different levels of language proficiency can benefit greatly from working together. Through teamwork-oriented activities, students cultivate resilience, adaptability, and strong language abilities. What is more, students “take almost full responsibility for working together, building knowledge together, changing and evolving together, and, of course, improving together” (Babu 2017: 31).

The following four team-based activities have been successful in various classroom settings and can be customized to suit different topics and proficiency levels.

2 Photo stop

This dynamic and captivating activity serves as an excellent introduction to the concept of teamwork. Moreover, it can be seamlessly integrated into various contexts and adapted for learners of all proficiency levels. It is a great way to foster collaboration and communication.

Display some photos of holiday destinations around the classroom. Each student should look at the photos provided and choose the one that attracts them the most. Once everyone has made their selection, they can move on to the next step. In their teams, students should discuss why they chose the specific photo. Encourage students to share their thoughts and listen to each other’s perspectives. Each student should take three post it notes. On each post it note, they should write down a word, a phrase, or a sentence related to holidays. These could be memories, feelings, or associations they have with vacations or festive seasons. For example, words like beach, family, adventure, relaxation, or food could be used. Stick the notes on the wall next to the photos. After everyone has placed their post its, students compare the notes in the teams. They should look for similarities and differences. Finally, give students a writing assignment related to holidays. They can choose from various prompts: write about their favourite holiday memory, describe a dream vacation destination, create a fictional holiday story, or reflect on the importance of holidays in their lives. It is important to encourage creativity and open discussion during the activity.

3 Odd One Out

Whether utilized as an engaging introduction to a specific topic or as a standalone task, this activity encourages students to think critically and communicate effectively.

Present three items, words, or pictures. These could be related to a specific topic you are covering in class. The objective is not solely for students to pinpoint the odd one out among the three items or determine which item doesn't belong to the group. Instead, the aim is to foster discussion and encourage students to articulate their reasoning behind why they perceive a specific item as different. Students debate and negotiate their viewpoints, trying to convince each other of their choice. Students should provide clear reasons for their choice. It is easier for the teacher to observe students in smaller groups where all students get an opportunity to speak. The teacher can help students by guiding a discussion and asking probing questions.

Here are some creative responses from the students based on food pictures of a hamburger, salad and fish and chips:

Student A: I think fish and chips is the odd one out because it doesn't include salad.

Student B: I don't think so. I think it's salad because it is healthy.
Hamburgers, fried fish and chips aren't healthy.

Student A: But if you make a hamburger at home, it can be healthy. You have good quality meat, you make your own bread, my mom makes mayonnaise...

Student C: Yes, that's true. My dad makes a great hamburger.
We never go to MacDonalds!

Student A: But fish are also healthy. They have that omega something which is good for your brain...

Student C: Yes, but these here in the picture are fried. Are they healthy then?

As seen from the example, the idea is for students to have "two or more ideas that make sense to them but that, when compared side by side, appear to be in conflict with each other" (Nottingham 2017: 5). It is best if these ideas are exchanged in a dialogue. "Dialogue is the foundation of learning, because it allows interaction and engagement with knowledge and with the ideas of others" (Nottingham 2017: 8).

4 Rate list

This activity is an interactive and comparative exercise where students evaluate and rank a set of similar items based on specific criteria.

The teacher chooses a category or theme for the items. For example, it could be food, gadgets, or vacation destinations. The teacher prepares a selection of around ten comparable items within that category. In teams, students rate each item on a scale based on the criterion assigned to the team. Students consider their personal preferences, experiences, and knowledge when assigning ratings. This activity encourages critical thinking, comparison, and communication skills. It is a great way to explore preferences, learn from others, and appreciate the diversity of opinions within the class.

An example:

A list of items: olive oil, canned tuna, almonds, cupcakes, cold cut, broccoli, blueberries, potatoes, cauliflower, butter

Criterion. Rank the items from the most expensive to the least expensive.

Dialogue:

Student A: We should put olive oil in the first place. It is very expensive.

Student B: How much is it?

Student A: I don't know, but my mom says so.

Student C: I see. Maybe we should check on the internet? Maybe something else is more expensive... We had a birthday party last week, and my mom ordered a cold cut. I think it was quite expensive.

Student D: I think almonds are also very expensive.

...

Student A: What should we put at the end? Butter? Potatoes?

Student B: Blueberries are the cheapest. They don't cost anything, you just pick them in the forest.

Student A: We never pick blueberries. If you buy them, they are very expensive.

As seen from this dynamic part of the dialogue above, students actively engage in discussing their ideas, search for information, critically evaluate ideas, and make comparisons. Such a learning process enriches the learning experience, fostering a deeper understanding of the language. Also, such peer-to-peer learning is beneficial "because feedback flows in both directions, participants in peer-to-peer learning tend to put more time and energy into making sure the feedback they provide is meaningful. They think from the perspective of their peer, consider where each is coming from" (Palmer 2018).

5 Egg Race

Another key aspect of effective teamwork is competitiveness. Students thrive on competition, and it keeps them motivated to complete tasks. Motivated individuals contribute their best, while teamwork ensures that everyone benefits from shared knowledge, skills, and achievements. This activity is both fun and fast-paced, which will greatly motivate students.

Place small slips of paper with individual words written on them inside some Kinder eggs. Secretly hide these eggs throughout the classroom before the students arrive. Divide the students into two teams. Students try to locate as many eggs as possible, forming a meaningful sentence from the words written on the papers inside the eggs. For a harder and more creative challenge, students write a short story. Leave some eggs empty for further excitement.

6 Conclusion

In my experience, students generally respond positively to teamwork-based activities. These collaborative tasks fully engage them; they stay motivated and develop language skills. Rather than fixating on language correctness, they focus on fluency and effective communication. When students collaborate in teams, they not only accomplish tasks but also forge stronger bonds. Occasionally, younger students may hesitate to work with peers they did not select. In such cases, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to emphasize the advantages of collaborating with diverse individuals. This collaborative environment fosters improved communication, diverse perspectives, and a deeper understanding of each other's viewpoints. Ultimately, it is a win-win situation where students develop both language abilities and essential interpersonal skills.

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TEACHING VOCABULARY IN THE FIRST GRADE

Nataša Kuselj

Abstract

In this paper, I will present the learning and teaching of vocabulary in the English language at an early stage, precisely in the first grade of a nine-year primary school. The features of early foreign language teaching will be presented with an emphasis on vocabulary learning through various didactic methods. Learning a foreign language in the early stages is similar to learning the mother tongue. Listening comprehension and spoken communication are emphasised, which the teachers help develop with the activities adapted to the age of the students, i.e. through fairy tales, counting games, various language games and movement activities.

Keywords: early learning of English, vocabulary development, vocabulary consolidation, teaching of a foreign language at an early stage

1 Introduction

The curriculum for the elective foreign language English in the first grade is non-restrictive, allowing teachers to have a free hand in planning and conducting lessons. This openness of the curriculum allows a considerable variation in the content and also in the range of vocabulary covered by first-grade teachers. The following chapters will present the linguistic abilities of listening and speaking at the early stage of learning a foreign language. We will focus primarily on the issue of learning and acquiring vocabulary as a basis for successful communication in a foreign language.

2 Listening and Speaking at the Beginning Level of Learning

Listening and speaking are the most important language skills that need to be developed at the initial level of a foreign language. Experts like Fleta (2014) and Pinter (2011) point out that listening is a prerequisite and the basis for starting to speak a foreign language, just like learning the mother tongue. Listening comprehension is the basis for the development of other language abilities, so at the initial stage of learning a foreign language, especially for younger students, the emphasis is mainly on listening to the language.

Providing rich auditory input is not enough, and it is, therefore, necessary to encourage students to listen actively and get used to it. Teachers should encourage students to listen actively through various tasks and check their understanding on the fly. A very good example of getting used to active listening at an early stage is the so-called TPR (Total Physical Response) games, such as “Simon Says” (Pinter 2011). As soon as possible, active listening should be followed by gradual learning of speaking, as younger students want immediate results (Brewster 2002). Younger students are generally very fond of songs, counting and rhymes. The rhythm and repetition in them make it easier for students to memorise new words.

Pinter (2006) believes that learning to speak correctly and fluently is one of the most difficult tasks in learning a foreign language because correct and fluent expression requires the speaker to think and speak at the same time. The author (2006), therefore, believes that frequent repetition and planned memorisation of pre-prepared phrases and dialogue models are important at the initial stage, which enables students, despite their weak knowledge, to move from listening to the language to participating in verbal communication. For example, most younger students at first only listen to the songs and then start to sing along. The same happens with rhymes and counting.

Younger students learn most successfully when learning takes place holistically, so students should be actively involved in listening activities through different sensory channels. At the same time as listening, the activities should also encourage students to observe, feel, move, test, research and speak (Fleta 2014). Therefore, TPR songs are great because young learners like to move and dance while singing. The combination of moving and singing is a great way to learn new vocabulary faster and easier. For the development

of listening comprehension and oral expression, in addition to quality teaching, both the quality and quantity of language input and language use are important. It depends on how many opportunities the students will get to communicate in a foreign language (Cameron 2001).

3 Vocabulary Teaching

For effective vocabulary teaching, it is very important that teachers ensure frequent and repeated exposure of students to the target vocabulary, offer them explicit explanations of the vocabulary with the help of context (e.g. by reading picture books) and create opportunities to involve students in interaction (Butler 2019).

4 Explicit Vocabulary Learning

There are two ways of learning vocabulary, namely explicit and implicit learning. The main characteristic of explicit learning is that it takes place through activities in which students' attention is directed to the vocabulary itself, its meaning and the rules associated with the use of the target vocabulary (DeCarrico 2001).

5 Vocabulary Range

The extent of the vocabulary is important because it depends on how much the young learners will be able to first understand and then express themselves and their ideas in a foreign language. When the student acquires the first few words, vocabulary learning usually proceeds much faster because the student has already learned certain sounds and syllables that may no longer cause him or her problems in expanding their vocabulary (Brewster 2002).

At the initial stage, the most attention is paid to the acquisition of individual words, among which nouns are predominant. With the acquired vocabulary, students will be able to form an understandable message during a longer time span only when they have also acquired enough verbs and adjectives, and later prepositions, adverbs and other word types (Butler 2019).

6 Vocabulary Knowledge Check

At the early stage of teaching a foreign language, it is recommended to test students' knowledge in a way that would not cause students stress, would not negatively affect their motivation to learn, and would not increase competition among them. The knowledge of the discussed content should be checked in a similar way as the students discussed a certain topic (Brewster 2002).

I try to check students' knowledge in a playful way. I always gather four to six students in a circle, and we talk with the help of different flashcards and pictures about the topics that we have learned. Young learners sing first some known songs in a choir together and then alone if they want to. In the end, they get a small reward (a stamp or a sticker).

7 Conclusion

Due to their age-related characteristics and cognitive abilities, younger students learn much differently than older students and adults, so it is necessary to approach teaching younger students in their way. Successful vocabulary learning in a foreign language is thus constantly intertwined with play and other activities close to younger students. Younger students generally like to learn a foreign language when the teacher prepares a stimulating learning environment for them and plans age-appropriate activities in which the students can actively participate.

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DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS BY CREATING ENGAGING AND COLLABORATIVE TASKS USING ENCODED MESSAGES

Nataša Luković

Abstract

In today's fast-paced world, overwhelmed by digital technology, educators should pay special attention to developing real-life social skills since they are of crucial importance for teenagers' physical and psychological development. This article presents practical ideas on how to integrate social skills activities using encoded messages and tasks into the school agenda in combination with the regular curricular activities, such as special activity days, school trips, nature schools and other ongoing school projects.

Keywords: teenagers, social skills, collaboration, encoded messages

1 Introduction

Being a teacher in today's world full of high-technology products, experiencing pressure from parents, busy schedules, overwhelming amounts of materials and various types of students may make many feel lost.

Approximately two-thirds (65%) of teachers believe that their work has had a negative impact on their mental health, and more than half (54%) evaluate that the job requirements affect their physical health (SVIZ 2018: 1).

Consequently, they might feel they are not good enough or doing enough. On the other hand, there are teenagers who are in a very vulnerable period of their lives and are trying to fit into this world and learn who they are. In the flood of images portraying what life should be like, they are most likely to feel confused and inadequate. Today's children are often described as self-interested, unfocused, lazy and tough to manage on the one hand but apathetic, unmotivated and indifferent on the other. They have difficulties dealing with teachers and parents as their leaders and later superiors at work. They want to do what they like, what is meaningful and purposeful to them, although they really cannot yet define the meaning and purpose. They often lack the feeling of happiness and contentment. That is why educators, as well as parents, should work hard to change that in the best way they can by inspiring them and building the teenagers' self-worth, a proper value system and providing opportunities to learn social competencies and meaningful relationships (Sinek 2018).

For that purpose, English language teachers have many opportunities to engage students in various collaborative activities that can play a major role in young people's learning process, encouraging language use in a meaningful way and development of real-life social skills. This article presents various ways of using encoded messages to provide opportunities for teamwork, learning and fun.

2 Adolescence at the Threshold of Adulthood

Teachers of students aged 12–15 bear a great responsibility since this age marks a critical time of transition and identity formation that lays the foundation for a healthy and satisfactory adulthood. It is the time of learning how to deal with new emotions, life changes, increased responsibility and a new sense of autonomy. As an educator who has been working with teenagers for twenty years, collaborating with educators from other European countries in Erasmus+ projects and especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, I can assert that there has been a significant change in teenagers' value system and a decline in their real-life social skills. It seems as if interpersonal skills that young people used to acquire naturally through their lifestyle in the past should be extra stimulated and taught in the present. Although we live in an era of grand technological development and globalisation, we still do not have a clear vision of the advantages and disadvantages it brings to teenagers' personal development.

As teachers, we have some power to help teenagers in their delicate periods of life by forming a positive school environment where we intentionally prepare situations where students can develop social skills. We should engage students in activities stimulating personal contentment, self-confidence, respect for oneself and others, positive attitude, social competences, creativity, and proper values. In this way, we give them more opportunities to gain important life skills and, consequently, improve their capacity for appropriate action in conflict and stressful situations, as well as empower themselves to cope with or maybe even prevent the most common mental disorders, like anxiety, depression and apathy.

Nevertheless, teachers should not neglect that changes in the development of interpersonal relationships in teenagers, both at the family level and with peers, are not necessarily a drawback. Moreover, we should understand that there is no longer a difference between online and offline relationships – they merge into a unique dimension. As teachers, we should embrace this fact and focus on helping the students manage them (Benvenuti, M., Wright, M., Naslund, J. *et al.* 2023).

We cannot just apply the education of yesterday to students of tomorrow. The teacher no longer has the monopoly of knowledge delivery since accessing and acquiring knowledge has changed much with the use of the Internet. Accordingly, teachers must adapt to the so-called 'digital native' generation and apply new teaching methods that are appropriate for the new generation. We should experiment with new pedagogical strategies, bridging the increasing gap between technology and pedagogy. By focusing attention on the function of technology and reasoning from the adolescent's development perspective, it is possible to say that when the use of technology supports a student's activity to reach a goal or to simplify its achievement, then this technology is functional to the adolescent development (Cornu 2011).

3 Stimulating the Development of Social Skills in School

All too often, one notices teenagers being bored, apathetic and fed up with extracurricular activities, such as special activity days or school excursions. Teachers can also observe that many students face problems with socialising, establishing interpersonal contact and making friends on such days. One can also observe their difficulties with cooperating, following directions, listening, showing empathy, respecting boundaries, appreciating differences, sharing, dealing with problems and conflicts and compromising. Too often, students seem absent-minded and easily distracted while they are supposed to be learning, for example, about the history and the landmarks of the city they visit.

Therefore, I tried to develop activities that would increase students' engagement and incorporate their interests. In the beginning, I designed a treasure hunt around our hometown. It turned out to be an effective and powerful tool for collaborative learning. It formed a positive learning atmosphere because it looked like an amusing game that motivated stu-

dents. They worked in small groups, which reduced the stress since the students could rely on one another and were not exposed in front of the teacher or the whole group. They had to work together to solve different puzzles and do funny tasks in a foreign language, which encouraged critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. They had to post the results of each task online so that the teachers could follow their progress. The results were amazing. The students built meaningful memories with their classmates, new friendships were formed, the students liked exploring the city, and most of all, they retained a lot of information they had learned during the activity. It takes a lot of time and effort to design such activities, but with slight adjustments, one can use them repeatedly. To make it more engaging, I came up with the idea of decoding the tasks to make it more interesting and appealing for the students and also give more opportunities for effective collaboration. I formed groups with students who were not necessarily friends or acquaintances, and as the goals of tasks were designed in such a way that everyone had to participate to achieve them, the students got the opportunity to learn about their peers and have fun. The completion of tasks provided students with a setting in which they could perform the activities naturally, which most often resulted in forming new bonds and friendships.

4 Break the Code Embrace the Challenge

Encoded messages and tasks can be used in different ways, for example, for groups of faster and more able students in class who always finish first or on different special school days, like sports or technical days, school trips and excursions, where students have a chance of working outdoors and in groups. You can create different levels of difficulty depending on the age and capability of the students and the available time. On technical days, the students can design personal ciphers, design decoder wheels and write encoded messages. The tasks you encode should be well thought out to achieve the expected results. If you wish to make the students learn something new, then encoded messages may not work well, since decoding long messages can be too strenuous and boring and takes up too much time. However, you can hide the task and encode the message that will lead the students to the hidden task. If you wish to achieve team building, then you can encode amusing collaborative tasks, like taking group selfies in front of a particular landmark, imitating the pose of a famous statue, creating short videos that show great team skills and similar.

Here are some ways to encode the tasks or messages and make learning more engaging for the students:

- 1.** Using various ciphers - A cipher is a disguised way of writing, a code that one has to crack to read the message. There are many free websites where you can find cipher generators and translators to help yourself.
 - a)** Emoji cipher - You can easily create your own emoji alphabet code using the smartphone keyboard on your computer. You can use symbols according to the topic you are dealing with in the class (food, transport, emotions, etc.). They may have a

direct reference to the letters (A – apple emoji), or you can choose them randomly (A – face emoji). You can create a task with encoded messages in different difficulty levels. You can provide the students with the whole KEY for decoding, you can give them a partial key with some letters, you can give them a message with one, or two words decoded. Students have to work out the whole KEY with the help of the cues that they are given. If you give the students a partial KEY, then you should also provide them with a bank of letters included in the message to make the puzzle solvable.

- b)** Well-known ciphers - You can use well-known codes, for example, the *Morse Code*, the *Braille Code* or the *Binary Code*. Then, the students use their smartphones to find the KEY for the code and decode it. Another idea is to replace the letters with numbers, and the students have to work it out; for example, A is number 1, B is number 2, etc.
- c)** Less known ciphers - If you decide to use a cipher your students do not know, then you can give them the KEY or provide them with some hints about the name of the cipher, so they can look it up on the Internet and work out the code. The Pig Pen Cipher, Dancing Men or Egyptian Hieroglyphs are great cyphers to use with students. You can also create your own personal ciphers using different symbols.

2. Playing with letters or words

- a)** In order to encode messages, you can write out the words backwards, you can scramble the letters in each word or you can simply remove the vowels.
- b)** You can use very small letters to make it difficult to read or write the whole message as a mirror image so that it can be read only when turned towards the window or mirror.
- c)** You can write hidden messages in a spiral, a snake or any other strange shape. You can also hide the secret words in randomly written sentences.
- d)** You can use different languages for different tasks, which works well when you have groups of students who come from different countries or language backgrounds. In this way, you give an opportunity to each of them to play an important role in decoding the meaning of the message.

Creating group activities and using encoded messages can be time-consuming. Nevertheless, once you try it and understand how it works, it makes it easy to prepare. Furthermore, you can always engage stronger or faster students to create a cipher or encode a message for the rest of the class or younger students. You can plan your whole activity in this way so that the students encode secret messages for their classmates.

Using encoded messages is a form of task-based learning. The emphasis is on the meaning of the messages, and students are required to use the language in a natural environment to achieve the given goals. This has been considered useful to employ in the language classroom because students are believed to learn the target language better when tasks

are used as vehicles in language teaching. Such activities involve using the four language skills and lead to interaction with others. By performing a set of activities, language learners convey messages and collaborate, as well as develop their communicative and social skills (Celik 2017).

Furthermore, special care must be taken of the tasks you assign. To be successful, create tasks that require the inclusion of every member of the group and mutual collaboration. It is also always welcome to include an element of humour or something the students can identify with. For the best monitoring and round-off, as well as for adding a sense of competition, it is good to use various applications, like Flipgrid or Padlet. In that way, the teacher has a constant overview of the students' work. What is more important is that the students can see the results at the end and enjoy the feeling of being a part of the collaboration.

5 Conclusion

The existing school programs and standard didactic approaches may not always work with the new generation of students, so it is crucial for teachers to pay attention to their students' needs, learn about the groups of students they work with and, most importantly, evaluate each activity they execute to learn what works well and what does not. In the end, the goal of education is to be successful in guiding students towards acquiring proper values, behaviours and habits that will enable them to have a healthy, satisfying and overall long-term quality of life in the future.

Planning engaging collaborative activities with clear goals and well-considered use of digital devices can play a major role in the learning process of young people and help them find their place and meaning in one of the most sensitive periods of their lives.

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WE'RE ALL CREATIVE – SCAFFOLDING CREATIVITY WITH STORIES

Nina Rainer Klančnik

Abstract

We are all creative, only in different ways. Sometimes it only takes a few steps to awaken creativity in students. With the right support from the teacher, everyone can participate in creative tasks in our foreign language classes and become more confident in the process. This article examines how scaffolding fosters creativity and enhances language learning through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework. By guiding students through tasks slightly beyond their current abilities and gradually reducing support, teachers can boost their motivation and reduce frustration. Key strategies include imaginative breathing exercises and scarf storytelling to stimulate creativity. Storytelling introduces new vocabulary and grammar in meaningful contexts, promotes cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking and empathy. Incorporating diverse cultural stories and guided analysis enriches student engagement and understanding. Overall, scaffolding through creative storytelling creates a supportive, dynamic learning environment where students can confidently explore and grow.

Keywords: creativity, storytelling, scaffolding, ZPD

1 Introduction

Creativity is a spark that ignites innovation and expression, yet not everyone sees themselves as being creative. Despite its potential, many individuals doubt their creative abilities. However, creativity is not limited to artists or inventors; it is present in every aspect of life, from problem-solving in daily tasks to finding novel approaches in professional endeavours. In an English language classroom, teachers who encourage exploration, embrace curiosity and nurture a mindset open to experimentation can help unveil creativity within their students, empowering them to unlock their imaginative potential and encouraging them to speak and do things in a foreign language they are striving to acquire. This paper aims to introduce the benefits of scaffolding creativity through storytelling in practically any language class, which stems from the concept of The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and – when applied to language instruction correctly and with specific student needs in mind – has the potential to change the learning process of both the instructors and their students for the better.

2 Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), introduced by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the 1930s (Dahms *et al.* 2007), is a concept utilised in education to facilitate skill development. It suggests that learners achieve optimal growth when guided through tasks slightly beyond their current ability level by a more knowledgeable individual, gradually reducing assistance as the learner becomes proficient. The so-called “more knowledgeable other” is Vygotsky’s term for someone who guides a learner through the acquisition of a new skill and can be anyone with a mastery of the skill that is being taught. In class, this is usually the teacher or tutor; however, a student scaffolding another student in this way is also not an unknown occurrence.

Vygotsky identified two stages of skill development: what can be achieved independently and what can be achieved with assistance, referred to as the ZPD. Scaffolding, the practice of providing structured support, is essential for implementing the ZPD and involves mentors such as teachers, parents, or peers. While commonly used in educational settings, these principles extend beyond schools, which is evident in scenarios like parents teaching children to ride bikes or coaches training athletes.

We can imagine the Zone of Proximal Development as a series of overlapping circles (Yetman 2020):

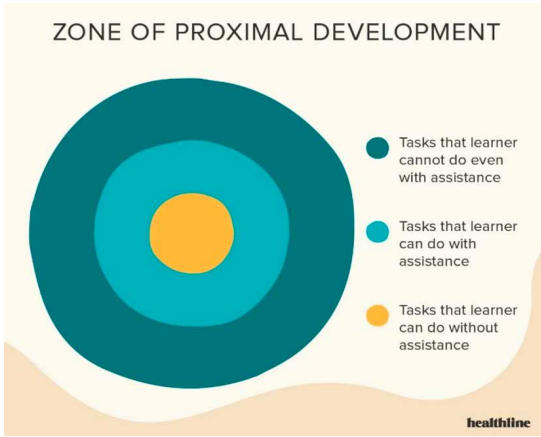


Image 1: Yetman (2020).

Green

Independent tasks: Activities the learner can execute without external assistance, representing their individual capabilities.

Blue

Assisted tasks: Activities the learner cannot accomplish on their own but can tackle with guidance, constituting their ZPD.

Yellow

Beyond-assisted tasks: Activities that surpass the learner's current ability even with support. Such tasks exceed their current skill level and fall outside their ZPD.

3 Instructional Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding is a teaching approach designed to facilitate a student's acquisition of a new skill. It entails a knowledgeable individual guiding a student through tasks within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). As the student's proficiency in the skill increases, the level of assistance provided by the instructor should decrease gradually. The application of this method can be seen across various subjects in classroom settings, spanning language, mathematics, and science. Teachers employ scaffolding techniques such as modelling, providing examples, offering one-on-one assistance, and using visual aids.

By fostering a supportive learning environment where students can ask questions and receive feedback, scaffolding offers several benefits, including enhancing learner motivation, reducing frustration, enabling rapid learning, providing personalised instruction, and fostering efficient learning processes. Employing probing questions during scaffolding sessions can further aid learner comprehension, such as prompting them to explore alternative approaches, analyse outcomes, make observations, consider next steps, and reflect on causal relationships (Yetman 2020).

4 The Benefits of Scaffolding Creativity with Stories in an English Language Class

Educators and researchers have found that scaffolding is very effective in engaging and motivating learners. Since students continuously build on their existing knowledge, they experience success before encountering new or unfamiliar material. This approach allows students to recognise their progress, reducing frustration and motivating them to continue learning (Sanako 2021).

Using scaffolding in language classes – almost any class, regardless of the students’ language level or age – can be incredibly beneficial, especially when it comes to promoting creativity through storytelling. Scaffolding provides a structured framework that helps students feel supported and confident in their language-learning journey. By guiding students through the storytelling process, teachers can capture their interest and keep them engaged in the lesson. Storytelling also provides a natural context for language acquisition. Through scaffolding, teachers can introduce new vocabulary, grammar structures, and language patterns in a meaningful way, making it easier to understand and remember.

Additionally, stories often reflect cultural values, traditions, and perspectives. By using stories from different cultures and backgrounds, cultural awareness and understanding among students can be promoted, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment. Scaffolding encourages students to think critically about the stories they hear and create. Teachers can guide students in analysing story elements, identifying themes, and making connections between the story and other texts or their own experiences.

Finally, scaffolding provides students with the support they need to take risks and express themselves in the target language. By gradually removing scaffolds as students become more proficient, teachers can help build their confidence and autonomy in using the language creatively.

5 Scaffolding Creativity with Stories - Tasks

Depending on your wishes and teaching style, you may open this lesson block by asking the class how many of them believe they are, in fact, creative. Not everyone is going to raise their hand. Tell them that you know them all to be creative, and that you will prove this with the help of the following tasks.

1. Sit back, relax, then breathe like...

Have students sit back in their chairs and relax. You might want to have them close their eyes. Tell them first to breathe like they are smelling the most fragrant flowers. Then, breathe like they are five years old, and they are blowing out their birthday cake candles. Next, like they are getting into a hot bath after a very long, hard day. Finally, have students breathe like the most ferocious dragon, burning everything that annoys them.

This task serves as a warmer and a way for the students to relax in their language learning environment. It also shows students to already act in a creative way – not everyone breathed in the same way in each of the aforementioned steps.

2. Scarf storytelling

Make sure you bring actual scarves (of any shape and colour, although it is easier to work with larger scarves) to carry out the following activities.

a) *What is it?*

Students form a circle. Take a scarf and form an object with it (e.g. a ball). Ask the students what it is. When the correct answer is given, students should raise their hand if they want to have a go themselves. This is important – do not force a turn on the students at this point.

b) *Who am I?*

Use the scarf as an accessory to show a story character, profession, etc. Say a sentence to help. E.g. With a scarf hung at the back to mimic a cape, you say "I am going to save the world!" (Superman). Again, students should raise their hand if they want to have a go themselves.

c) *Create a story*

Put students in small groups and give each group a scarf. They need to think of a story to act out or reenact a well-known story, where they use the scarf in five different ways. As a group, they also need to decide whether to make their story narrated or silent. Give groups 15 minutes to prepare, and then they will act out their stories. If all groups turn out to have chosen their stories to be silent, you may have other groups narrate the stories.



*Images 2 and 3:
Images from the personal archive.*

*Video 1: Video from
the personal archive.*

See video example



6 Conclusion

Our students often feel self-conscious in a foreign language class; they fear making mistakes or being compared to other, more proficient students, while feeling vulnerable. This consequently reduces their motivation, willingness to put themselves on the spot and cooperate, and thus makes their language learning less efficient. It is the instructor's job to change this.

Storytelling as a scaffolding tool introduces new vocabulary and grammar in meaningful contexts, enhances cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking and creativity. Activities like breathing exercises help students relax and engage creatively. Additionally, incorporating scarf storytelling tasks, such as forming objects with scarves or using them as props for characters, encourages students to think imaginatively and participate actively. Both prove that everyone has creative potential. Using stories from diverse cultures introduces new vocabulary and grammar in meaningful contexts, enhances cultural awareness, and fosters empathy among students. Teachers should guide students in analysing story elements and making connections to their own experiences, promoting critical thinking.

Overall, using scaffolding in language instruction, especially through storytelling, transforms the educational experience, creating a supportive environment where learners are encouraged to explore, experiment, and grow confidently.

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“SHE DOESN’T EVEN GO HERE!”

Nina Srejš Pojbič

Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a teaching approach that has gained popularity in Europe. It is a broad concept that involves teaching a subject or content using a non-native language, with the aim of developing language proficiency as well as subject knowledge. In recent years we have seen a rise in the number of CLIL activities in textbooks for teaching English as a foreign language. With their increased frequency, it is time to ask whether the CLIL activities in the textbooks are appropriate and relevant for our pupils.

Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), textbook evaluation, cross-curricular skills, motivation

1 Introduction

Recent discoveries in neuroscience (Tik *et al.* 2018) can be utilised in the context of foreign language teaching, specifically by using CLIL (Ting 2010). Successful learning directly affects brain function by changing the connections within the brain. But how do we know if we or our pupils are learning successfully or unsuccessfully? Our brains process information even when it is irrelevant and even when we do not fully understand it. Although it wastes mental energy, this activity is crucial for our survival. At school, our aim is not merely to survive. As teachers, we want motivated students who enjoy our lessons. And we are in luck because motivational pathways already exist in our brains (Ting 2021). Csikszentmihalyi was a Hungarian-American psychologist responsible for recognising the psychological concept of “flow” – which is a highly focused mental state. He did so by observing artists, painters and musicians at work. He wondered how it is possible for them to spend so many hours working on a project without taking any breaks and sometimes even forgetting to eat. A composer described that he experiences a state of ecstasy and loses track of time due to the fact he is enjoying his work. He explained that during such a state, music would just “flow out of him”. Other artists, poets, and even athletes described the same phenomenon. He tried to understand the source of their creativity and motivation. It has been described as a deep focus on the task and an autotelic enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

2 Can Our Pupils Get into a State of Flow through CLIL?

We can; however, it has to be done correctly. Flow helps to integrate a sense of self. In a state of deep concentration, consciousness is well organised. Our thoughts, intentions, feelings, and all our senses are focused on the same goal. The experience is one of harmony. Flow is located in a sensitive area between anxiety and boredom. We move to an optimal state for learning when the problem or task presents us with a solvable and manageable challenge. If the problem is too easy, we will get bored. If the task is too demanding, we will be anxious (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Ting 2021).

We have to keep in mind everything we already know about CLIL and language learning: The conceptual framework (Coyle *et al.* 2010) provides a solid pedagogical and methodological basis for truly sustainable teaching and learning. Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom *et al.* 1981) can help in the content evaluation of learning materials. Knowing in which taxonomic levels we could classify the tasks helps us be aware of creating tasks that are solvable and manageable. As there are many advantages to integrating a foreign language with non-language content (Pižorn 2006), high-quality materials should also contain content that can be found in the national curriculums of non-language subjects. The national curriculum of a non-language subject can help us understand what level of knowledge children already have about a specific topic.

Last but not least, it is important to find the right balance between content and language learning. Academic language proficiency develops through social interaction from birth

onwards. It begins to differentiate itself from basic communication skills after the early stages of schooling, reflecting the language that children acquire at school and need to be able to use effectively if they are to progress successfully to higher grades (Cummins 1979). In the past, the conversational and academic dimensions of language have often been combined in the classroom. This integration has contributed significantly to the emergence of learning difficulties in the area of literacy for pupils who have been taught English as a second foreign language (Cummins 2008). Students often performed poorly on tasks that required them to know and apply academic language skills in lessons. Pupils, therefore, also need to develop their professional communication skills throughout their schooling (Cummins 1984). Pupils' learning will not improve if they are presented with technical terminology in lessons in the form of concepts that represent only part of the bigger picture. This is because there is a risk that students will confuse content and context, resulting in nonsense. The key to finding the right balance is in age-appropriate disciplinary discourse. When conducting a CLIL activity, it is also important to ensure that the language used in the discourse is closely related to the content being taught (Ting 2022).

3 Are Coursebooks Adhering to this Rule?

Research on coursebooks for teaching English as a foreign language in grades 4 and 5 of primary school in Slovenia (Dagarin Fojkar *et al.* 2024) has shown that the professional discourse of CLIL activities in grade 4 is mostly appropriate and partly appropriate. The proportion of activities that do not contain age-appropriate professional discourse is lower, but it does not present a challenge for the pupils. The proportion of CLIL activities which lack age-appropriate professional discourse is lower for grade 5 pupils. In this case, the majority of activities consist of age-appropriate professional discourse. However, it is also possible to find professional discourse that does not challenge pupils. These are mainly activities that inappropriately integrate the content of the subject. Activities overlap with the subject matter of learning about the environment, which the students have already covered in the first educational period. CLIL activities with content that would be too challenging for pupils in grades 4 and 5 were not detected.

Take a look at the following example (Picture 1). I created this activity based on the ones I have seen in English coursebooks. There is nothing necessarily wrong with it if you present it to a student in first or second grade, but if you give the same task to a student attending 4th or 5th grade, they are very likely to be discouraged because it lacks a challenge.

According to the Slovenian national curriculum for a non-language subject Science and Technology (2011), primary school pupils in grade 5 can understand and discuss the natural water cycle. Therefore, if we want to provide an age-appropriate challenge to learners through a CLIL activity, we need to take their abilities into account and present them with an activity that will make them want to participate. Here (Picture 2) is an example of a coursebook activity that acknowledged students' skills and met them at their level.

Example: Look at the pictures and write. What's the weather like?

foggy, rainy, cloudy, snowy, sunny, windy



Image 1: Image from the personal archive.

Water

1 Answer the question. Then listen, read and check.

Look at the picture. Can you find the rain, a river, the sea and clouds? Point.

1 There is lots of water in the world. There is water in rivers and seas. There is water in glaciers and underground. There is water in clouds.

4 When the clouds go up into the sky, they get cold. The clouds turn to water. Then it rains again.



2 When it rains, water falls from the sky. The rainwater goes into streams. The stream water goes into rivers. Then the river water goes into the sea.

3 When it's sunny, the seawater gets warm. Some water goes up into the sky. It makes clouds. Some water from the leaves of plants goes up into the sky too.

Image 2: Water from Young Explorers 2 (Lauder et al. 2017: 73).

4 Conclusion

Flow makes our present more satisfying, builds our self-confidence and helps us develop important skills. As teachers, we can use Flow theory to our advantage. We recognise our pupils' motivation is influenced by many internal and external factors. We must try to balance the factors that are within our control. One is the material we use in our lessons. Coursebooks should not blindly guide us through the school year. We need to critically assess their content. In the case of CLIL, we should start by asking ourselves whether an activity is fostering age-appropriate disciplinary discourse. If not, do not be afraid to say the famous *Mean Girls* (2004) line: "She doesn't even go here!" and make appropriate changes for the sake of your pupils.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINES FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Petra Kralj

Abstract

By integrating consistent routines, engaging songs, and fun games, educators can create a supportive and effective learning environment for young learners, fostering their English language development and making the learning process enjoyable.

Keywords: young learners, routines, rules, classroom language, whole brain teaching

1 Introduction

Routines and transitions are crucial during lessons with young learners. They help students follow the lesson with minimal additional guidance, which is especially important at the beginning of their English learning journey. Using classroom language effectively engages young learners and draws them into activities (Jones & Jones 2016: 465).

2 My Routines

Routines can encompass rules, games, songs, rhymes, and movement activities. Each lesson begins predictably and simply, starting with brain-gym movements (like counting and shapes) followed by a Hello song and other familiar tunes. Implementing routines at the beginning of the school year and consistently using them helps students know what to expect. These routines should be simple, fun, and easy to remember. Repetition is key to making these routines effective (Jones & Jones 2016: 467).

3 Whole Brain Teaching Rules

I discovered Whole Brain Teaching (WBT) rules while searching for simple rules or commands to use in lessons. Many variations are available, and free resources can be found on the Teacher Pay Teachers website. I introduce these rules in the first grade, initially explaining each in Slovene. We repeat them frequently at first, and once students understand them, we implement them in our lessons. The rules I chose are simple and easy to follow, with added hand movements to aid memory:

1. Follow directions quickly.
2. Raise your hand for permission to speak.
3. Raise your hand for permission to leave your seat.
4. Make smart choices.
5. Keep your dear teacher happy.

Additional classroom commands include:

- “Class! Class!” – “Yes! Yes!” (to gain attention)
- “Crisscross!” – “Applesauce!” (sit down crisscrossed in the circle)
- “Teach!” – “OK!” (signal for discussion with a partner)
- “One, two, three! Eyes on me!” – “One, two, three! Eyes on you!” (to end a task)
- “Blow in your fist! Release!” (students ‘blow’ their answers into their fists and release on the count of three)
- “Mirrors!” (students repeat words, phrases, or movements)
- “Switch!” (students switch partners or roles, depending on the task)

4 Songs and Rhymes

Teaching young learners can be challenging; some songs resonate more than others. The same applies to hello songs, which I rotate through the grades:

- First grade: "Hello Song"
- Second grade: "Hello, Hello, Can You Clap Your Hands?" or the chant "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear"
- Third grade: "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning"

Songs should be short and adaptable in rhythm or pace. At the beginning of the lesson, we sing familiar songs from previous lessons or years to help students acclimate to the English language. Examples of popular songs include:

- "Wind the Bobbin Up"
- "Pat-a-Cake"
- "Open Shut Them"
- "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear"
- "Hokey Pokey"
- "Season Song"
- "12 Months"

Songs are also excellent for transitioning to another activity or for reinforcing vocabulary or sentences learned. For transition times, I often use "Walking Walking" and the "Color Song," which help prepare students for the next activity.

5 Games

Games engage students using English with their peers, not just the teacher. They complement songs well. Some engaging games include:

- *Earthquake*: Students perform different movements for specific commands.
- *Travelling Ball*: Students ask and answer known questions or identify the colours of objects.
- *Running Family Members/Numbers/Colors*: Students run around the circle when they hear their assigned item.
- *Off You Go*: Students switch places in the circle after identifying flashcards suitable for various topics.
- *Abracadabra Simsalabim*: The teacher turns students into animals.
- *Night/Day*: A game that continues until students are eliminated.
- *Simon Says*

6 Conclusion

Using familiar songs, games, and other routines helps young learners feel more comfortable speaking English and being immersed in the language. These routines improve listening skills and overall understanding. Props for games, such as laminated flashcards or various objects (like a flycatcher, ball, or wool yarn), enhance the experience. Ultimately, these routines create a more comfortable atmosphere for using the target language (Jones & Jones 2016: 471).

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MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR GRAMMAR LESSONS

Petra Žerovnik

Abstract

It is usually a challenge to motivate students during grammar lessons. Therefore, there are several strategies that make grammar activities more engaging and effective. This paper presents some fun activities to learn grammar easily and faster.

Keywords: grammar activities, motivation, motivational strategies

1 Introduction

Learning grammar structures can be boring, especially for teenagers. Thus, I decided to search for some fun activities which will motivate students, especially teenagers, to learn grammar. In my opinion, students learn faster when some material is prepared for them. I prepared specific material that students can play with while learning grammar structures. The motivational activities for learning grammar are the following:

- Present and past tense matching game
- Hot potato
- Charades
- Grammar clothesline
- Grammar surprise eggs
- Spelling with surprise eggs
- Sentence building with plastic caps

2 Games

Present and Past Tense Matching Game

A teacher writes the past and present forms of different verbs on small papers, one verb on each paper. The blue colour is used to write the present tense verbs, and the red colour is used to write the past tense verbs so each set of matching verbs has one blue and one red verb. All the papers with verbs are mixed and put into four bags. Students are divided into four groups of six students. Students are invited to pick out the papers with verbs one by one and read each verb aloud in their group. Once a verb has been read aloud, the students place it face-up on their table. When their bag is empty, the students are asked to match each blue verb to the correct red verb. Each student in one group picks one pair of verbs and makes a sentence in the Past Simple and one in the Present Simple tense (Games4esl n.d.).

Hot Potato

With Grammar hot potato, a grammar category is chosen (e.g., the 1st and the 2nd conditional), and the timer is set. The student with the hot potato (a ball) gives an example: 'If it rains tomorrow, we will _____.' or 'If I won the lottery, I would _____.' and passes it. It continues like this until the timer goes off and the student holding the ball is out (FluentU n.d.).

Charades

One student acts out a verb, and the rest of the students guess the action by forming complete sentences using the Present Continuous tense (FluentU n.d.).

Grammar Clothesline

Material needed: clothespins, string or yarn, small pieces of paper, marker.

Various sentences or phrases are written on small pieces of paper. Each sentence should contain a grammatical error or incorrect usage that students need to correct. A string or yarn is hung across the classroom or any open space where clothespins can be attached.

Paper pieces with sentences are attached to the string using clothespins. The students are divided into teams or pairs, depending on the number of students. Each team takes turns selecting a sentence from the clothesline. The chosen team must read the sentence aloud to the class. The rest of the class then discusses what is wrong with the sentence and how it can be corrected. Students are encouraged to explain the grammar rules or concepts involved. Once the mistake is identified and corrected, the team earns a point. Turns are rotated among the teams until all the sentences have been corrected (Teachers Pay Teachers n.d.).

Grammar Surprise Eggs

Material needed: Kinder Surprise eggs (or any similar small, plastic eggs), small slips of paper, markers, stickers (optional), grammar worksheets or flashcards (optional).

The teacher prepares the Kinder Surprise eggs by filling them with small slips of paper containing different grammar tasks or questions. The teacher can write tasks directly on the paper or use stickers to make them more visually appealing. Examples of the tasks:

- "Find and name three nouns around the classroom."
- "Make a sentence using the word 'happy'."
- "Act out a verb and let others guess what it is."

The filled eggs are hidden around the classroom. Students find the eggs, open them, and complete the grammar tasks inside (Lucky Little Learners n.d.).

Spelling with Surprise Eggs

Material needed: flashcards, surprise eggs (different letters are written on them).

Each member of the group takes one flashcard on the pile. The pictures are not seen. There is a picture of one item of clothing on the flashcard, and each player has to name it. Each player takes the bag with the same picture on it. There are surprise eggs with letters in the bag. The player takes the surprise eggs and has to "construct" the word by putting the letters in the correct order. The word "hat" is constructed as an example. The winner is the student who finishes first by "constructing" his own word. When one student finishes, other members of the group decide if the word is spelled correctly, and then they can check the spelling of the words on the flashcards. The game can be continued until the last word is "constructed" (Lucky Little Learners n.d.).



*Images 1 and 2:
Images from the personal archive.*

Sentence Building with Plastic Caps

Different parts of speech can be written on the caps (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.). Students are provided with a set of caps, and they arrange the caps to form grammatically correct sentences (Pinterest n.d.).

3 Conclusion

All the activities that are presented here help students learn grammar in a more motivational way than just filling the gaps in some exercises in students' books. These activities not only help students practice different grammar structures but also encourage collaboration and discussion among classmates. During all the presented activities, the teacher uses different motivational strategies, such as setting clear goals where the teacher defines specific, achievable objectives to provide direction and purpose. Then, some constructing feedback can be provided, which helps students understand their progress and areas for improvement. Finally, the teacher establishes a supportive and encouraging atmosphere to foster motivation.

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STRESS-FREE GRADING: ENHANCING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH SUPPORTIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Sabina Kavšek

Abstract

The article explores the impact of frequent grading on students' mental health in Slovenian schools, where an 8th grader is assessed 60–70 times annually. This frequent grading contributes to significant stress and anxiety, exacerbating broader mental health challenges among teenagers, as highlighted by the National Institute of Public Health and WHO. The author emphasises the need for teachers to adopt strategies that alleviate this stress, such as positive affirmations, creating a safe classroom environment, and offering clear grading criteria. By fostering a supportive atmosphere and empathising with students, particularly those with special needs, teachers can improve students' well-being and academic performance.

Keywords: grading, stress, destressing, different approach

1 Introduction

An average 8th grader in a Slovenian school undergoes approximately 60 to 70 assessments annually. To put this into perspective, imagine being evaluated by your superiors more than once a week. This undoubtedly induces significant stress, and many students experience considerable pressure. Recent surveys (WHO 2023) indicate a high prevalence of serious mental health issues among young people, a population with whom educators engage daily. It is imperative that we actively listen to students and foster an environment of trust. By empowering them, we can better equip students to navigate academic challenges and interpersonal relationships. It is crucial to teach essential social competencies such as emotional regulation, appropriate expression of feelings, active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, resilience-building, and mental health literacy. These skills can be effectively integrated into classroom contexts, particularly during the grading process, when stress levels often escalate. Educational professionals working with adolescents should be adequately trained to address these mental health concerns, as outlined in various accessible academic publications (Jeriček 2023; Cosma 2023).

2 Stress Among Teenagers Is a Big Deal

Data from the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ 2022) reveals a significant increase in the prevalence of psychosomatic symptoms among young people aged 13 to 17 during the period from 2018 to 2022. Additionally, there has been a notable rise in both suicide rates and suicide attempts within this demographic. At the European Union level, the mental well-being of Slovenian youth is alarmingly below the average (WHO 2023). The National Institute of Public Health has issued urgent warnings, emphasising the necessity of prioritising the care and support of our young population. The World Health Organization has similarly highlighted these concerns, with their recent comprehensive surveys unveiling numerous distressing trends that warrant immediate attention. Notably, the data indicates that girls are disproportionately affected by mental health issues, with more frequent reports of symptoms such as dizziness, back pain, low mood, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and irritability compared to their male counterparts. The incidence of health issues among young people is escalating across most countries.

Although this information is substantiated by official reports and research, it is likely that most educators would agree that these findings are unsurprising. In educational settings, mental health challenges among students are encountered almost daily.

3 Stress Connected with School and Grading

We must agree that teenage times are tough enough without school. We are all familiar with the hormonal changes and the overwhelming emotional reactions. Teenagers are not always thinking and reacting according to our expectations. They face many issues that cause stress – family relations are getting complicated more often than in the past (i.e. divorced families, single parenting), friendships are different and more challenging to maintain, and finding a position in society is tougher as it used to be. Moreover, school

plays a crucial role for an average teenager, even though they might not show it. Grades and points are sometimes the only things that young people seem to talk about, and they are a common topic among parents and teachers. Many of us know adults who emphasise grades as the most important aspect of life, which is not entirely wrong, provided that other, more important aspects of life are also acknowledged.

4 How Can a Teacher Help?

According to broader EU findings, school is a major factor in the well-being of young people, and therefore, we can easily conclude that **TEACHERS CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE**. Extensive consideration has been given to the available options for teachers, and it is evident that a wide range of strategies exist. Some of these strategies, which have proven effective in various educational settings, are briefly outlined below. Multiple variations of these approaches can be implemented by teachers within the classroom environment.

Some effective strategies include **positive affirmations** (repeating one and the same thing, like “you are not your grade”); **creating a safe environment** (inviting students after class for a debriefing); **discussing stress often and showing true empathy** (especially before and while grading); **showing your students “the big picture”** (that grades are not that important if you look at them from the higher perspective); **showing understanding** (because not all students are lazy and disrespectful); **giving them short notes about their forthcoming grading** (they can post it in their notebook and check it at home); **planning set dates for oral examining** (it helps diminish stress); **offering help for extra practice** (Why not finding some time for the motivated students who want to learn?). Another possibility is providing a variation of different assessment options for your students, such as **multiple project types** (videos, interviews, creative writing, etc.), **peer reviewing**, **portfolio assessment**, and **collaborative problem-solving projects**.

Do not forget about all the students with special needs who are not “guilty” of being in need of all the extra assistance. It is too often that one can hear a teacher who would complain about all the work that they have to do for these “special cases”, individuals who struggle because the school system is just not to their advantage. They do demand extra work, but I believe that a teacher should never forget those who need them most – the weakest are the most difficult to help, but in the end, many of them are way more thankful than “the smart ones”.

5 Conclusion

An emphatic teacher will confirm that there are too many students in our schools who are misunderstood when they express stress and anxiety. Too often, this is the case in connection with grading because students are rarely presented with clear criteria in advance, they are not aware of what to expect from the teacher, and not knowing much about grading specifics causes increased stress among many of them. Presenting clear criteria in

an individualised written form is something that every primary school student (and why not also students in secondary school) would be very thankful for and would feel more comfortable with learning. This would make it much easier for our students to achieve their goals and gain better knowledge. It is proven that one learns and performs much better in a safer environment. Teachers should make an effort to see things from their students' perspectives more often, as this would lead to better interaction and cooperation, resulting in a more positive experience for everyone.

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CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

Sandra Kozorog Košuta

Abstract

Content-based instruction (CBI) is a special concept of teaching where the language learning objectives are equally important as the content learning objectives (Brown & Bradford 2017). Therefore, CBI teachers are challenged to balance instructing the language and the content during their lessons. However, if we frame our lessons within concepts and routines that are familiar to the students, relate new lessons to ideas that students already comprehend, give them appropriate feedback which is not hindering their progress and correct them just enough, we will help our students become much more fluent, self-confident and able to do new, even more, academic activities with language, such as writing essays, debating and expressing themselves.

Keywords: content, cognitive load, meaningful interactions, language acquisition

1 Introduction: Language Learning

Most EFL classes teach students new words to express things that they already know how to express in their first language. In CBI (content-based instruction) classes, however, it is often not only the words that are new to our students but also the concepts they express. Teachers (and students), therefore, face a dual challenge of balancing between teaching the language and the content, but it is also true that learning often gets incidental since our students are much more focused on the content of the lessons rather than on its vocabulary or structure.

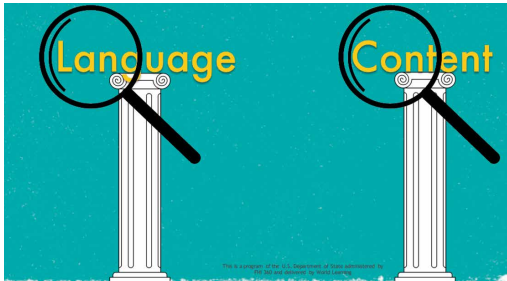


Image 1: CBI course by World Language Institute (2021).

At least at the beginning, CBI lessons are, therefore, much more challenging than the traditional ones, but in the long run, students improve their proficiency in the language and the content they study, thus making them much more self-confident and fluent, let alone well-informed.

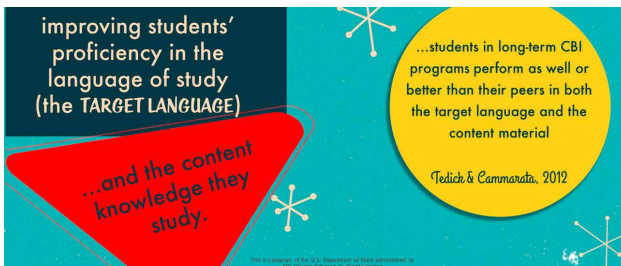


Image 2: CBI course by World Language Institute (2021).

2 Learning Content

As teachers, we have to keep in mind that people can only think about so many things at once since our working memory is limited. The term 'cognitive load' used throughout the course refers to how much mental work a task requires, and a cognitive load theory recommends that learning tasks be created so as not to overload our learners' working memory (CBI 2022). That means that we must be aware of which parts of our tasks are difficult, and we need to structure lessons so that students are always focused and able to achieve the objectives we put in front of them. One of the best ways to lighten the cognitive load of a

learning task is to frame lessons within concepts and routines that are familiar to the students. As CBI teachers, we can facilitate our students' learning when we relate new lessons to ideas that students already comprehend, and we frame our activities in routines that students can settle into with little need for orientation.

Last but not least, most of our students' language proficiency comes through meaningful social interactions.

3 Active Learning and Success Factors

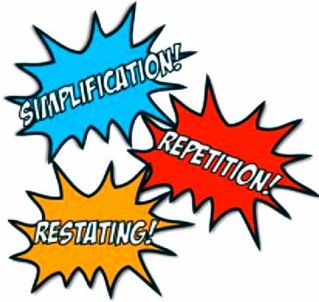


Image 3: CBI course by World Language Institute (2021).

When learners play an active role in classroom activities, they perform better and learn more. Most teachers know this to be true, but it becomes very tempting to move to a teacher-centred style of teaching when it feels like there is too much material to cover. However, we teachers must constantly strive to keep our students active and give them a certain degree of autonomy by:

- keeping our students in the target language
- providing effective feedback on both language and content
- giving our students sufficient support to grasp new concepts
- giving them enough linguistic support so that they can follow what is happening in class and
- making sure that students control the language that they need to perform the tasks we have asked them for

Moreover, we should bear in mind that any learning is an extremely emotional process, and it will only take place if our students feel well, valued and appreciated if they find learning meaningful, if they are not afraid of making mistakes and if we help them realise that errors are an essential, valuable part of L2 acquisition, if they are frequently exposed to meaningful input and, finally, if they have many opportunities for practising the language. This is especially important when instructing them a language through its content because our students will be open to exploring new ideas and concepts without fear of judgment or failure only when they feel emotionally secure, recognised and valued.

4 Warming up

As stated above, learning only starts when we connect our existing knowledge to the prior one. When there is too much that is new and not enough that is familiar, it becomes much, much harder to understand something. This is especially important within the process of CBI because connecting new content to what they already know will help students understand and retain new content more effectively.

If we have a reading comprehension, for example, it is, therefore, for the students to ask themselves questions like:

- What do I know about the subject?
- Do I understand what I have just read?
- What do I think I will learn from this topic?
- Do I have a clear picture in my head about this information?
- How does it fit in with what I already know?
- What more can I do to understand this?
- What were the most important points in this reading?
- What new information did I learn?

5 Building Vocabulary

In order to facilitate the process of language acquisition, we need to provide our students with a number of exposures to the new vocabulary in meaningful and contextualised ways, like:

- a) **Word wall:** During the lesson, the teacher highlights key content vocabulary and writes it down in alphabetical order on the word wall, which is usually a large sheet of paper posted on the wall.



Image 4: Teaching Packs – The Word Wall Display Pack (2024).

- b) **Personal dictionary:** Students read a text under their teacher's guidance, in pairs or in small groups, and list down the new words.
- c) **Adopt a word** is an activity that can be carried out throughout the year. Students choose a word, present it to their friends and give a short presentation based on that word. Then, they paste their sheet on the wall.

Although this is an individual activity, it promotes group (incidental) learning in that students get to learn new words from each other by looking at those words every day on the wall.



Images 5 & 6: Vocabulary and fluency classroom strategies (Voigt M. n. d.).

- d) *Role play* is a familiar activity that younger children love, and, what is more, it is a great way to overcome their shyness, communicate more in the target language, and learn the content.



Images 7 & 8: Dynamic Presenting – Role play (2016).

- e) *Word cloud* is similar to a word wall, except that the words are not organised in alphabetical order but randomly. Word clouds are extremely easy to create and can be used as an effective brainstorming tool in the classroom.

To make classroom activities playful, a teacher can ask the students to think of words associated with the concept they will discuss. As the students brainstorm words, the teacher can type them into the word cloud and create them in front of them.



Image 9: Image from the personal archive.

By completing meaningful tasks that are directly related to the content being taught, students will namely be motivated to acquire not only the content but also the language itself, which is also one of the main goals of content-based instruction.

6 English Only

Teachers often switch to L1 when they think students may not understand them. Instead of doing that, we should:

- simplify our speech,
- repeat when necessary,
- speak more slowly and give examples,
- always give instructions in English, but start with tasks which are already familiar to the students,
- teach them useful classroom vocabulary,
- use routine,
- put commonly used phrases on the classroom walls,
- introduce L1-free periods: tell your students that for the next 5 minutes, they can only use English; post a classroom sign that reads: NOL1,
- motivate Ss for using L2 by giving them rewards like stickers, pebbles, candies,
- introduce an activity by writing ENGLISH ONLY on the board at the beginning of the lesson, and challenge students to keep the whole phrase. Whenever students use Slovene, the teacher erases one letter.

7 Conclusion

Learning a language can be much more than pure language learning, i.e. vocabulary and grammar. A teacher has the power and the chance to broaden their students' minds, making a learning experience fun and unforgettable. That, however, means moving far away from the traditional language teaching, with students seated in their seats, listening, learning by heart and drilling new structures. I strongly believe that some drills are a must, but if we want our students to become efficient language users, we should create our activities in a way that is fun, useful, challenging, and at the same time familiar to them.

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FROM IMAGE TO IMAGINATION

Simona Brečko

Abstract

As a language teacher, I have always been enthusiastic about using various images because, if chosen correctly, they can instantly evoke numerous mental images in our brains and thus stimulate the imagination even in the most unmotivated students. An integral part of the *Dixit* board game is a pile of exceptional images which, due to the richness of motifs, can be used in language lessons, particularly to encourage creativity. This article presents some examples of good practices in using images and fostering creativity among students.

Keywords: image, imagination, creativity, motivation, stories

1 Introduction

An American dancer, choreographer, and author, Twyla Tharp, said that “creativity is not just for artists. It’s for businesspeople looking for a new way to close a sale; it’s for engineers trying to solve a problem; it’s for parents who want their children to see the world in more than one way.” Being creative means possessing the ability to imagine things. As Jakob Streit (1996) observes in his book *Warum Kinder Märchen brauchen*, adults are flooded with happiness as they observe children playing, where with simple objects and on the wings of imagination, they build castles, tame horses, herd cows with fir cones, and with their words and calls, they follow their actions with the utmost seriousness.

Imagination can be defined as the ability of the mind to form mental images, ideas, and concepts that are not necessarily present to the senses or based on reality. It involves creativity, visualisation, and the capacity to think beyond what is directly observable or experienced. Imagination allows individuals to explore possibilities, solve problems, and generate new ideas or perspectives. According to the *Psychology Today* article, “imagination is not dependent on external sensory information taken from what a person can see, hear, feel, taste, or touch in the moment. Rather, it is generated from within and often unconsciously influenced by memories and feelings. It plays a crucial role in various aspects of human life, including art, literature, science, problem-solving, and innovation” (Psychology Today Staff 2024). And as Albert Einstein said, logic will get you from A to B, but imagination will take you everywhere.

2 The Power of Images

As a German and English teacher at the Secondary School of Mechanical Engineering, Mechatronics and Media, I am often faced with the challenge of how to arouse interest in students and awaken their grey cells. I realised very soon that using images definitely works and stimulates students’ imagination and creativity. Why is that so? As Margarida Alpuim and Katja Ehrenberg (2023) state in their article *Why images are so powerful – and what matters when choosing them*, “images are immediate – humans can process an image in the blink of an eye. ... Images impact emotions faster and more powerfully than words. ... Images are more memorable. ... Images elicit stronger emotions and engagement responses,” which seems to boost imagination and, consequently, also creativity.

In my teaching career, I have also used images that have proven to be not versatile enough to evoke a sufficient variety of mental images in the users. Then, one day, my daughter borrowed a board game from the local library, and I was immediately impressed by 84 images that are an integral part of the game, so I decided to use them in classes. *Dixit* is a board game that was created in 2008 and was declared the game of the year in 2010 as it sold more than twelve million copies. What is more, different artists and the authors of the game created

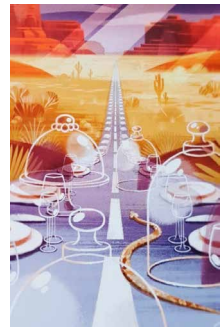


Image 1: *Dixit* (2008).

even more dreamlike cards/images in the following years, expansion packs of 84 content-rich cards – *Anniversary, Daydreams, Harmonies, Journey, Memories, Mirrors, Origins, Quest, Revelations*. When I provided my students with *Dixit* images, the results were astonishing – the explosion of associations happened. For instance, when the image below was presented to students, each came up with a different association – ten students and seven different associations: road, road trip, dreams, desserts, journey, where's the food, dinner in nature. A single image can provoke many different mental images, which leads to amazing results.

3 Memories, Stories, Teamwork ...

Apart from imagination, other skills are encouraged, such as speaking, writing, listening, teamwork, etc. Students are usually invited to pick a random number of images out of 84 *Dixit* images. They are instructed to pick the ones they feel most attracted to at first sight.



Images 2 - 9: *Dixit* (2008).

An example of good practice is the speaking activity, which was also meant to encourage teamwork. Students were invited to share their childhood memories with their school-mates after they had each chosen two cards that they had been most attracted to when thinking of their childhood. In the next step, students in groups of four were asked to combine their chosen cards/images and make a meaningful story. One of them is based on the following images:

“Once upon a time, there was a little African boy. He had a big teddy bear. He was flying through space in a castle on a balloon. When it was dark, he lit a candle so he could read his book. His favourite kind of book was an adventure book. But this book was like no other – it stood out from the crowd. It was so touchy that he cried all night. His tears were so large that it kept raining outside the castle.”



Image 10: Dixit (2008).

Another activity using Dixit cards was writing stories. This time, students had to choose three cards they were most attracted to. Groups of four were randomly formed after the cards had been chosen. They discussed their cards and combined them to write a story. Only after the story had been finished, I asked them to think of the title of their story. In a single lesson, seven extremely interesting stories were written, and some of them were published in the English section of the school newspaper.

The story entitled Seeking Youth was written to these images.

“There once lived a king named Henry II who ruled the Droplet City. He was very upset because he was getting old and wished more than anything to have eternal youth.

Therefore, the King went to the fortuneteller Catelin. He wanted to know how to make his wish come true. Catelin explained that he would have to go on a long journey to get his youth back. Henry II then escaped the Droplet City and began his journey. On his journey, he stumbled upon a talking tree and asked: “Oh, talking tree, how can I get my youth back?” The talking tree then answered: “To make your wish come true, you must find the goddess of time!” ↴



Image 11: Dixit (2008).

After the tree had given him a few pointers, Henry II continued his journey. After many months of searching and walking to the ends of the Earth, he finally found the goddess. Henry II asked her if she could grant him the eternal youth he had wished for so long. But the goddess wanted something in return. As Henry II could not offer her anything, the goddess got angry at him and instead of eternal youth, she cursed him so he would forever age backwards. Henry II soon became a baby and vanished from the world. And to this day, his cradle remains somewhere in the woods.”

The authors of *Lucifer the Dice Devil* were inspired by the images below.



Image 12: Dixit (2008).

“In a world where there was nothing but pure happiness, peace and balance, the sun was shining over the colourful land. The sea was blue like the sky without a cloud, and there were clouds of various shapes in the sky. The Queen was an astonishing musician. As long as she kept playing the peace melody, everything was alright. The King and the Queen’s love had been surprisingly strong until the Dice devil named Lucifer started a tornado which tore the Queen away from the King. The King was furious, so he called the amazing Paperman, who was covered with the whitest paper you had ever seen. His veins were filled with blue blood, which gave him the stunning qualities of a hero. He defeated the Dice devil Lucifer effortlessly. The King gave his firstborn to the Paperman as a thank-you. The exchange was followed by a grand celebration of love, restoring peace once again to the land.”

These images were the inspiration for *The Journey for a Friend*.



Image 13: Dixit (2008).

“Once, there were friends who were magically separated and were both left with one thing. The weaker and younger one was left with a protective bear and the other with a bunch of leaves. The one with the leaves decided to leave and look for his friend. He sought out the fairy of knowledge, who told him to search for the flower which would help him find his friend. He was given a compass and a map, which led him to the desert. He suddenly got stuck in the sand, where the only option he had left was to try and get some nearby birds to help him. One of the birds suddenly flew away and got a rope with a ring. He managed to pull himself out and grab the ring from the rope. ↴

He didn't know the ring was magical and it would help him find his way. He was led to the secret forest, which was filled with magical creatures. There he met a cat named Simba. He spent his time painting realistic fishes. Simba led him to Mr Nugget, who was the only one who was able to tell him where the magical candle was that would reunite him with his friend."

4 Getting Feedback

After such activities, I usually get students' feedback using one of my favourite tools, Mentimeter. Students have to think about how they felt during the activity of story writing.

As I want them to think about the activity and the work they have done, I do not mind the mistakes that might appear while giving their feedback. It also does not matter if students express a negative opinion.



Image 14: Image from the personal archive.

Moreover, after all the stories are read to the class, students are invited to vote for their favourite one – using Mentimeter again. This way, students get the impression that their opinions count and are even more motivated to participate in similar activities next time.



Image 15: Image from the personal archive.

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MULTIMODAL LITERACY IN TODAY'S MULTI-WORLD

Tanja Fajmut

Abstract

If we want learners to communicate effectively in today's world, they need to be proficient in multimodal literacy because multimodal texts will continue to dominate our communication environment far into the future. To achieve this, specific multimodality literacy training needs to be provided. Learners should be given opportunities to critically view – analyse and interpret – multimodal texts in the classroom. They also need to learn how to convey meaning through multimodal texts. The article begins by defining multimodality and multimodal literacy, then explores essential skills such as viewing and representing, and how these can be integrated into classroom activities to make learning more engaging and learner-centred.

Keywords: multimodality, viewing, representing, multimodal teaching approach

1 Introduction

Multimodal literacy is important in English language teaching if we want students to learn English in a way that is relevant to the way they live and how they interact with others. We must recognise that literacy in today's digital age is much more than just language competence - it also involves viewing and representing with multimodal texts. Language teachers need to be able to help learners become more active and critical viewers, as well as more effective and creative composers of multimodal texts.

2 What Is Multimodality, and What is Multimodal Literacy?

Communicative competence traditionally involved using written and spoken language to get a message across. However, in today's digital era, the principal mode of communication is a combination of text and still or moving images, sometimes accompanied by sound as well. Our communication has thus become increasingly multimodal in nature. The relevance of multimodality in language teaching is therefore linked to the changing nature of communication and literacy in the digital age. As a result, communication today has become much more than just writing and speaking, and literacy has become much more than language competence.

Multimodality refers to the combination of multiple modes of communication, such as sight, sound, print, images, video, and music, that produce meaning in a text. Each mode serves a different purpose and works in different ways. To fully understand the message, we have to be aware of different modes working together (Donaghy *et al.* 2023). According to Donaghy *et al.* (2023), there are five modes of communication:

1. Linguistic mode involves the use of written or spoken language, including word choice, sentence organisation, vocabulary, grammar, and structure.
2. Visual mode is what is seen by the viewer, including images, symbols, videos, and design elements like colour and layout.
3. Aural mode includes audible elements such as voice, sound effects, and music, characterised by volume, tone, and rhythm.
4. Gestural mode refers to communication through movement, including facial expressions, gestures, and body language.
5. Spatial mode relates to the arrangement and spacing of elements in a text, including the positioning and distance between objects.

When a text contains more than one of these modes it is considered multimodal. Multimodal texts can be paper-based (picture books, textbooks, graphic novels, comics, and posters) or digital (videos, vlogs, slide presentations, video games, memes, and web pages). Each mode has its specific limitations and possibilities (called 'affordances') related to the mode's meaning-making potential. The concept of multimodality describes how each mode contributes to the overall meaning of a multimodal text (Donaghy *et al.* 2023).

Effective contemporary communication requires people to be able to comprehend, respond to, and compose meaning through multimodal texts in diverse forms, which is where the two concepts of multimodality and meaning-making (literacy) merge into what we call **multimodal literacy**. Multimodal literacy introduces two new skills: viewing and representing. Together with listening, speaking, reading and writing, they contribute to meaning-making across different modes of communication.

3 Why Is Multimodal Literacy Important in English Language Teaching?

As contemporary communication is increasingly multimodal, the concept of communicative competence in ELT needs to be reconsidered. The main focus of English language teachers should, of course, still be on language, but it is also necessary to help learners develop their multimodal communicative competence. According to Donaghy *et al.* (2023), the main reasons to include multimodal literacy in ELT are:

- The majority of texts learners access outside the classroom are multimodal, requiring an understanding of how various modes interact with language to form communication.
- Providing opportunities for learners to critically analyse and interpret these multimodal texts in the classroom is crucial.
- Developing multimodal literacy is essential for learners to communicate effectively in today's changing communication environment.
- Integrating multimodal texts in the classroom improves accessibility for all learners, including those with learning difficulties, by using video and audio resources alongside text.

4 Important Concepts of Viewing and Representing

As explained by Donaghy *et al.* (2023), **viewing** refers to the active process of comprehending and responding to multimodal texts. At the basic level, viewing involves learners noticing the different modes of communication used in the multimodal text and responding to the text on an emotional level. At the higher level, viewing involves learners analysing and interpreting the multimodal text and responding to it critically. Viewing is linked with the receptive skills of reading and listening.

Representing refers to learners communicating information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts. Representing is about learners creating multimodal texts, such as posters, collages, comic strips, storyboards, videos, slide presentations, infographics, and memes. Multimodal composing is crucial for the development of multimodal literacy because it provides learners with opportunities to represent their learning and allows them to learn through making. Representing is linked with the productive skills of writing and speaking.

5 How to Incorporate Viewing and Representing in ELT?

As demonstrated by Donaghy *et al.* (2023), viewing can be integrated into classroom practice by adapting the procedures teachers already use when teaching listening and reading (pre-, during-, and after-activities):

1. pre-viewing: activates prior knowledge, encourages predictions and questions,
2. during-viewing: involves interpreting, summarising, and evaluating the text, linking it to prior knowledge,
3. after-viewing: students respond personally, critically, and creatively.

The next skill, **representing**, refers to learners communicating information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts (paper-based: posters or comics, or digital multimodal texts: videos, slide presentations, or memes). Representing can be integrated into the classroom by using similar procedures teachers already use when working on writing and for projects such as storytelling. To illustrate the similarities between writing and representing, 'digital storytelling' can be used as a common form of multimodal composition. According to Reinders *et al.* (2022), digital storytelling integrates digital media, such as photos, audio, video, animation, etc., to create a story which can be fiction or non-fiction.

6 Designing Multimodal Learning Experience in ELT

When designing multimodal learning experiences, it is important to choose appropriate multimodal texts. Donaghy *et al.* (2023) claim the following two models should help teachers create a multimodal learning practice: the first model tackles the learning processes that encourage multimodal literacy. These four learning processes are encountering, exploring, evaluating, and expressing. First, encountering focuses on emotional engagement. During the learners' encounter with a multimodal text, they are encouraged to describe it, share their emotional response, and reflect on their emotional engagement. Second, exploring focuses on cognitive understanding of the text. Third, evaluating is mainly defined by critical perspectives. Learners are encouraged to adopt a critical approach in their analysis of the multimodal text and to question the messages represented in it. Last, expressing focuses on multimodal composition. Multimodal composition tasks can include, for example, writing a multimodal review of a short film, a multimodal analysis of a key scene, a short video of a student giving a film review, or something similar.

The second model calls for six features of multimodal literacy learning experiences. The first feature is authentic texts - the ones learners encounter in their everyday lives and are meaningful and relatable to them. These help to connect learners' out-of-school literacy practices with the literacies they learn in school. The second feature refers to collaborative learning (group work): learners from different backgrounds and experiences bring multiple perspectives into the classroom that are productive for multimodal literacy learning. Another feature is the so-called explicit teaching, where the teacher explicitly teaches the knowledge and skills of viewing and representing by modelling features of viewing and representing

with multimodal texts. The next one is inductive learning where learners explore the meanings in the multimodal text amongst themselves before the teacher summarises what they have understood. The additional feature to ensure a multimodal learning experience is, of course, the use of digital technology, accompanied by artefact-making, which refers to the creation of knowledge artefacts such as texts, videos, memes, posters, etc.

7 Conclusion

Multimodality is gaining ground as a focus in language education because multimodal texts will continue to dominate our communication environment far into the future. To cover all communication modes, we have to expand the four traditional skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) to include viewing and representing (creating multimodal texts) as well. Furthermore, traditional forms of literacy are not sufficient to understand and produce multimodal texts. We, therefore, need to teach multimodal literacy. Language teachers need to be able to help learners become more active and critical viewers, as well as more effective and creative composers of multimodal texts. As effective multimodal communicators, learners will be able to flourish at school, in further education, at work, or in private life.

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JOB SHADOWING – EXPERIENCES, PROS AND CONS

Tina Rajhman

Abstract

Erasmus+ offers an interesting training opportunity for teachers, known as job shadowing. I had the opportunity to observe teaching at a grammar school in Austria and could see for myself the advantages and disadvantages of such training. There are some points that should be improved. The article summarises my experiences and some suggestions on this topic.

Keywords: job shadowing, Erasmus+, international cooperation

1 Introduction

Job shadowing offers a unique opportunity within the Erasmus+ program to learn from colleagues at partner schools abroad by observing their work at their schools. During the visit, participants observe the daily life and work at the partner school and familiarise themselves with the way teachers implement teaching methods for specific subject areas within their curriculum and education system. Such an activity can contribute to a more effective implementation of the work process at our school.

Job shadowing opportunities are part of the Erasmus+ mobility and are open to professionals working in formal and non-formal education. The aim of this activity is to give professionals the opportunity to improve their pedagogical skills in an international environment. Job shadowing also offers the opportunity to exchange teaching methods and tools and thus improve education systems in different European countries (Gartner 2024).

2 Job Shadowing in Vienna

My job shadowing took me to a school in Vienna that teaches students aged between 10 and 18. The different age range poses a completely different challenge for teachers than in Slovenia. Here, educators have to tailor their teaching methods to both children and teenagers, which requires a nuanced approach to their work.

At this school, teaching is characterised by a dynamic exchange between teachers and students, creating an atmosphere that resembles an advanced academic discourse. However, this conversational approach raises the question of how to maintain the active engagement of all students and how students prepare for exams, as they have hardly any notes in their notebooks.

3 The Pros of My Job Shadowing Experience

One of the biggest advantages of my work shadowing was the opportunity to observe German and English lessons, with German being the students' first language and English their second language. One noticeable difference I observed was the smaller class sizes compared to those in Slovenia; usually, a class at the host school consisted of around twenty students. This smaller class size proved to be advantageous as the teachers were able to react more quickly to disruptions, which allowed for smoother lessons.

One interesting observation was that teachers used smartphones instead of traditional computers to participate in lessons. This innovative approach has inspired me to consider similar adaptations in my own teaching practice when circumstances warrant. I also noticed a relaxed approach to students' personal belongings, such as drinks, smartphones and even make-up. Surprisingly, despite the indulgence, students did not take advantage of this freedom and remained focused and respectful throughout the lesson. This observation prompted reflection on the balance between discipline and trust in the classroom.

4 The Cons of My Job Shadowing Experience

One notable drawback of my job shadowing experience was the lack of benefit from the German lessons for me personally. The lessons were structured as native language lessons, which did not correspond to my role as a foreign language teacher. Consequently, I found these lessons unproductive and felt that I could have made better use of my time by talking to the available teachers during free periods in the staff room.

Another problem was the obvious lack of preparation on the part of the host teachers. Apparently, they were only informed that they were hosting a foreign colleague shortly before the lesson, leaving them insufficient time to prepare adequately or plan opportunities for a meaningful exchange of information. This rushed approach hindered the potential for fruitful discussions and shared learning experiences. Ideally, time could have been scheduled before or after class, or even after working hours to allow for more meaningful interactions and knowledge sharing between myself and the host teachers. This underscores the importance of effective communication and planning to optimise the benefits of job shadowing experiences.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, while I understand the challenges of finding a host school and the demands of a teacher's busy schedule, I believe that schools participating in the Erasmus+ program should make a concerted effort to be effective hosts and ensure that both hosts and guests are motivated and prepared for the experience.

Looking to the future, I hope to see improvements in the hosting process. It would be beneficial if host schools allowed some time for the host teacher and their guest to meet and have meaningful conversations, perhaps over a cup of coffee. This time could be used to reflect on lessons, share teaching methods and discuss the intricacies of teacher life in their respective countries. By encouraging such opportunities for collaboration and exchange, all participants can maximise the benefits of job shadowing experiences, enrich their professional development and contribute to the overall aims of the Erasmus+ program.

I am aware that other English teachers would like to know more about the teaching practices I observed during my observation. However, it is important to know that the Austrian and Slovenian school systems have many similarities in their teaching approaches. Therefore, the main goal of this article was to highlight job shadowing as a valuable training opportunity. This information could be particularly useful for colleagues who have not yet participated in such a program. To deepen my understanding of different teaching methods, I have already applied for my next job shadowing in another country. By observing teaching in two different education systems, I hope to provide the readers of this magazine with a more comprehensive analysis of my experiences. This future report will allow me to share more detailed observations and possibly present some effective practices that we could adapt to our teaching environments. Ultimately, my goal is to inspire and inform

other educators about the benefits of job shadowing and encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities for their professional development.

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ENGLISH THROUGH HISTORY

Tjaša Šuc Visenjak

Abstract

Teaching guidelines vary from teacher to teacher and from subject to subject. Nowadays, there are various ideas on how to make a lesson more interesting and how to combine different teaching elements with various teaching approaches. An interesting example is cross-curricular integration, which connects the knowledge of different subjects and enables a more integrated teaching approach. A successful English lesson with cross-curricular integration of history presents good practice and, therefore, effective English teaching. The subjects of English and history intertwine during the lesson. This combination motivates the students through interesting topics and teaching methods to participate and assimilate knowledge more easily. Interesting work material and the teacher's approach keep students focused and show how students even enjoy a topic they mostly would not. The presented lesson has learning stations that provide another teaching approach, different classroom organisation and management. Let us embrace ourselves with different cross-curricular integration and observe English teaching from another angle.

Keywords: English teaching, English learning, history, cross-curricular integration

1 Introduction

An English lesson with cross-curricular integration of history presents good practice. The presented sample is based on a lesson with cross-curricular subjects, English and History. What exactly is cross-curricular integration? It is the practice of connecting a topic that is traditionally taught as a stand-alone subject - such as ELA (English language arts), math, science, history, social studies, engineering, or computer science - to a different subject area (EiE Team blog 2023). Cross-curricular integration encourages combining the knowledge of different subjects at school and strives for a more integrated teaching method. Therefore, I wanted the students to be engaged with the presented topic and to use their pre-learned knowledge of history.

I always try to collaborate with my co-workers and exchange my knowledge with theirs to gain new ideas with their insights about certain topics. When a lesson or activity integrates two or more subjects, educators can teach and practice more effectively than in two back-to-back single-subject lessons. Students also benefit from these time-saving, multifaceted learning opportunities by being exposed to the interconnectedness of different subjects which provide a new perspective on learning (EiE 2023).

2 The Lesson with Cross-Curricular Integration

In each lesson, teachers strive to teach/bring something new, not only knowledge but interesting facts, activities and ideas to think about afterwards. This particular lesson focused on historical findings with an emphasis on Christopher Columbus.


The lesson took place in the 9th grade, where students have been learning English since the 1st grade (optional) and since the 4th grade on a regular basis. Some information about the lesson can be seen in the table below.

Class and Subject	Topic	Objectives	Didactic Aids
9. b class (19 students)	Historical findings and Christopher Columbus	Improvement of vocabulary, grammar, and expressive skills, gaining knowledge about historical events and the history behind the foreign language they learn.	Tablets, interactive whiteboard, educational applications (LiveWorksheets), and Touchstone 9 coursebook.

The objectives were mainly the improvement of vocabulary skills and grammar skills because the students talked about the discovery of America and life in Europe; they read and talked about English history and revised describing past events and actions (since this is the topic, we had already discussed in the 8th grade). First, we spoke about the pictures I had prepared on the board for my students. The pictures were of major historical events,

and the students had to look at the pictures and try to identify the findings. They had previously already covered them in their history classes. This is the online worksheet that the students had to complete together on the smartboard:

1. Match the historical events with the correct name.




- The Olympic games
- Stonehenge
- The Eiffel tower
- America discovery
- The great wall
- George Washington
- A Nobel prize for physics
- The Paint mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci
- Gravity by Newton
- The battle of hastings

Image 1: Liveworksheets.com - Interactive Worksheets Maker for All Languages and Subjects (2023).

Then, they were presented with a similar picture but as a handout about the historical events. They had to look at the events and try to draw a timeline of the historical events in chronological order.

MAJOR HISTORICAL EVENTS

 THE 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES LOS ANGELES	
HAMLET SHAKESPEARE ENGLAND 1601	AMERICA CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS 1492
 THE EIFFEL TOWER 1889 GUSTAVE EIFFEL FRANCE	 THE GREAT WALL CHINA MORE THAN 2000 YEARS AGO
 THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS ENGLAND 1066	 GEORGE WASHINGTON PRESIDENT OF THE USA 1789
 MONA LISA LEONARDO DA VINCI FRANCE 1507	 A NOBEL PRIZE FOR PHYSICS ALBERT EINSTEIN 1921
 GRAVITY SIR ISAAC NEWTON ENGLAND 1666	 STONEHENGE ENGLAND 2500 BC

BUILD, PAINT, WIN, ELICIT, DISCOVER, FIGHT, WRITE, HOLD, DESIGN

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Image 2: Liveworksheets.com - Interactive Worksheets Maker for All Languages and Subjects (2023).

After the students completed their timelines, we focused on the text about Christopher Columbus. Afterwards, I checked their comprehension with a vocabulary exercise. The students had to search for expressions that are described on the worksheet. The examples were also grouped for the students under each paragraph to make the expressions easier to find. An example of the exercise is provided below:

V berilu **THREE CHEERS FOR COLUMBUS** na str. 12 poišči izraze, ki ustrezajo spodnjim. Glej primer 0, ki je že rešen. /20

1st and 2nd PARAGRAPHS

- 0) time from 476 to 1500: the Middle Ages
- 1) a shout that shows you are pleased: _____
- 2) substance used to make food tastier: _____
- 3) things that are made to be sold: _____
- 4) soft material for clothing: _____
- 5) to buy and sell: _____
- 6) a way from one place to another: _____
- 7) look for: _____
- 8) the opposite of 'safe': _____
- 9) something that shows what other things of the same kind are like: _____

3rd PARAGRAPH

- 10) enormous, large: _____
- 11) get to: _____
- 12) circular: _____
- 13) travelling by sea: _____
- 14) predict without sufficient information: _____
- 15) think that something will happen: _____
- 16) be in the space which someone needs for a particular movement: _____

4th PARAGRAPH

- 17) come or go after somebody: _____
- 18) take selfishly: _____
- 19) grow crops and keep animals on the land: _____
- 20) colonists: _____

POPRAVA

Image 3: Touchstone 9, vaje za preverjanje znanja (2018).

Then, we explained what the text was about, and the students had to answer the questions; however, not in their coursebooks. They were divided into three groups at learning stations, which provided another teaching approach, different classroom organisation and management. They got tablet PCs where they had to answer questions like, for example, *Why did Europeans in the Middle Ages trade with India? How did Europeans travel to India?* The students practised both their vocabulary and grammar skills here.

Students connect better with the topics that are close to them, and teachers, of course, strive for useful and mainly educational content. Therefore, as their last assignment, the students were given a blank strip to imagine what they would hope to discover as a Christopher Columbus of today.

The students took their time and imagined thoroughly what they would hope to discover. The ideas were great and more than interesting. They stated that what they wished to discover would be an 'allower medicine', as the students called it, something that would cure everything: the old days, futuristic cars, interesting and different animals, blue pineapples, no school island, etc.

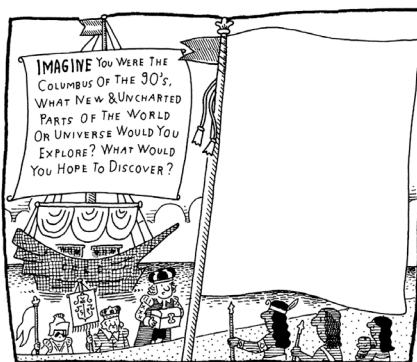


Image 4: MakeBeliefsComix (2017).

From Bill Zimmerman's book *MakeBeliefs for Kids of All Ages*. Drawings by Tim Bloom. Published by Andrews and McNael.

3 Lesson Analysis

At the end of the lesson, each student had to put a marble into that one smiley jar that best represented the level of student satisfaction with the lesson. This is what we use after class for students to evaluate each lesson. It was no surprise that the happy jar was filled with the most marbles.

The objectives were met, and the students improved their vocabulary and grammar skills. They talked about the discovery of America and life in Europe, read and talked about English history, and revised past events and actions. They were also creative when they had to imagine making a discovery like the Christopher Columbus of today. The cross-curricular integration of history, therefore, presented a good practice in this case. The practice of connecting a topic that is traditionally taught as a stand-alone subject is always more than welcome in language classes as they can be easily combined. They also provide students with more input and give them even more topics to discuss. The same is suggested by Sullivan in *Curriculum and Instruction* from Point Park University, where it is stated that the different school subjects are just a small puzzle piece of the larger puzzle. They can all go together as one to make up the big puzzle in education. What students learn in math for example can be applied to English, social studies, and science in some capacity, and if not all the subjects, at least some (Chiaro 2021). Because two subjects, English and history, were intertwined during the lesson, their simultaneous use was also additional motivation for the students, as interesting topics and teaching methods (such as learning stations) were combined. The students participated happily and assimilated knowledge in a seemingly easier manner.

4 Conclusion

My students enjoy most of our classes because I always try to vary the lessons to make them more appealing. These variations and appeal very often stem from simultaneously incorporating English and history in our teaching and learning a foreign language. I also feel that even when I think certain exercises are not interesting enough, the students might still prove me wrong and make me feel better because they express gratitude. Whenever we talk during our free time or other school occasions, they explain that they always like different tasks I bring and already guess what our next lesson will look like. Which feedback is simply one of the best types of feedback a teacher can get? The one from their students. Therefore, let us embrace ourselves with their feedback and continue to provide diverse multiple-subject lessons that benefit everyone.

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MOODLE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL: A LEGACY OF THE PANDEMIC

Tomislav Mravunac

Abstract

This paper showcases how Moodle LMS can effectively be used at the primary school level to enable the teacher to move towards the role of facilitator by spending less time on repetitive tasks and more on engaging the pupils. Using this tool, a teacher can accommodate a classroom full of students of varying capacities without singling anyone out.

Keywords: Moodle, personalisation, lessons, tests

1 Introduction

Moodle is a free and open-source Learning Management System (LMS) first released in 2002. It is mainly used at the university level for holding online courses, or for providing regular courses with an effective online component. I started actively using it during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now, Moodle has become an indispensable part of my lessons at the primary school level. Students enjoy using it, and it allows them to progress at their own pace.

2 Class Administration

I teach years 5–8, and when I start teaching a *new* year 5, I manually add all of the new students into a virtual classroom with their basic information – name, e-mail, and password. Students can change their password, but as administrator, I can always reset it in case it is forgotten. A class administrator can also monitor all student activity, i.e. see what the students did and for how long they accessed the site. An interesting feature when administering users is *Groups*. Using this, you can group students of similar abilities together and then assign different material to each group without them realising it. You can also go to the individual level and assign special material to just one individual student.

3 Materials

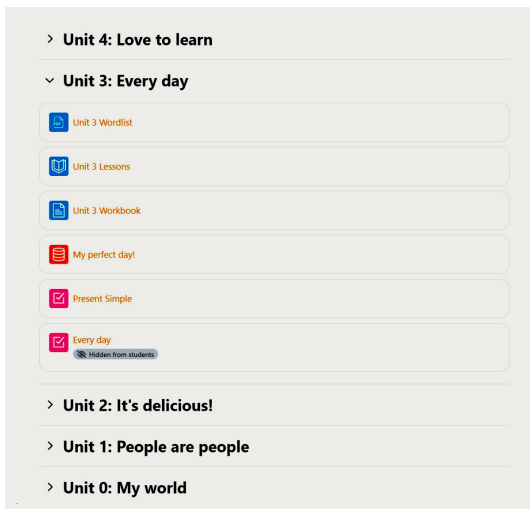


Image 1: Image from the personal archive.

The actual usability of a virtual classroom is measured by the amount and quality of the provided material. Whereas Moodle's appeal is most noticeable when dealing with large groups of students, this is where the benefits of having a prepared virtual school year are immensely useful – even when dealing with smaller classes. Moodle has a plethora of built-in options for posting materials, which you can easily use, grouping them into *Activ-*

ities and Resources. For the sake of brevity, I will delve into more detail on just a few. The following is merely one example of use tailored to my teaching style and textbooks. To the right, you can see how my typical school year is organised. The most important note to take here is that students cannot see all of this at once. As the school year progresses, I unlock more material. This prevents being overwhelmed when just starting out and enables an easy yet steep learning curve. The school year is divided into units, and each unit typically contains the following:

- *Wordlist* – a *.pdf file with keywords for students to use at their convenience.
- *Lessons* – a virtual book where each lesson (written down in the students' notebooks) is represented as a chapter. This enables those students who were absent from class to easily catch up, as well as those students who are slower at writing to cover anything they have missed.
- *Workbook* – the solutions to the workbook, which are unlocked at the end of the unit.
- *Additional material* – depending on the topic, student motivation and time, here I make use of Moodle's comprehensive resources to have surveys, hold videoconferences with guest speakers, create class databases (e.g. favourite films), have forum discussions, etc. If you want, you can set it up in such a way that students can see their classmates' work and comment on it.
- *Quizzes* – each unit has at least one quiz to serve as a formative assessment. The students can always see their results and practise as often as they want (all of this can be tweaked in the options).

As can be seen from the picture, each type of material has a special icon. Furthermore, different types of materials are colour-coded, e.g. the quizzes/tests are pink. This colour differentiation is especially useful to students with learning disabilities, as it helps them easily remember the meaning of each icon.

For access to the site with my materials, contact me at tomislav.mravunac@skole.hr.

4 Tests

Put the verbs in brackets into the Past Simple.

Yesterday, I (get) up early. I love running and yesterday I (have) an important race for my school. My parents (come) with me to the track. I (put) my running clothes on – I was very nervous! My mum and dad (watch) me as I (go) around the track. I (run) really fast and (win) the race – I was first! And the best thing was that my mum and dad (see) me do it!

Image 2: Image from the personal archive.

I consider this the most beneficial use of the Moodle platform, which is why it is getting a special chapter. When understanding test-taking in Moodle, a paradigm shift is needed. You do not design tests (or, as Moodle calls them, *quizzes*) per se. You create a question bank, which you fill with questions, and then when designing a test, you pull up the questions from the bank. In order to have a successful question bank, you need to plan ahead and have an idea of how you are going to organise the questions – something that is linked to your choice of textbook and its contents, as well as the frequency of tests. My students take all their tests on the computers in the ICT classroom, including writing essays. I grade the essays manually, but a *traditional* English test can be graded automatically. This alone has been the single most important boon to the quality of my school year. It takes considerable effort and planning, but the payoff is immeasurable. Moodle offers a lot of different question types - I mainly use fill-in-the-blanks questions such as multiple choice, drag and drop, and open cloze. An example of a simple question can be seen in the image below.

The larger your question bank, the more options you can have. I have already mentioned that you can assign special material (which includes tests) to individual students. If you name the material the same, you do not single anyone out. Another option is randomising questions. When creating a test, you can utilise the *random* option – you may have thirty questions in a question bank category but plan on using only ten. Using this option, Moodle randomly chooses ten questions from that category for every individual student. Additionally, by using the shuffle option, even non-randomized questions can be put in a random order. Also, since your students are taking the tests online, you are not bound by a sheet of paper and can format the questions as you wish, adding luxurious illustrations, embedding audio and video, adding links, etc.

5 Reusability

The thread not explicitly mentioned but underlying everything written down so far is – *reusability*. As I have explained here, utilising Moodle and harnessing just a fraction of its possibilities is not something done in a couple of afternoons. It is a long-term process that needs to be thought out before being implemented. Likewise, it would be counter-productive if it had to be repeated every year. That is why, using Moodle's built-in options, at the end of the school year, with a few clicks of a button, everything that has been done in the virtual classroom is stored in one file, which can then be transferred and safely stored offline, in case it needs to be used later. Then, also with a few clicks of a button, all the activities, tests and user interaction during the school year in a particular class are erased, and you are left with all of the resources intact, available for modifying or being utilised again the next school year.

6 Conclusion

Before 2019, I used Moodle for test-taking, but during the pandemic, I expanded that use to what was presented here. The platform has now become indispensable in my teaching,

replacing the more mundane aspects of this job, such as writing down keywords on the school board, grading formative and summative tests or copying and distributing material. These repetitive tasks are now either automated or simplified. In the classroom, I can now focus more on giving attention to individual students or making the lessons more engaging. The students' feedback has also been overwhelmingly positive – they can use the material at their own pace and practise what they need as much as they need. Using Moodle teaches digital literacy in its most useful form and shows how developing computer skills can successfully complement the traditional classroom without being detrimental to the students' other skills.

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LEARNING ENGLISH IN CHUNKS CAN BE FUN

Vesna Dobrila

Abstract

Learning and teaching a language in chunks refers to learning and teaching phrases, groups of words, or complete sentences rather than single words. It was first researched in 1993 in *The Lexical Approach* by Michael Lewis. Most coursebooks in Slovenian primary schools are based on the lexical approach and, therefore, already contain sections that focus on selected set phrases, collocations, idioms, or sentences worth teaching and learning. However, teachers can use any other chunks their students might need.

As in any teaching, the challenge in teaching chunks is how to help students practise and memorise them while still enjoying the class. The article describes five fun activities designed and modified by the author to help students learn chunks of language and become more motivated in the learning process.

Keywords: learning chunks, chunking, lexical approach, fun activities, games

1 Introduction

In his famous publication *The Lexical Approach* (1993), Michael Lewis claimed that understanding and producing chunks is a significant part of learning a language. The word 'chunks' refers to lexical phrases or patterns of words that appear together regularly. Accordingly, they get stored in a person's mind as units containing vocabulary, grammar, and phonology. Examples of lexical chunks are idioms, e.g. 'I have it on the tip of my tongue,' collocations like 'After a quick shower, he ordered some fast food,' and set phrases, such as 'Make your bed and do the washing up.'

2 Why Learn Chunks?

Groups of words or complete sentences learned as units require less effort to remember since learning them as such resembles learning the lyrics of a song (Weller 2022). Students do not have to retrieve multiple words and then use grammar to construct a sentence. Learning whole chunks gives them a feeling that they have learned more and helps them understand idiomatic language. They develop their language faster and improve fluency (Thornbury 2019, Weller 2022).

3 Which Chunks Should We Teach?

From the corpus linguistics' point of view, it is reasonable to teach and learn lexical chunks that appear frequently in everyday conversations (e.g. *do homework, make a mistake, cause damage, break a rule*, and the like). Lewis (1993) claims that everything that appears in the coursebook (groups of words, phrases, complete sentences) and does not belong strictly to grammar or vocabulary can be taught and learned in chunks. Most coursebooks in Slovenian primary schools are based on the lexical approach and already contain sections that focus on chunking, i.e. emphasise which sentences are convenient to learn as units (e.g. *Fun-tastic* sections in the *Touchstone* series). However, in our classroom, we can include everything our text offers. Therefore, choose the chunks your students might need and use in the future, especially those that are easy to teach.

4 Fun Activities for Learning Chunks

In designing activities for learning chunks of a language, we should bear in mind that 'implementing the principles of effective vocabulary teaching applies equally well to the teaching of chunks as it does to the teaching of individual words' (Thornbury 2019: 18). In my classroom, I often want to surpass the usual teaching methods, such as reading, repeating, chanting, copying, translating, and completing, to make the drill more enjoyable. The activities presented in the latest conference workshop and described below are based either on standard activities for learning vocabulary or on traditional games. I have noticed that my students are less familiar with these games than they used to be in the past, which is, I guess, due to the increased use of smartphones. Through group work, these activities thus not only enhance cooperation and facilitate peer correction but also bring a temporary escape from the digital world. What is more, elements of competition in-

crease students' motivation. Every activity should contain clear rules, instructions, and the key to lead students to independent learning. Moreover, my experience shows that adding visual stimuli helps them retrieve the correct expressions. I adapted and created all the described activities to include phrases and sentences from the *Touchstone* series course-books. I used them with eleven- to fourteen-year-olds. With suitable modifications in language and level, they can suit all ages and types of learners.

Bingo (Image 1 and Image 2) is a traditional game in which the caller draws and calls out random numbers, and the players cross out those on their bingo cards. The one who first crosses out all the numbers calls '*Bingo*' and wins. In my version, the numbers have been replaced by the beginnings and endings of sentences. Produce at least twenty caller's cards, each containing a complete sentence in two parts (e.g. *Do not lean ... out of the window*). The beginnings are written in black and the endings in red (Image 1). With an online tool create up to thirty bingo cards with sentence endings in various combinations (i.e. red parts from caller's cards, see Image 2). Students play bingo in smaller groups. Every player takes it in turns to draw a caller's card from a bag. They only read the black beginning. Everyone who has the ending of the called-out sentence on their bingo card says it out loud and crosses it out. The caller checks its accuracy with the red text on the caller's card. You can play bingo with the whole class as well. In this case, replace the caller's cards with a PowerPoint presentation. To be able to reuse your bingo cards, ask students not to write on them. They can draw empty grids in their notebooks and mark their scores there.



Image 1:
Caller's cards, chunks from *Touchstone 6* (2015).

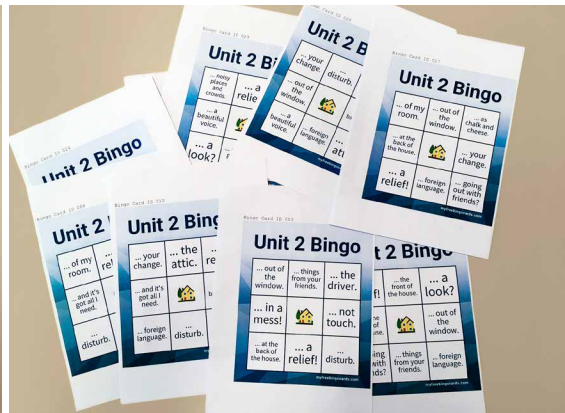


Image 2: Bingo cards, chunks from *Touchstone 6* (2015) created on myfreebingocards.com.

Black Peter (Image 3) is a traditional card game in which players collect pairs of cards with matching images. For language learning, cards contain beginnings and endings of sentences instead of images (e.g. *Do workout ... to lose weight*). You will need 10 to 20 pairs of cards and an odd one – the Black Peter. Mark the matching cards with identical icons to

ensure students collect the correct pairs. The best number of players is four to five, so you will need more than one set. After dealing out the cards, the players search for pairs in their hands and discard them. The player holding the fewest cards draws a card from the player to the left and adds it to the hand. If that player can form a pair with this new card, they discard it. In this way, the game continues until the players discard all pairs. The player holding Black Peter receives an agreed penalty. It is essential that every time the players discard pairs, they say the complete sentence out loud.



Image 3:
Black Peter, chunks from *Touchstone 9* (2015).



Image 4:
Three-Card Spreads, chunks from *Touchstone 8* (2016).

Three-Card Spreads (Image 4) is a competitive or non-competitive activity that consists of 15 to 20 sets of three cards. It has nothing to do with the original tarot card reading apart from its name. Students work in small groups or individually. They place three cards together to form meaningful sentences. Three colours mark the beginnings, the middle parts, and the endings of sentences, e.g. *To protect yourself ... indoors, ... crouch under a table*. It can be played in different ways, from simply placing the correct sets of cards that form a sentence to discarding one card from each set and trying to guess what is missing, or even like a memory game, where the players collect sets of three cards instead of pairs.

Four In a Row (Image 5) is an activity performed with a whole class. The teacher projects the grid on the whiteboard for a competition between two individuals (each with supporters in class) or two groups. In general, it is like *Tic Tac Toe*. However, the aim is to fill four slots in a row (horizontally, vertically, and diagonally) instead of three. Another difference is that a slot can only be filled if the one below is already full. To fill the slots, players follow mother-tongue instructions and form meaningful sentences, e.g. '*Predlagaj, da greste v kino*' (meaning '*Suggest going to the cinema*'). The idea is based on similar grids for a different activity in the *Touchstone 6* coursebook (Skela *et al.* 2015). You can also print the grids for pair or small-group work, but, in this case, include the key for students' self-check.

Sentence search (Image 6) is like a classic word search activity where learners search for sentences in a grid in all directions (e.g. *Nicoletta's ... day ... off ... is Sunday.*). It is used for individual, pair, or group work, either as a competition or a non-competitive exercise, printed out or projected on a whiteboard.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Reci sošolcu, naj pospravi svojo posteljo.	Povej, da imaš veliko zbirko znamk.	Povej tošolku, da ji ta oblika lepo pristaja.	Vprašaj, čigave so tiste značke.	Vprašaj sošolca, če rad košaristi.	Vprašaj sošolca, kaj zbira.	Vprašaj sošolca, kako se črnuje njegovo ime
2	Vprašaj sošolca, kakšno je njegovo kolo.	Vprašaj, katero je glavno mesto Irške.	Vprašaj pridajalko, koliko stanejo tiste nogavice.	Vprašaj, katere narodnosti je nosa slavná osoba.	Povej mami, da ta bura lepo paše k tistemu krilu.	Povej, da ne mara brati debelih knjig.	Povej, da je tonaal glavno mesto Avstrije.
3	Povej, da sta brat in sestra, a različna kot noč in dan.	Reci sošolcu, naj se ne nagiba skozi okno.	Povej, kaj imaš danes oblečeno.	Vprašaj prodajalko, ali lahko pomeniš tisti pullover s kapucno.	Vprašaj sošolca, kdaj hrani svojega hrčka.	Prijatelj se slabo počuti, Vprašaj ga, kaj mu je.	Reci sošolcu, naj ne moti.
4	Povej, da so šavbojce pretresne.	Povej, da se ti vrti.	Vprašaj sošolca, če zna plesati.	Povej, da tvoj kuža odaj rpi.	Prosi za nekaj kruha.	Predstavi se po telefonu.	Povej, da zunaal debelje in da pija veter.
5	Vprašaj sošolca, kaj počne v hip.	Vprašaj, če lahko pomeniš tiste sandale.	Predlagaj sošolcu, da gresta v kino.	Povej, da se počuti grozno.	Reci sošolcu, naj si ne izposoja stvari od prijateljev.	Opravci se, da ne moreš iti na tekmo, ker deliš nalogo.	Ponudi kosček torte.
6	Povej, da so Benelke v Italiji.	Prosi sošolca, naj prešteje svoj drobit.	Povej, da rad fotografiraš.	Prosi sošolca, naj ne moti vozmka.	Povej, da so ti te kratke hlače prevelike.	Vprašaj sošolca, koliko tet in strcev ima.	Vprašaj sošolca, koliko stane ta plašč.

This version of the game is based on the Functions Summary sections in Touchstone 6. It can be played in pairs, small groups (print out a copy for each student and provide the key for self-check) or in lockstep format (simply project the grid on the whiteboard, divide students in two groups or select two volunteers).

Image 5:
Four in a row, chunks from Touchstone 6 (2015).

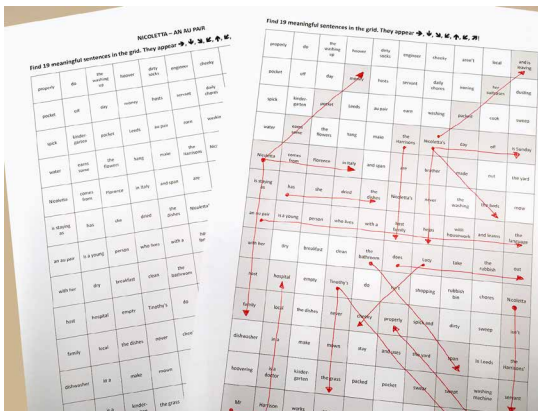


Image 6:
Sentence search, chunks from Touchstone 8 (2016).

5 Conclusion

To implement at least two essential teaching rules, i.e. motivate students and avoid boredom in class, teachers should experiment with various activities or even adapt and design their own to engage students in learning. The same principles apply to teaching a language in chunks. Even if learning groups of words rather than individual words enables learners to benefit more from learning and thus progress faster to fluency, it still needs to be an engaging and motivating classroom experience.

The activities described above originate in traditional games and standard vocabulary activities. They have been designed and modified to meet the aims of learning language chunks. They bring fun to practice and enhance motivation. My students love them and keep asking for more.

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