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Eric Atkinson

The teacher as saviour?
Mandana Arfa Kaboodvand

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Several articles in this issue consider the nature of teaching and what exactly English teachers are trying to achieve. Should we take the view that we are being paid simply to improve our students’ ability in English and nothing else, or are there other agendas, covert or overt, that also play an important part in our role as language teachers?

In our main feature, Eric Atkinson wonders about the correct measure of successful English teaching. Is it to produce fluent English speakers with near-native ability? If so, then many of us are certainly failing. If there is something else going on along the way – such as the teaching of other skills of educational value and the development of our students as people – then the ability of most students to get beyond an intermediate level in English should not be seen as a teaching failure.

Mandana Arfa Kaboodvand addresses an issue I have long hoped to see discussed in this magazine – whether it is the English teacher’s remit to ‘save the world’, in terms of teaching students to be better citizens, more environmentally aware, more morally sound, etc. If so, whose values are we to promote, and what happens when they are at odds with those of the students’ culture? And why English teachers? Why not social science teachers or geography teachers?

Michael Morgan comes down firmly on the side of using language classes to introduce serious issues and to awaken the social consciences of our students. He finds Psi’s Gangnam Style video a useful device for discussion of materialism and superficiality in society.

And if the students are to be socially aware, why not the teachers, too? Tessa Woodward explains what she has learnt professionally from campaigning for an issue about which she feels very strongly. She exhorts other teachers to embrace a cause dear to their hearts and helps them to learn from the experience of trying to do something about it.

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What exactly are we doing here?

Eric Atkinson asks if success in English is the correct measure of successful English teaching.

Well, if our students’ ability in English is the correct measure of our success, we’re in trouble. A recent report showed that the vast majority of learners of English in European schools don’t get much beyond the A2/B1 level on the Council of Europe’s CEF scale. And that’s in a region with good teachers and rich resources. But I’m going to suggest it isn’t the correct measure, at least not for those who teach English as a school subject.

Educational value

We don’t expect all learners of maths to achieve a university entrance level in the subject at the end of their schooling, neither do we expect all science students to be able to understand complex theories and conduct cutting-edge experiments, so why should we expect, or be expected, to push and harry all learners of English in schools up to a fully functional level?

We continue to teach maths and science in our schools despite relatively low levels of achievement in those subjects because we recognise that there is something of educational value in learning them. The logical thinking developed by maths and the hypothesising and evidence-based approach of science are considered important skills for a child to learn. We also need to teach maths and science to all school students to enable that percentage who are truly able in the subjects to shine forth, go on to study them in higher education and do essential jobs that require that knowledge.

Shouldn’t we be adopting that approach to English teaching in state schools? In other words, looking for and promoting the educational value of teaching the subject and using that as a measure of successful English teaching? What are the implications of this? Let’s take a look at some common activities in the English language classroom in the light of their educational value.

Activities without value

Let’s start with an activity that is still all too common in many classrooms. The teacher stands in front of the class, chants out a series of sentences and the students chant back every sentence in perfect unison. What is the educational value of this? Well, the students might strengthen their memorising skills, they may learn some discipline in dutifully remaining silent when the teacher chants, but it’s hard to think of any others. This is especially so when the sentences are unconnected and used for demonstrating a feature of grammar: I have visited Paris. John has visited Paris.
Who cares who’s visited Paris? – not very inspiring. Is there any way of rescuing this activity from its poor educational value? Well, the sentences could be sequenced to form a meaningful text with interesting content, but it’s hard to think of anything else.

What about the teacher translating texts word by word, sentence by sentence, for the students to comprehend and then asking the students to do the same, perhaps with the help of a dictionary? Well, doing the task requires a certain amount of concentration and this ability is probably being developed; the text is more than likely a complete one and may well contain interesting material; and a certain amount of research skill is being developed in consulting the dictionary, so some improvement in those areas is being made. But again, I’m struggling to come up with other, more meaningful educational benefits.

Valuable activities, more often than not, use whole, complete texts that present interesting content, which adds to the student’s knowledge of the world.

Generally speaking, the two activities described above (and other activities usually associated with a teacher-centred, grammar translation approach) are educationally poor: there is too much focus on the acquisition of discrete grammar points and unrelated lexical items – and perhaps this is as good a reason as any for stamping out the last vestiges of it. So what about activities that have the student at the centre, have real communication as a purpose and integrate a number of different skills?

Activities with value

Valuable activities, more often than not, use whole, complete texts that present interesting content: stories of scientific inventions, biographies of interesting people and articles on controversial issues, all of which add to the student’s knowledge of the world. Is it any wonder English teachers make such excellent members of pub quiz teams? They’ve spent years absorbing hundreds of snippets of information.

But there is a special content area that language teaching is especially useful for, and which perhaps should be promoted more, and that is the presenting of information about other cultures – not only the cultures of those countries where English is spoken as a first language, but all the other cultures of the world. We can learn about yak herders on the plains of Mongolia, whirling dervishes in North Africa, as well as youth culture in the UK or any other native-speaker cultural groups. So how can a teacher make the best use of this learning opportunity? Well, maybe in addition to checking that the language has been understood, an English teacher should also check if the content has been taken in. Do men and women go to the same wedding celebrations in Yemen? How was radium discovered? How many different ways do herders use the yak on the Mongolian plains? The very questions make you want to read, listen and watch.

And think of what we ask students to do with these texts:

This article contains a boy called Lorenzo, a swamp and a bulldozer. What do you think it will be about?

We are asking the students to speculate and predict. We are getting them to use their imaginations.

Find three arguments for pulling down the house and two against.

We are asking them to seek evidence and present it within a logical framework, creating connections between cause and effect.

Would Lorenzo’s family be better moving out or staying? Tell your partners your decision.

The students are being asked to evaluate, weigh up evidence, come to a conclusion and be ready to present and defend it.

What would be the consequence of Lorenzo’s family staying?

Again, the students are being asked to predict, drawing their conclusions from evidence in a text. All these great cognitive skills are being developed. And we can certainly add others: listing, comparing and hypothesising, for example. Just think of the questions that you ask your students, and what kind of thinking skills are required to answer them. How can teachers promote this kind of learning? Well, listen to the quality of thinking being presented and challenge the students to develop it: Would Lorenzo’s family really have nowhere to live? What about family and neighbours? So what is the connection between the swamp near their home and the outbreak of illness?

Working in pairs and small groups is another common classroom activity. What educational value does this have? The social skills of attentive listening, turn taking, valuing other people’s contributions and all those other aspects of politeness and respect that make living together so much more comfortable are being developed. Again, how can the English teacher make the most of this educational opportunity? Perhaps, when we do correction work, we should not just be drawing attention to how things could be said differently from a linguistic point of view, but also how they could be said differently from a social point of view. Do you think Ahmed had a chance to speak? How could you have asked that question differently to make Josef feel better? And our modelling of correct language should be accompanied by models of good social behaviour. Then thinking a little deeper, if we do decide to include developing social and conversation skills in our educational goals, perhaps working in small groups is a better way of doing this than pairwork. Doesn’t interacting with three or more people require greater social skills?

And think of all the presentational skills that a student can develop through doing English activities. Preparing a small talk on a favourite sport and delivering it in front of the class develops confidence, clear speaking, control of body and gesture and the ability to select and deliver content in a
What exactly are we doing here?

way that will interest and keep the attention of a group. Teachers should not only give feedback on language, but also on the presentation: *What was the effect on the audience of rocking backward and forward on your feet? Do you think everyone in the room heard you?* Learning to write a CV allows students to think about how to order the information and how to phrase it so it is attractive. It certainly makes them think of their audience. They want that job and they have to impress their future employers. In fact, any kind of writing will help students think of the audience and what they require, and help them present information in a way that will be most effective for the purpose they have in mind.

And then there are all kinds of drama activities that can be done in the English classroom, all of which, one way or the other, develop social and personal skills. Being the irate shopkeeper in a roleplay about shoplifting develops a student’s understanding of that person’s viewpoint. Taking part in any prepared scene makes them listen out for their cue and pay attention to the mood of an audience and generally improves concentration and focus.

Measuring success

So, if we are to use the educational value of English as a measure of successful English teaching, what implications does it have for those factors that support English teaching and learning in the classroom? Well, materials developers should look for the educational value of the work they do and design some tasks that focus on that. Generally speaking, modern materials developers do that well. School inspectors should be looking out for how well the teacher promotes overall educational development, as well as developing their students’ English skills. And perhaps most importantly, teachers should be trained to discover the educational value that can be found in teaching English, knowing all the different cognitive, social and personal skills it can develop and what techniques can be deployed to improve them – perhaps another reason to be wary of native speakers who do short four-week courses and have the temerity to call themselves ‘English teachers’. You may be able to learn a few techniques to develop English skills in four weeks and may just be able to call yourself an English ‘instructor’, but you’re never going to learn about all those other skills that a school child can and needs to learn in the classroom by studying English teaching in that short time. These can only be developed by a ‘proper teacher’.

### School inspectors should be looking out for how well the teacher promotes overall educational development, as well as developing their students’ English skills

**Testing success**

But what about tests of English? Should these involve assessment of cognitive, social and personal skills as well? Well, you may be surprised, but I’m going to say no to this. A test of English should be a simple test of what a student can do with English and how well he or she can do it. After all, it’s a test of ‘English’, and what we are saying when a person gets a mark in an English test is how well he or she can use English. And experts in language testing will tell you that you should keep the interference of non-language skills to a minimum as they can certainly mess up the results. *Did Sven get that question wrong because he couldn’t understand the text or because he’s not bright enough to do the cognitive task?* We can leave the assessment of what progress has taken place in the cognitive, social and personal areas to teachers’ observations – and the telling of this to the school report: *Agnieszka is better at deducing from evidence. Pawel is better at socialising.* Furthermore, these reports should be taken as seriously as English test results when assessing the success of English teaching.

So, should success in English be the measure of successful English teaching? Well, of course, as teachers of English, we can’t deny our duty to develop English skills, and how well we do this has to be considered as one of the measures of our success. However, perhaps we should agree that the A2/B1 level that most school students will achieve is acceptable, probably all they will ever need anyway, and add another and perhaps more important measure of how well we operate as teachers of English: that being, how well we use the subject to promote the overall educational development of our students. How well we improve their general knowledge, cultural understanding, cognitive, social and personal skills. After all, student-centred, interactive, skills-based English teaching can make such a huge contribution to a student’s overall educational development that it would seem a great pity not to acknowledge this.

Oh, and perhaps we should add to the list of success measures, how well we identify those who are capable language learners and support them in achieving true excellence. Making sure we have the next generation of multilingual business leaders, cultural and political diplomats and, of course, English teachers.

So, these have been my thoughts on successful English teaching. What are yours?

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The teacher as saviour?

Mandana Arfa Kaboodvand wonders whether language teachers are supposed to save the world.

Teachers today are sometimes conceived of as moral agents whose duties include investigating and tackling world issues and problems. Besides having competence in their own fields of expertise, they are required to display good character and conduct and to deal responsibly with whatever topics of discussion arise in their classes. Moreover, they are frequently expected to have some pre-planned agenda for the promotion of personal and social values, regardless of the age and ethnicity of their learners. These responsibilities are even more highlighted in language classes, with language teachers sometimes being viewed as the driving force behind coordination, harmony, peace and global understanding. In other words, they seem to be seen as responsible for saving the world!

There is no doubt that teaching is a social act and, in particular, the language class provides an environment where communication is encouraged through both formal instruction and informal interaction. There is also no doubt that many ‘socially responsible’ topics are actually very inspiring and teachers are generally enthusiastic about including them in their lesson plans. However, is it really part of the actual duties of a language teacher to include these topics in their classes while teaching a language? And even if this is something that teachers themselves want to do, is it a possibility for all of them? In other words, are language teachers really supposed to save the world and, indeed, can they?

What is saving the world?

The first two questions one might ask are:

- What does it mean to ‘save the world’?
- How does a language teacher know that the topics being raised in the class are relevant and can contribute to this?

Much is in dispute concerning the answers to these questions. The story behind a poem by the famous Iranian poet Jalal ad Din Rumi (1207–1273) may better illustrate the ambiguity of the answer to both of these questions and at the same time shed light on the concept.

Is it really part of the actual duties of a language teacher to include these ‘socially responsible’ topics in their classes while teaching a language?

A group of men are sent to a dark room in which an elephant is kept, but they cannot see it and they don’t know what it is. So they try to find out what it is by feeling it with their hands. The first man, having touched the trunk of the elephant, assumes that it is a water-spout. Upon touching the ear, the second thinks that it is a fan. Rubbing up against the elephant’s leg, the third one is sure that it is a pillar. And finally, the last one, who
How different people view saving the world has similarities to trying to identify an elephant in a darkened room.

By and large, teachers’ views about the world depend on their own ontological viewpoints and the environment they are working in. For example, teachers’ epistemological views will be affected both consciously and subconsciously by whether they have an interpretivist view of the world and believe in the existence of multiple realities or have a positivistic and objective outlook, looking at the world as one whole. These factors will also, of course, affect their performance in the classroom. Those who support the social structure and the primacy of social values will obviously behave differently from those who favour individual identity and the promotion of individual thought.

All in all, there are likely to be a variety of views concerning what saving the world might comprise, and it is unlikely that there will be one ‘best’ answer. Teachers are likely to promote moral and ethical values in their classes in order to promote living a better life. However, there will not be unanimous agreement about what these values might be.

**Can and should all teachers teach moral values?**

In order to illustrate the complexities of teaching morality and ethical values, there are many different aspects that need to be addressed. Teachers whose personal values are in line with the social values of the community in which they live are very fortunate. Problems arise when the social values of the community a teacher lives in are not the same as their own personal values – something which is not uncommon in many places.

It may be useful to examine the reasons for this disagreement and then look at how different teachers choose to deal with the situation and how a society might try to direct the performance of its teachers.

There are several reasons why teachers may disagree with or disapprove of at least some of the trends of the community they live in. These might include the teachers’ level and type of education, their social status, background and intellectual ability. Another important factor might be a drastic change, usually a political one, that has taken place within that community, resulting in radical changes to existing values.

**Different teachers**

Sometimes what happens is that teachers try to put their own views aside. The reasons for doing this are various and sometimes out of their control. Elements like their upbringing and/or teacher training method may, for instance, prohibit them from discussing different values in their classes. Even the way teachers view their job plays a very significant role here.

For many teachers, teaching is a just a job – not necessarily even a profession – and they need to earn their living through it. They believe that the syllabus should be covered; they want their students to pass their exams successfully; and, at the end of the day, they need the right boxes to be ticked by the school head so that they can get the pay raise or promotion they have been waiting for. They either may not want to put their jobs at stake, or may not even know of any way of doing their job other than simply covering the syllabus. They might believe that their main duty is to cover the syllabus in the best way they know and they get satisfaction from doing so efficiently and in the right time span. Even if the syllabus is bland and deprived of any social values, they do not seem to mind. In short, these teachers keep their views to themselves and simply try to follow the rules imposed by the authorities, even if they do not agree with them.

On the other hand, teachers who view teaching as a profession and not merely a job are different. They are usually intrinsically interested in teaching and look for innovative methods; they think critically, analyse and plan very carefully; they read, reflect and try to get inspiration from their experiences and from the experiences of other teachers; they care about their students and their well-being and development, not only in the subject they are teaching, but also morally. However, what they can do very much depends on the context they are working in. Sometimes they are urged to keep their views to themselves if they contradict the norms of the society at that time. Fear of losing their jobs, respect for the community’s beliefs even though they do not share them, or even a desire not to share their own views, are among the reasons for their silence. Many teachers live in challenging situations where they do not have the freedom to discuss different values. Some are fortunate enough to live in less challenging circumstances where dialogism and multiculturalism are accepted and even supported.

Still one point remains, though. What has already been said is mainly applicable to when teachers choose to discuss ethical values directly within the classroom context and while doing controlled, planned and formal teaching. In many cases, however, even if teachers...
The teacher as saviour?

have made the decision not to make their own values clear, these values will inevitably manifest themselves in their behaviour and their natural personality traits – even their body language. Most, if not all, observant students cannot fail to recognise them!

Language teachers

Why is it that language teachers are thought to be in a better position to save the world than other teachers?

The fact remains that no matter what values teachers promote, there will be some people in and out of the class who might not totally agree with what they think.

Accordingly, in order to improve their students’ knowledge of the world, language teachers should be encouraged to broaden their own knowledge and gain understanding of other cultures and societies so that they can provide the stimulus for curiosity and insight in their learners. Not only should they learn and employ a variety of teaching methods and, in the case of non-native speakers, improve their own language proficiency, but they should make an effort to learn more about the world. Attending language teaching conferences, watching movies, going on trips, reading books and stories, surfing the net, joining online communities and doing online searches can all contribute to teachers becoming more knowledgeable and more flexible, and it is very likely that they will then consider including some of this knowledge and information in their classes.

Why is it that language teachers are thought to be in a better position to save the world than other teachers?

and other communities’ cultural beliefs and values. Of course, this type of discussion may not always be welcome in the more challenging contexts described above.

One might argue that teachers of other subjects have better knowledge of the topics within their expertise, be it sociology, geography, history or whatever. This is undeniably true. However, the discussions that arise in a language class might better provide grounds for giving ideas from these topic areas an airing and generating curiosity and interest in the students. Once their interest has been raised, students may then become curious enough to undertake further investigations outside the language class and then seek the help of other teachers.

The teacher as saviour? 

The teacher as saviour?

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Oppan ELT style

Korean singer Psy’s Gangnam Style video is a supernova schema for today’s university and secondary school students studying English. Gangnam Style is not merely viral; it is the most-watched video of all time, which makes it particularly potent in an ELT class. The instant the video streams into the room, students respond to the synthesizer’s mesmerising thumps, Gangnam’s garish scenes (Gangnam is a rich district of Seoul) and Psy’s unintelligible rap (unintelligible except to Koreans). The video becomes their universe for four minutes and thirteen seconds. But there is more to their universe than first meets the eye!

A critical eye
You don’t have to be Korean to understand the Gangnam Style video – and see the subtext in it. The early scenes in the horse stable establish the Gangnam Style manner of moving as a ‘horse dance’. Barely seven seconds after leaving his equestrian inspiration, Psy and two female models emerge from a parking garage to a violent gust of Gangnam garbage. Psy’s tuxedo gets plastered with paper trash. The garbage then turns to snow. Psy and the women are snowed by their society, and it makes them wince. They cannot shake it off. Such abrupt twists in the video’s structure offer secondary and post-secondary English students of all nationalities resources to engage in critical thinking. How have they themselves been ‘snowed’ by their societies? Can they shake it off?

Students can find perspective in the Gangnam Style video, assembling their own interpretations and finding matching circumstances in their worlds. Teachers can then work in collaboration with their students, helping them give voice to their interpretations. In doing this, teachers may want to draw from Paulo Freire’s liberation pedagogy, which famously served as a guide for helping students overcome oppression during the 1970s. There is a peculiar unity between the Gangnam Style video and Freire’s liberation pedagogy. Both bring awareness of social inequality and materialism, yet both can be disarmingly absurd.

Materialism
Psy has fun in the video, but it wouldn’t be a rap video if it didn’t criticise elements of society. According to Max Fisher, during the filming of the video Psy lamented: ‘Human society is so hollow, and even while filming I felt pathetic. Each frame by frame was hollow.’ Different nations have different oppressors and different degrees of oppression. One oppressor shown in the Gangnam video is common to all: people who value things over fellow citizens and acquire wealth to the detriment of society. As Freire puts it, these oppressors want ‘to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power’. Teachers can use the Gangnam Style video to challenge students to envision their lives without the oppression of materialism or social inequality.

Students of English can be encouraged to distinguish between the meaningful and the fluff in the video:

- Avoid direct instruction and, instead, encourage your students to cull socio-economic comparisons for themselves from what they see. It is your task, as the teacher, to operate the audio-visual technology for streaming the video, pausing it, replaying scenes and pausing it again when the students spot something they want to discuss. For example, a student might want to pause the video when the sequence with a stylish red Mercedes-Benz appears. A discussion might then begin, with the students estimating the car’s price tag and then agreeing on its degree of flashiness. This may lead to them wondering whether they are pursuing their educational goals in order to afford that car.
- Ask the students to recall a purchase that they regretted, and write their examples on the lower half of the board, labelling them Material goods.

Michael Morgan liberates his pedagogy with Psy.
Above these examples, write the following sentence: ‘A host of careful studies suggest that across-the-board increases in our stocks of material goods produce virtually no measurable gains in our psychological or physical well-being.’ (This is a quotation from Robert Frank’s book Luxury Fever.) Ask the students to take their own examples of material goods and think of them in the context of the sentence. Then replay the Gangnam Style video. The video offers a kaleidoscope of material goods that dazzle but, in the end, bring about no gains in well-being. On the contrary, they leave people feeling hollow.

Conduct a metacognitive follow-up one or two days later by asking your students to explain what they hope to do after graduation. I have had students who wanted to help their countries achieve some kind of social equality by, for example, helping women or the poor. No one has mentioned pursuing an education to buy a Mercedes!

Inequality

Psy’s send-up of materialism and superficiality in the Gangnam district of Seoul, South Korea, provides abundant resources for students of English to analyse and apply to their own society in written or spoken commentary. At one point in the video, Psy and friends board a merry-go-round. Nothing looks merry except for the plastic horses, which are merely painted to look merry. Around they go in circles, literally and figuratively. Explication of Seoul’s affluent Gangnam district is not necessary. Students everywhere can relate to Gangnam Style’s ‘problem-posing’ visuals. The important thing is the students’ understanding of oppression where they live and their ideas for liberating themselves and others from what prevents them from being more fully human. Every student knows a ‘Gangnam’ in their country. From the consumer insanity of Tokyo’s price-insensitive Ginza shopping district to Venezuela’s plastic surgery beauty schools that carve girls into future Miss Universes, gross reality can be unveiled by students in every society. The existence of Bollywood’s Film City in Mumbai and Hollywood’s Red Carpet in Los Angeles cloak the reality of Mumbai’s grinding poverty and Los Angeles’ soaring crime rate. The visual ambiguities in the Gangnam Style video allow students of every nationality to reflect on oppressive conditions in their own lands.

Absurdity

There is some absurdity in both Gangnam Style and liberation pedagogy, and one needs to maintain a sense of humour in dealing with it. Psy’s lyrics are undeniably vapid. In fact, South Korean journalist Shin Hyo-seop thinks the Gangnam Style lyrics are so silly they are not worth translating. Here is a sample, so you can judge for yourself:

I’m a guy
A guy who seems calm but plays when he plays
A guy who goes completely crazy when the right time comes
A guy who has bulging ideas rather than muscles
That kind of guy

Nevertheless, the vapidity of Psy’s lyrics works to the advantage of an English class. Students can write serious stanzas that talk about their realities in a way that has meaning for them – substitutes for the Gangnam district exist in cities throughout the world. Two Asian students in my class composed lyrics showing tension developing in their affluent district between a street famous as a luxury shopping destination and the ‘black taxis’, unlicensed taxis operating illegally to scam unsuspecting shoppers.

In one line, Psy gently jokes about young, pretentious women: ‘A classy girl who knows how to enjoy the freedom of a cup of coffee.’ This joke belongs distinctively to South Koreans. It refers to young women who save money eating cheap noodles for lunch so they can splurge on ultra-expensive coffee. Those are the only weighty lyrics in Psy’s rap, but I am not complaining. As a Westerner, I am amazed to hear a rap song – currently the most famous rap song in the world – without the mandatory misogyny of Western rap music.

Pedagogy

The Gangnam Style video is at once cute and cutting. It can be used by teachers and students to enlighten English education in classrooms throughout the world. Try Googling prestigious schools of higher education with ‘liberation pedagogy’ to see what specific courses are offered. They probably go by names like ‘pedagogy in action’ or ‘education for liberation’, but the descriptions show Freire’s theories embedded in them. To see how 21st-century students in North America transform their education through liberation pedagogy, see the article ‘Transformational experience through liberation pedagogy: a critical look at honor education’ by Mihelich, Storrs and Pellet.

Gangnam Style’s popularity comes from its song, dance and video scenes. The song and dance are youth entertainment. I am not youthful enough to be entertained by the song or the horsey dance: I find them annoying. However, I find the oppression of social inequality and materialism unacceptable. Gangnam Style’s video scenes can be used to trigger student awareness of problems relating to themselves and others in their societies. This awareness makes it not impossible for social change to occur.

How far should students be allowed to go with the Gangnam Style video and liberation pedagogy? Should they theorise about social change? Actualise a social movement? Let the students decide. To paraphrase Confucius (Kong Qiu): ‘The superior student knows what is right; the inferior student knows what will sell.’

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Michael Morgan has been involved in English language teaching since 1984. He taught EAP in Asia before returning to work in his hometown, Detroit, USA. Since 1997 he has been the Coordinator of the American Language and Culture Program at the University of Detroit Mercy.
A common feature in coursebooks these days is the instruction: 'Discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.' Usually these discussion tasks come at the end of a section when, hopefully, the students have had a chance to find out something about the topic and start to formulate their own opinions.

Coursebook writers generally go to a good deal of trouble to try to come up with stimulating questions. Nonetheless, these discussion questions can often fall rather flat.

Sometimes this is because the students still don’t know enough about the topic – or simply can’t relate to it. You may need to add your own input on the topic which will help them to see how it relates to their lives. Or you may just be using the wrong book for this group of students.

Assuming that the students do have something to say about the topic, how can you make the most of the discussion questions and turn them from a seemingly optional add-on to a key part of the lesson?

Appropriate timing
Having to plunge straight into a discussion can be quite threatening for students. So why not give them a few minutes to look at the questions and think about what they’d like to say first? You could also ask them to think about any vocabulary from the lesson that they could use to answer these questions.

Alternatively, you could try getting your students to have the conversation on paper first. This may sound a bit odd if the aim is discussion, but writing a discussion and passing the paper back and forth will slow the processing time right down, giving the students the opportunity to push themselves a bit harder to come up with exactly what they want to say. You can then follow this up by swapping pairs, and asking them now to have an oral conversation about the questions.

As well as providing more processing time, this approach also uses task repetition, which, as Martin Bygate points out, has been shown to improve the quality and quantity of students’ spoken language.

Appropriate language
Giving students processing time can help them to gather together the language they know, but it won’t help if they don’t have the language to hand.

As well as giving them time to plan, you could give your students more support in reviewing topic-based vocabulary by either eliciting words and...
Putting them up on the board, or giving them out on little cards. Students could then decide together which words could be used to answer which question, before they start the discussion.

Alternatively, you could give out one word-card to each student, who has to make sure that they use the word on their card during the discussion. To make it a little more challenging, you could specify that they have to keep their word secret and try to slip it in without anyone noticing. This means they have to use it really naturally. If a group member thinks someone else is attempting to slip in their word, they can challenge them.

Often in discussion tasks, however, it is the actual language of discussion which students need most. Think about useful phrases for giving opinions, giving reasons for your opinions, giving examples to back up your opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, interrupting politely, asking for clarification, and so on.

Although your students may know these kinds of phrases, they won’t always use them in the middle of a discussion, so try introducing a game-like element to encourage their use. One possibility is to put the phrases you want the students to use onto small cards and divide them between the members of a small group. As they speak, they have to try to use the phrases on their cards and, as they do so successfully, they can discard the card. The other members of the group judge if the use was successful, and if they think it wasn’t, the card gets handed back. (Thanks to Antonia Clare for that last twist.)

It may be rather stilted and artificial at first, but the more students use these phrases and hear them used, the more likely the phrases are to enter their long-term store of language and come to be used more and more naturally.

Concrete tasks

One of the practical problems with discussion questions is that what you hoped would be a nice ‘meaty’ discussion, taking up the last 20 minutes of a lesson, trails off within a couple of minutes. ‘Finished!’ they cry, and your heart sinks.

Part of the reason for this is that discussion questions don’t tend to have any concrete outcome. By making the questions into a task, with a final outcome, you can add to motivation – and ensure the students aren’t finished before you’ve returned to your desk!

Try turning the questions into a survey. Either ask your students to select the question which most interests them, or allocate a question to each student and ask them to ask their question to as many people as possible in the class. They should take notes and then be ready to report back to the class at the end. Obviously, this then provides more speaking practice, and can be particularly helpful for shy students because they have had a chance to prepare what they are going to say in public, rather than suddenly having to produce ideas under pressure.

Alternatively, turn the discussion questions into statements (some positive, some negative) and dictate them to the students. The students have three columns on their page (agree, agree and disagree, disagree). They have to write down the statements as they dictate them in the appropriate column. This is, of course, also good for working on recognising features of connected speech and sound–spelling correspondences.

Discussion questions shouldn’t just be seen as an optional add-on for the last few minutes of the lesson

Once they have written down all the statements, they have to find someone else in the class whose choices are the closest to their own. They should then sit down with that person and discuss why they chose to put the statements in those particular columns. Of course, you could also ask the students to find someone whose choices are as different as possible from their own – particularly if you want to encourage a bit of healthy argument within a well-bonded group.

Another approach, if the students know each other quite well and you judge they can take it, is to ask them to look at the discussion questions individually and write down what they think their partner’s answer will be. They can then discuss the questions and see if their assumptions are correct. This should provoke a lot of extra discussion along the lines of ‘Why did you think I’d say …?’

Competitive tasks

As well as making the task more concrete, introducing an element of competition can help to motivate students, especially teenagers, to express their opinions. We’ve seen some examples of this earlier, with the words and phrases on cards, but the following activity is more overtly competitive. It works very well with questions which ask for advantages and disadvantages, but is fine with any type of discussion question.

Put the students into two teams. Give them the first discussion question. Someone from Team A must give an opinion in order to win a point. Then someone from Team B must counter their argument, saying, ‘Yes, but …’ or ‘That may be true but …’, etc. A different person from Team A may counter if they can and points are awarded, like tennis, until a team ‘drops the ball’ (they can’t respond in any meaningful way).

You may also like to establish the rule that each person in a team can only speak once per round, thus pushing everyone to participate. Smart students will also quickly see that it’s easier to be one of the first to speak, when there are lots of fresh arguments – which, again, should encourage participation.

Ultimately, we want our students to be able to use language productively and creatively, and discussion is a key way to provide them with a chance to do this, as well as the opportunity to review and recycle language from the lesson or unit. So, discussion questions shouldn’t just be seen as an optional add-on for the last few minutes of the lesson, but as something with much more potential value. Try some of the ideas above and see how you can maximise the impact of this often overlooked section of the coursebook.
In Issue 87 we outlined our ideas on getting students to notice the characteristic features of academic discourse. Here, we offer sample activities, structured into five sections, placing the onus on the noticing of topic sentences, supporting sentences, concluding sentences, text coherence and text cohesion.

**Topic sentences**

Initially, the teacher should provide the students with several paragraphs (see the example below) and get them to identify and look carefully at their topic sentences. The students can then be put into pairs and asked to discuss the position, function and impact of these topic sentences. Finally, the teacher discusses the paragraphs with the class. Students should be able to recognise that a topic sentence is commonly a one-sentence general statement that usually comes first in a paragraph and that summarises the main points. For example:

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*There is empirical evidence to suggest that soft drugs are harmful to the human body. According to a longitudinal study carried out by Professor Wilson from the University of Cambridge, drug users show impaired concentration, memory and learning skills. The study shows that 69% of students who regularly take soft drugs tend to score significantly lower on all university examinations than their non-addicted peers. In turn, Professor Smith from the Medical Academy in Edinburgh observes that soft drugs cause blood pressure to increase when a person is lying down, and then blood pressure abruptly falls when the person stands up, causing dizziness. Furthermore, recent research (eg Hanson, Venturelli & Fleckenstein, 2012) reveals that marijuana increases the heart rate by about forty beats per minute, which can lead to a heart attack or sudden death. From this evidence, it is clear that soft drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs."

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Alternatively, the teacher can provide several paragraphs with the topic sentences removed and ask the students either to choose the best topic sentences from several options (and justify their choices) or to write their own topic sentences. For example:

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*According to a longitudinal study carried out by Professor Wilson from the University of Cambridge, drug users show impaired concentration, memory and learning skills. The study shows that 69% of students who regularly take soft drugs tend to score significantly lower on all university examinations than their non-addicted peers. In turn, Professor Smith from the Medical Academy in Edinburgh observes that soft drugs cause blood pressure to increase when a person is lying down, and then blood pressure abruptly falls when the person stands up, causing dizziness. Furthermore, recent research (eg Hanson, Venturelli & Fleckenstein, 2012) reveals that marijuana increases the heart rate by about forty beats per minute, which can lead to a heart attack or sudden death. From this evidence, it is clear that soft drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs.*

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Handoyo Puji Widodo and Andrzej Cirocki suggest some sample activities.
a) People say that drugs are dangerous to the human body.
b) There is empirical evidence to suggest that soft drugs are harmful to the human body.
c) Drugs severely harm the human body and therefore people should avoid them.

If the students were asked to choose the best option from a to c, the answer should be b, a sentence which contains the major thought of the paragraph and lends itself to development. As can be seen, all the sentences that come after the topic sentence develop the idea expressed in the opening sentence of the paragraph in question. In addition, topic sentence b succinctly conveys its message and avoids the use of ‘vague’ words.

The above activities are designed to train the students to recognise what constitutes a good topic sentence. To make the activities more interesting, the teacher may allow the students to work in pairs or groups so they can share their answers or negotiate their responses with one another.

Supporting sentences

In the following activities, the students focus on supporting sentences in given paragraphs. The teacher can provide students with several paragraphs and ask them to underline the key elements. Finding key words and phrases draws the students’ attention to the supporting sentences. The students should be led to an awareness that supporting sentences tend to move gradually from the general to the specific and that their function is to explain the idea expressed in a topic sentence. The students should be encouraged to include good examples, specific names or provable numbers in their own supporting sentences in order to make their paragraphs more effective. It is essential that students have a chance to see how certain sentences support particular topic sentences. Here is an example, where all the underlined key phrases support the idea that drugs are harmful to the human body.

Carried out by Professor Wilson from the University of Cambridge, drug users show impaired concentration, memory and learning skills. The study shows that 69% of students who regularly take soft drugs tend to score significantly lower on all university examinations than their non-addicted peers. In turn, Professor Smith from the Medical Academy in Edinburgh observes that soft drugs cause blood pressure to increase when a person is lying down, and then blood pressure abruptly falls when the person stands up, causing dizziness. Furthermore, recent research (eg Hanson, Venturelli & Fleckenstein, 2012) reveals that marijuana increases the heart rate by about forty beats per minute, which can lead to a heart attack or sudden death. From this evidence, it is clear that soft drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs.

The teacher can also provide paragraphs without supporting sentences, but with lists of key words which the students can use to complete the paragraph by writing their own supporting sentences. The students should be reminded to avoid digressions, and always stick to the point; otherwise, they will lose the unity of their final product. They should be encouraged to draft medium-length paragraphs, not exceeding 200 words. The teacher should demonstrate how long paragraphs are unlikely to maintain the readers’ attention and impede recognition of unifying themes and ideas.

Activities which promote the noticing of the function and structure of supporting sentences serve the purpose of drawing the students’ attention to the fact that relevant sentences are needed to support, explain and develop the ideas contained in the topic sentence.

Concluding sentences

In the following activity, students identify concluding sentences in given paragraphs. They need to recognise that concluding sentences are not just restatements of topic sentences, but also echo the information presented in the preceding paragraph and ensure smooth transitions between paragraphs. The teacher should first provide the students with ready-made paragraphs and ask them to select the most appropriate concluding sentences from the options provided.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that soft drugs are harmful to the human body. According to a longitudinal study carried out by Professor Wilson from the University of Cambridge, drug users show impaired concentration, memory and learning skills. The study shows that 69% of students who regularly take soft drugs tend to score significantly lower on all university examinations than their non-addicted peers. In turn, Professor Smith from the Medical Academy in Edinburgh observes that soft drugs cause blood pressure to increase when a person is lying down, and then blood pressure abruptly falls when the person stands up, causing dizziness. Furthermore, recent research (eg Hanson, Venturelli & Fleckenstein, 2012) reveals that marijuana increases the heart rate by about forty beats per minute, which can lead to a heart attack or sudden death.

a) From this evidence, it is clear that soft drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs.
b) Drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs.
c) Therefore, drugs should be avoided at all costs.

Next, the teacher can supply the students with a few paragraphs which have no concluding statements. The students are asked to complete the paragraphs with appropriate sentences. This activity is highly recommended because it combines careful, analytic, reflective and critical reading with writing simple and precise sentences. If the students learn how to write good concluding sentences in their own work, they will be able to convince their readers of the accuracy of the given information.
Coherence

Coherence is one of the most crucial aspects of academic writing. Coherence refers to how all the sentences in a paragraph work together to strengthen a topic sentence and how the relationship between them connects the ideas in a logical order to generate meaning. In order to help students to understand the concept of coherence, the teacher should provide them with examples of coherent and incoherent paragraphs and indicate what makes some of them puzzling. Here is an example with some irrelevant sentences marked in blue.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that soft drugs are harmful to the human body. According to a longitudinal study carried out by Professor Wilson from the University of Cambridge, drug users show impaired concentration, memory and learning skills. Professor Wilson is a well-known academic in the UK. The study shows that 69% of students who regularly take soft drugs tend to score significantly lower on all university examinations than their non-addicted peers. The results of this study were published in the Journal of Medical Research in 2010. In turn, Professor Smith from the Medical Academy in Edinburgh observes that soft drugs cause blood pressure to increase when a person is lying down, and then blood pressure abruptly falls when the person stands up, causing dizziness. Furthermore, recent research (eg Hanson, Venturelli & Fleckenstein, 2012) reveals that marijuana increases the heart rate by about forty beats per minute, which can lead to a heart attack or sudden death. Despite the health risks, drugs frequently lead to domestic violence. From this evidence, it is clear that soft drugs have a detrimental impact on human health, and therefore should be avoided at all costs.

Alternatively, the teacher can jumble all the sentences or ideas in the paragraph and ask the students to arrange them in order. The aim is to get the students to see how supporting sentences strengthen the topic and concluding sentences. Subsequently, the teacher can get the students to work in small groups and analyse a new set of paragraphs in terms of coherence. This can be done as a competition, with the winners being the group that succeeds in identifying all the incoherent paragraphs first. Finally, the winners must justify their choice to the class.

Cohesion

In this last noticing-oriented activity, the students concentrate on the concept of cohesion. Cohesion refers to explicit, formal lexico-grammatical ties within a text. Cohesion creates the readability of a text and affects the comprehensibility and clarity of the arguments in a particular piece of writing. Textual cohesion can be achieved through the use of conjunctions (eg in fact, on the contrary, similarly), references (eg pronouns, demonstratives) and lexical relations (eg doctor – diagnose, nibble – cheese, rodent – mouse).

In the activity below, textual cohesion is based on the use of appropriate connectors that tie clauses and sentences together. The students are asked to complete the text with the following items: but, as, and, first of all, in fact, if, for example, since, but and in other words. Teachers can construct alternative activities based on other cohesive devices. (The excerpt has been taken from Stephen Jay Gould’s ‘Were dinosaurs dumb?’ published in Natural History in 1978.)

I do not wish to deny that the flattened, minuscule head of the large-bodied ‘stegosaurus’ houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective, _____ I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. _____, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, _____) is remarkably regular. _____ we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, _____ not so fast as body size. _____, bodies grow faster than brains, _____ large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. _____, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. _____ we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. _____ we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs in particular.

The activities described here are intended to focus on various aspects of structuring effective paragraphs for ‘argument essays’. They address a range of important issues, which teachers should take into account while teaching writing skills in order to help their students recognise the intricacies of academic writing. With the step-by-step approach suggested above, students can become writers who are capable of tailoring their writing to particular academic conventions.
Motivating the unmotivated

Kate Bokan-Smith believes student motivation starts with the teacher.

Why do teachers often struggle when it comes to engaging students and promoting interest in the English language classroom? What can they do to motivate their students and maintain a healthy, positive classroom environment? While there is not one perfect answer for all teachers and all classroom situations, I believe it is essential that teachers first look at their own motivation and perceptions of learning before attempting to encourage important learning values in their students. If teachers themselves can justify the purpose of the lesson and the value of the content, then this could provide students with a stronger reason to come to class.

Writing about motivating adolescents, Patricia Hardrée and David Sullivan stress the influential role of the teacher’s actions on student motivation. They encourage teachers to be aware of both the design of the classroom learning environment and the type of relationships they have with their students. Their account of how teachers can motivate students includes both a ‘situational strategy and an overall motivating style’. The degree to which teachers are supportive or controlling, promote autonomy or are authoritative, determines the level of comfort and motivation in the classroom. If a teacher is either too keen on student autonomy or too controlling, this can upset the delicate balance which is needed for teachers not only to introduce rules and expectations, but also to promote communication and curiosity among the students. Students should feel comfortable being asked questions and discussing challenging ideas in the language classroom. Some teachers may draw away from encouraging their students to ask questions, but I have found that by encouraging more questions, not only does the conversation become richer, but also the students respect the teacher more (even teachers are allowed to say: ‘I don’t know the answer … let me check for you!’). A teacher who doesn’t claim to know everything and models good learner behaviour will go a lot further than a teacher who pretends to know everything.

Setting the tone

Teachers first need to set the tone of the learning environment before introducing specific learning activities and motivating strategies. If the teacher establishes an environment where autonomy is encouraged and creates a supportive atmosphere, students will be more likely to react positively and want to take part in the learning. I have found that the secret to engaging the students lies in taking the time to listen to their needs, finding out their own personal motivations for learning a language and getting their feedback on what works and doesn’t work for them as individual learners.

Encouraging communication

Teachers with multicultural classes can try having students from different countries sit next to each other. This promotes conversation in the target language (regardless of topic) and creates interest in the students’ peers. This way, students from the same country cannot speak in their native language and leave other students feeling awkward or left out. If the students are all from the same country, teachers could try using pair- and groupwork in which the students need to communicate (hopefully in the target language as much as possible). Promoting communication, engaging students through groupwork and allowing them to voice their interests and needs will allow the teacher a better opportunity to create lessons that tailor to the needs of
Motivating the unmotivated

the students rather than to their own preconceived ideas of what their students may or may not want to learn.

Knowing your audience

Teachers should also examine their own ideas of motivation and what they believe to be the key ingredients of a successful lesson. Once a teacher has created a lesson plan, it is recommended that they discuss it and share their ideas with other teachers. Teachers should never be afraid to get feedback from colleagues, even those from different areas of study, because they can offer a fresh perspective and new insight to a lesson. In my own experience, the most successful lessons often come not only from personal ideas, but also from colleague feedback and student opinions. Since students are the target audience for all language lessons, it only makes sense that teachers try to accommodate their audience as much as possible, rather than themselves.

By now, many teachers may be asking: What makes a lesson motivating? The answer is that it depends on your students! If students have certain interests, it is important to cater to them. For example, if the students are mostly adolescent boys from Australia, a teacher might not achieve an interested class of students by using the topic of traditional bridal customs in India!

Learning through movement

It is good to promote movement and interaction in the language classroom. The idea of involving movement comes from James Asher’s Total Physical Response (TPR) theory. This theory uses physical movement as a reaction to verbal input in order to reduce the students’ anxiety and stress over working in a new language. It also allows the students to react to language without ‘overthinking’. This strategy aids students who tend to shy away from participation, because it allows them to be actively involved without being the centre of attention. TPR can be used when learning vocabulary in any foreign language. For example, the teacher can ask the students to touch physical objects in the classroom, walk in a certain style or manner (practising adverbs), interact with a partner and take an active role in the learning environment. This method positively shifts the classroom from a static setting into a malleable, flexible space – perfect for creative learning and interaction. The more students interact, move physically and connect those movements to the language, the more positive student engagement and motivation could be.

Useful motivation strategies in the language classroom

- Determine the purpose of the lesson and communicate it (‘sell it’) to your students.
- Encourage creativity, communication and curiosity.
- Set the tone in the classroom and be aware of your teaching style.
- Encourage autonomy; this will create a more positive classroom environment than if you are a controlling teacher.
- Encourage communication from all your students. Try different types of activities in pairs and groups as well as whole-class discussions. Only allow students to use the target language, if possible.
- Encourage the students to learn the language through physical movement; this can be fun and encourages even the shy students to participate in the activity.

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TALKBACK!

By showing the difference between the principles and the reality of teaching in most English teaching contexts, Steve Brown in his article ‘Let there be light’ (ETp Issue 85) emphasises the need to let spontaneity and unpredictability into the classroom.

From my teaching experience, I know that during each lesson there are quite a few precious ‘learning moments’ which have not been included in a lesson plan or a coursebook. If we are focused entirely on following our lesson plans, we are likely to miss those important moments as well as our students’ instant reactions and the spontaneous language which emerges during the lesson.

I go along with what the author says: that there is no one ‘best’ method of teaching. Teachers should be able to select (from a wide array of methods) and mix together those which will suit their students’ needs. I also agree that syllabuses and other documents, which state mainly which language points should be covered, have nothing to do with genuine learning. Too much planning and sticking to a coursebook limit the creativity of both teachers and students. By not allowing any unpredictability to take place in the classroom, planning ‘kills’ spontaneity, which, in fact, a real conversation is about.

Changing the direction in teacher training towards one which gives more space for unplanned situations or spontaneous reactions would encourage teachers to improvise, create more real-life situations and, consequently, more learner-centred lessons.

In addition, instead of worrying if they have done everything as planned, teachers should pay more attention to creating the right atmosphere and building relationships in the classroom. It will surely open students’ minds to the language, increase their confidence and, as a result, foster learning. After all, we must realise that teaching and learning are about relationships, which no plans or syllabuses take into consideration.

Anna Marciniuk
Siedlce, Poland
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The final goal of teaching English to children should be to enable them to interact in real-life situations. To achieve this goal, teachers must decide whether to teach grammar or not. If they decide to teach grammar, the next question is how to do it. A number of experts provide useful insights which can help us to make the right decisions.

What is grammar?

Before deciding whether to teach it or not, we first need to define the term grammar. What do we mean by grammar? For this question, there is more than one answer.

Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy define grammar as the part of language which is concerned with acceptable and unacceptable forms and the distinctions of meaning these forms create. According to Scott Thornbury, grammar is a description of the rules for forming sentences, including an account of the meanings that these forms convey. For Mary Spratt and her colleagues, grammar is that aspect of language which describes how we combine, organise and change words and parts of words to make meaning. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes the grammar of a language as the set of principles governing the assembly of elements into meaningful labelled and bracketed strings (sentences).

Even though there are many definitions for grammar, there seems to be agreement that the term does not only refer to form, but also to meaning.

Should we teach grammar?

There are two main points of view regarding the formal instruction of grammar. Some experts argue that it is unnecessary, while others argue that a student cannot become a competent user of a language without receiving formal instruction in grammar.

According to Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell, students learn grammar as part of the acquisition process and therefore formal instruction in grammar does not play an important role in developing language competence. However, Krashen’s rejection of formal instruction of grammar in ELT classrooms has been questioned by grammarians such as Scott Thornbury, Diane Larsen-Freeman and Rob Batstone, among others.

Scott Thornbury puts forward several arguments in favour of teaching grammar. First, he explains that grammar is a kind of sentence-making machine which offers students the possibility of limitless linguistic creativity. Second, he mentions the ‘fine tuning’ argument: since grammar allows for greater subtlety than just words, formal instruction of grammar would serve to avoid ambiguity. Third, he offers the ‘fossilisation’ argument, which claims that learners without formal instruction of grammar may be at risk of error fossilisation sooner than those who receive formal instruction. His fourth argument, the ‘advance organiser’ argument, suggests that the study of grammar may have a delayed effect because it can help students notice how native speakers use the same grammar structures that they have studied in class. Fifth, he gives the ‘discrete item’ argument: teaching grammar helps make language digestible because students learn discrete items instead of a mass of language. Thornbury’s sixth argument is the ‘rule of law’ argument: that grammar offers a structured system that can be taught and tested in methodological steps.

Diane Larsen-Freeman also provides a number of arguments in favour of teaching grammar. To begin with, she mentions that the conditions of learning are different when learning a foreign language: students learning English as a foreign language are usually exposed to the new language for only a few hours a week. For her, motivation, attitude and aptitude are important aspects to be considered and she claims that teaching grammar effectively can help all students, not only the gifted and motivated ones, learn a foreign language.
Finally, Rob Batstone believes that 'by focusing on particular grammatical forms and their associated meanings, we can help learners to develop their knowledge of the grammatical system, and the meanings which it helps to signal'.

Taking all this into consideration, we can conclude that there is a good case for the argument that formal instruction of grammar does play an important role in the development of communicative competence.

**Grammar and young learners**

If we agree that grammar plays an important role in the development of communicative competence and that its formal instruction is necessary, then the next question is when and how we should teach grammar. Should it be taught only to teenagers and adults? Should children be excluded from receiving grammar instruction?

As language teachers, our aim should be to help children communicate successfully in the target language. If this is our goal, there is no reason to exclude them from grammar instruction. However, it is important to remember that grammar should not be taught explicitly, because young learners are not cognitively ready for abstract explanations. Another key aspect to remember is that activities should be motivating and appropriate to the students’ age and level.

Rob Batstone proposes a three-stage model that can guide the process of teaching grammar. The three stages are noticing, structuring and proceduralisation. The teacher needs to plan each stage carefully to help young learners become competent in English.

**Stage 1**

In the noticing stage, the teacher provides opportunities for the learners to see a particular structure and appreciate the relationship between form and meaning. To do so, teachers create contexts where there is a real need for communication. According to Lynne Cameron, noticing activities have the following characteristics: they support meaning as well as form; they present the form in isolation, as well as in discourse and in a linguistic context; they contrast the form with other structures which are already known; and they require active participation from the learners. Noticing activities should be at a level of detail which is appropriate to the learners – a series of noticing activities may 'zoom in' on specific items. In this stage, students notice the structures but don’t yet manipulate them.

**Stage 2**

In the second stage (structuring), controlled practice is introduced. The teacher designs activities in which learners have the opportunity to practise certain grammatical patterns, but which do not ask them to express their ideas freely. As Wendy Scott and Lisbeth Ytreberg put it, activities of this kind provide ‘the basis for oral work, but do not always produce “real” language at once’. It is important to give young learners sufficient opportunities to practise the new language. However, repetition should be done through different meaningful and motivating activities. Lynne Cameron proposes the use of questionnaires, surveys, quizzes and drills. If the teacher decides to use drills, these must require more than simple repetition. Scott Thornbury advocates adding repetition and variable substitution drills to imitation drills. In repetition drills, one element is replaced each time, and in substitution drills, the response varies according to a series of prompts. This structuring stage is important because students are actively involved in manipulating structures to express meaning.

**Stage 3**

In the proceduralisation stage, the learners can express themselves in a more natural way. The activities must, however, be designed so that the target grammar pattern is crucial to convey meaning. Activities such as descriptions which require specific grammatical structures provide opportunities for more spontaneous use of grammatical forms to express meaning. Batstone argues that it is through proceduralisation that learners organise their knowledge in such a way that it can be activated quickly and efficiently in communicative tasks.

Grammar is essential to convey meaning. Teachers can help young learners become more competent in English by designing activities which move from noticing grammar patterns (and the meanings they convey) to those which practise the structure in controlled conditions and, finally, to activities which require the correct use of the target structures to participate in real-life communication.

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Echo, echo, echo ...

Nicholas Northall tells us to beware of repeating what our learners say.

Is echoing always a bad idea?

Echoing can be used effectively as an error-correction tool. When something is said incorrectly, the teacher can echo the mistake using questioning intonation. Jeremy Harmer believes that when teachers echo the incorrect part of a student’s utterance they can pin-point the error by emphasising the wrong part. For example:

Student: I’m going home in Saturday.
Teacher: You’re going home in Saturday? (with emphasis on in)
Student: Oh, I’m sorry; I’m going home on Saturday.

Harmer concludes that echoing is ‘an extremely efficient way of showing incorrectness during accuracy work’.

Is the teacher repeating what I’m saying because I’m not saying it correctly? This could also result in the students’ losing the motivation to speak, as they become afraid to open their mouths.

Interaction patterns become teacher centred.

Jim Scrivener argues that echoing has a dramatically negative effect on the interaction patterns within the classroom. This problem becomes even more serious when the teacher echoes the responses in student–student interactions, as in this example:

Student 1: Where do you come from?
Student 2: I’m from Japan.
Teacher: She’s from Japan.

With the teacher repeating everything that is said, the students might quickly forget that there are other students in the classroom. In other words, they might simply focus only on the teacher, thus creating a teacher-dominated classroom, in which the teacher always has to have the last word.

Teacher Talking Time increases.

Who is getting the most speaking practice here, the students or the teacher? For example, if the teacher asks, say, five students what they did at the weekend and echoes all of them, each student will only speak once, while the teacher will speak at least five times.

There is less time for other activities.

When the teacher repeats everything, the pace of the lesson slows down as everything is said twice. This could mean less time for other activities, such as reading, listening, groupwork, etc.

How can I stop myself echoing?

First of all, teachers need to be aware that they are actually doing it. The next time you teach, think about every time you repeat what your students are saying. If this is hard to do, try recording yourself with a video or audio recorder. You can then watch or listen to yourself after the lesson. Another way would be to persuade a willing colleague to observe you and make a note of every time you echo. Ensure that whatever method you choose, you make yourself not only aware of how much you echo, but when during the lesson you repeat your students, eg whilst eliciting, when giving instructions, etc.

Once you are aware of how much and, indeed, when you echo, you need to take control of it. Again, this can be hard, but with practice it should become easier. Try to force yourself not to repeat what your students are saying. Write a note telling yourself not to echo and put it on your desk – or even on the wall.

Remember, every time you echo, you are taking time away from your students. By reducing your echoing, you will give them more talking time and more time to do other activities and they will start listening to each other. This should result in a more learner-centred classroom, where students are not afraid to speak as they know their teacher values and respects their efforts.

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Over the wall ...

Alan Maley looks at how to live life.

What do we mean by ‘a good life’, and how do we go about living it? This is one of the central questions of all philosophy. And amid the pressure and pace of modern existence, it takes on even more significance, which doubtless helps to explain why the bookshop shelves are overflowing with self-help books on how to be successful, happy, fulfilled, etc. But the books I am discussing below are not in the category of self-help manuals – far from it.

Help

In fact, the first – Help by Oliver Burkeman – offers a devastating critique of the self-help genre, delivered in a delightfully humorous and irreverent style. The basic (and self-contradictory) premise of all self-help books is that we need their help. The assumption is that we are all in some way inadequate: not happy enough, not healthy enough, not efficient enough, not attractive enough, not rich enough, not gregarious enough, not clever enough … so we need help. And self-help books are there to provide it. So Burkeman obligingly takes us through the back lanes and dead-ends of popular psychology as expressed through such manuals and systems. His first chapter debunks the clichés of self-help: Finding your passion, Making fresh starts, Focusing on your goals, Instant personal magnetism, etc. He points out that ‘reading lists of things to do is often a seductive way to avoid doing them’. Subsequent chapters cover Emotional life, Social life, Work life, Productivity, Mental life, Everyday life, Gurus, God-men and other questionable characters. The last chapter offers extensive and very useful references to further reading and resources. This is a wise and a fair book. He does not dismiss every idea out of hand, but acknowledges their value – when they have one. Essentially, however, his message is that we are responsible for ourselves, and no self-help book will change that; that before deciding to change something, we should make sure it needs fixing; that we should have modest expectations and not go for radical and unrealistic action; and that we should be kinder to ourselves. If you are looking for texts for conversation classes on critical thinking, there is plenty here to feast on.

How to Live

Sarah Bakewell’s superb book is difficult to categorise. It is certainly not a self-help book. Neither is it a straightforward biography. Rather, it is a delightful stroll through the life, times and writings of the remarkable man who was Michel de Montaigne, with excursions into philosophy, history and human psychology. The initial question is How to live? and the 20 chapters which follow offer, not so much answers, as insights drawn from various aspects of Montaigne’s life and his essays. Here are the chapter titles:

Don’t worry about death, Pay attention, Be born, Read a lot, forget most of what you read, and be slow-witted, Survive love and loss, Use little tricks, Question everything, Keep a private room behind the shop, Be convivial: live with others, Wake from the sleep of habit, Live temperately, Guard your humanity, Do something no one has done before, See the world, Do a good job, but not too good a job, Philosophise only by accident, Reflect on everything; regret nothing, Give up control, Be ordinary and imperfect, Let life be its own answer.

It is hardly surprising that Montaigne enjoys the reputation he does, given the fact that readers will always find themselves reflected in what he writes.
His originality lay in the fact that he wrote about himself, including his faults and failings, in such an open and disingenuous manner that we cannot resist following him in his meandering through whatever topics took his interest. He has a protean quality: the whole of life is there, endlessly fascinating and engaging. Whether he is writing about his own near-death experience, speculating about his cat’s feelings, describing his unimpressive personal appearance, reflecting on the difficulty of achieving marital contentment, describing the habits and customs of American Indians, detailing the pain of his kidney stones, or lamenting the death of his beloved friend La Boétie, we are drawn into the stream of his consciousness by the warmth and frankness of his manner. His writing is full of paradox and contradiction, yet happily aware of the fact, and accepting them willingly. He lived through one of the most violent periods in French history, when indescribable acts of cruelty were routinely committed, and when plague regularly decimated the population. Yet somehow he survived it with his integrity and humanity intact. His message of moderation, scepticism, suspension of judgement and getting on with life is all the more relevant in our troubled times.

Learning to Dance

Learning to Dance by Michael Mayne is in many ways an admirable book. Each of the 12 chapters is centred on a month of the year, and starts with a lyrical evocation of nature in that month. The chapters then go on to explore, through reflection and a wealth of quotations (the book is worth reading for the quotations alone), scientific issues such as the Big Bang, Evolution, DNA, the brain and the cosmos, and psychological and human issues such as identity, consciousness, suffering, ageing and belief. Basically, the book is an extended apologia for Christianity, written in an attempt to reconcile religion and science, while exploring ‘what it means to be human’. Not everyone will buy the Christian message, of course. Michael Mayne makes two main assertions: that the complexity of the cosmos is the work of a divine and unknowable intelligent creator; and that the problem of an omnipotent God who does not prevent pain is not a real problem, because ‘the world of suffering is a necessary context for growth towards God’. I, for one, find his arguments unconvincing, and he certainly makes some unjustifiable and extreme claims: ‘The God who reveals himself as Christlike is the only God on offer.’ ‘... a God who ... before all else desires that we should desire him.’ If that is truly the case, then give me Buddhism any day! Many readers will doubtless find that a spiritual sense of awe at the wonder of nature and the universe does not require them to sign up to a particular brand of religious belief. However, the book is still well worth reading; it is beautifully written and offers almost unlimited scope for critical thinking classes.

The Age of Absurdity

Michael Foley’s book is an attempt to analyse the many ways in which contemporary life gets in the way of happiness. He does this by trawling through ‘philosophy, religious teaching, literature, psychology and neuroscience for common ideas on fulfilment ...’. But this is by no means a dull book – it is feisty, full of humour at the many absurdities which characterise our lives. What makes fulfilment impossible is the modern sense of boundless wanting, the sense of entitlement and the avoidance of effort. The new trinity is: ‘I must succeed’ ‘Everyone must treat me well’ and ‘The world must be easy’. In the meantime, ‘We can’t sit still. We can’t shut up. We can’t escape self-obsession. We can’t stop wanting things’. Foley’s argument is that fulfilment only comes about through endless effort. It does not grow on trees. As he rightly points out: ‘If we could feel good without effort, we would no longer feel good.’ And our effort is worthwhile for its own sake, even if it does not appear to be ‘successful’, because ‘the search for meaning is itself the meaning’. The key common concepts which turn up repeatedly in all the fields he draws on are ‘personal responsibility, autonomy, detachment, understanding, mindfulness, transcendence, acceptance of difficulty, ceaseless striving and constant awareness of mortality’.

The down-to-earth message of the book will not be welcome to many ears, but it is realistic and far from boring. I have now read the book three times and each time found more things to reflect on. As language teachers (and learners), we know that learning a language is a long and difficult process. These books are a salutary reminder that, in this respect at least, life is very much like language learning!

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A few years ago, after many years as a journalist, I took a full-time job at a two-year community college, teaching freshmen how to write essays and basic research reports. I was excited about the prospect of teaching the elements of good writing to college students, most of whom were the first in their families to attend college. Many were the children of immigrants, or were immigrants themselves, and had learnt English as a second language.

I thought I was prepared for the big career jump from newsroom to classroom. As a long-time newspaper reporter, I knew how to gather information, synthesise it and explain it to an audience quickly and clearly. I also had experience as an adjunct professor at a both a public and private university, albeit as a journalism instructor, not as one teaching composition. Brazenly, I thought to myself: What more do I need to know?

Remember the audience

My first mistake was not engaging the students immediately. Students came into my journalism courses with some interest in the subject, even if it was only because they wanted to be the next Carrie Bradshaw, the columnist on the TV show Sex and the City. Not so with the students in English Composition, which was a required course for every student in the college, whether they were majoring in history or studying a trade such as landscape design. As a result, the students had varying degrees of interest in the class. Reaching back to my ink-stained origins as a member of the press, I realised I should have known better. I had violated a basic tenet of journalism: never forget the audience.

The classroom was my audience now, and in my struggle to do my job, I decided to use what I knew about journalism to teach my students how to write reports and essays.

Find an angle

Using the news to help students is not new. In academia, journalism is already a recognised form of expository writing, as evidenced in English composition textbooks like The Prentice Hall Reader by George Miller, which features essays from journalists such as Bob Greene and Anna Quindlen. Additionally, many newspapers in the United States participate in the ‘Newspaper in Education’ programme, which has an excellent reputation for informing students about important topics, such as the state of health care in the US or the repeal of capital punishment. However, the ideas I used in class were not quite as lofty. Instead, in true tabloid tradition, I decided to use the stuff of cocktail conversation and water cooler chatter – or perhaps I should say the stuff of tweets and blogs. I brought to class novel, in-your-face news stories to engage the students. Then I used the tools of journalism to demonstrate how to develop those ideas into academic

In true tabloid tradition, I decided to use the stuff of cocktail conversation and water cooler chatter – or perhaps I should say the stuff of tweets and blogs.
From newsroom to classroom

reports and essays – or, as they say in newsroom parlance, I showed the students that the news topics had ‘legs’.

The approach is hardly academic, but tabloid-style news was one way to get the attention of my audience, a generation who are used to brash, reality television. YouTube video and tweeting in 140 characters or fewer. The essays we had been reading in our textbook were literate and sometimes even provocative, but they did not always resonate with the younger generation. Part of the problem was generational, I think. I loved discussing an essay by William Least Heat Moon about his journey travelling around the United States, meandering into forgotten places, such as a town in Tennessee called Nameless – an essay rich in detail, description and dialogue.

In journalism, stories require an ‘angle’ that will catch the reader’s attention in our fast-paced world

Responded to the titbit with more interest than I had seen them display in any of our textbook essays. One student asked why he was wearing a dress. Another wanted to know about his legal rights. We had a discussion about whether the young man had a legal right to wear the dress, which led to a discussion about free expression. One student pointed out that the school had the right to a dress code. That sparked a lot of discussion and questions that required research. Did the dress code specifically ban cross-dressing? Could the school board pass such a ban? In some places, public school students are banned from wearing religious symbols such as Muslim headscarves or Christian crosses. Could the United States make that kind of law?

Tabloid-style news was one way to get the attention of my audience, a generation who are used to brash, reality television

Making connections

The subject of the boy in the dress was also relevant to the students’ lives. First, he was a student and also from the local area. David Pegram maintains that making a connection to students’ local communities gives assignments context and meaning, as it did in his own classroom when he asked his students to write a research paper based on a real problem in the local community: ‘It is a mode for students to properly use research as a tool for solving real-life problems with creative-thinking skills.’

Students who already enjoyed reading and writing appreciated it, but for those less interested, it was slow-moving and so detailed that it lost their attention.

Least Heat Moon’s essay may have been too subtle for the less interested students, something tabloid journalism definitely is not. In journalism, stories require an ‘angle’ that will catch the reader’s attention in our fast-paced world. In tabloid journalism especially, the angle is often so outrageous it hooks the reader and lures them into continuing reading.

One article that caught the students’ attention was about a local teenage boy who was suspended from school for wearing a dress. Apparently, the young man had lost a bet with his buddies that required him to wear dresses to school for a week. I decided to mention the dress story to the class, simply as an ice-breaker to start the lesson one morning. To my utter surprise, the students responded to the titbit with more interest than I had seen them display in any of our textbook essays. One student asked why he was wearing a dress. Another wanted to know about his legal rights. We had a discussion about whether the young man had a legal right to wear the dress, which led to a discussion about free expression. One student pointed out that the school had the right to a dress code. That sparked a lot of discussion and questions that required research. Did the dress code specifically ban cross-dressing? Could the school board pass such a ban? In some places, public school students are banned from wearing religious symbols such as Muslim headscarves or Christian crosses. Could the United States make that kind of law?

Develop the writing

The students instinctively asked the key questions that every reporter asks to get information for a news story, and that is who, what, where, when, why and how – known in the news trade as ‘The five Ws and H’. This journalistic technique is itself a form of problem-based learning, according to Lynette Sheridan-Burns: asking who, what, when, where, why and how – the underpinning of every journalistic story – ultimately creates a puzzle for the students to solve. The approach utilises several skills at once, taking into account such factors as audience needs and ethical considerations, all of which require participants to engage, to evaluate, to seek answers and to reflect critically.

Brainstorming

The active questioning is also a form of brainstorming, a strategy that Zhenhui Rao believes helps develop writing skills. Rao showed that while students often experience difficulty developing ideas and forming a viewpoint, those who brainstormed were more successful at the task. The writing was better too: ‘Essentially, writing is a way of expressing thinking and good writing comes from good thinking. Before students start writing something, it is reasonable to offer them opportunities to think so as to have a sober reflection about the topic in question. This is an absolutely necessary stage at which students activate prior knowledge and skills to apply to the writing task and find out what information they already obtain and what they still need.’

The students instinctively asked the key questions that every reporter asks to get information for a news story, and that is who, what, when, where, why and how
Organising

The classroom conversation often got heated, and in the excitement it would have been easy to fall into the so-called ‘discussion trap’, never getting into the actual work of writing. Instead, I used the discussion to inspire the students to formulate arguments and opinions. In their research, Marleen Kieft, Gert Rijlaarsdam, David Galbraith and Huub van den Bergh found a strong beneficial relationship between planning what to write and better writing outcomes.

During the discussions, I used the whiteboard to write down points made in class, noting how easily the students had just developed the makings of a very interesting, informative and argumentative report or essay. The class was then told that they were going to write a report or essay based on the key points by finding further details and examples to support their arguments. We discussed how to research the points, once again using ‘The five Ws and H’ to explore topics in a deeper way. The basic ideas developed in class created a skeleton structure for an essay.

The structure lesson then led to discussion and lecture opportunities on other elements, such as how to organise essay points and how to write transitional sentences to connect paragraphs. The students then had to write their essays or reports, based on everything they had covered in the lessons.

Later, they used the news to find further ideas to research and write a five-page research report, using the Modern Language Association (MLA) academic style.

Don’t forget the grammar

While I limited the use of the ‘G-word’ – grammar – we did have to address it. My purely anecdotal research showed that some students are downright ‘grammar-phobic’. Students’ perceptions of what they consider a confusing multitude of irrefutable grammar rules can hinder their ability to look at English as the wonderful communication tool that it is.

The news articles we discussed in class were jumping-off points for some lively discussions. The students were surprised to learn that many reporters do not know the more complicated rules of grammar. All journalists, however, are required to know their way around a sentence. Rather than overwhelm the students with rules, I introduced them to the books that reporters use, including William Strunk and E B White’s *The Elements of Style* and William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well*. Considered bibles in journalism classes, both offer basic commandments, such as ‘write in the active voice’ and ‘use precise, direct language’.

The news articles we discussed in class were jumping-off points for some lively discussions, and often led to substantial topics for future essays and research reports. The students were taught how to research, organise and write, all using the news. While tabloid journalism is clearly not part of the canon, countless generations of immigrants in the United States have learned to read and write English by reading tabloids or listening to the news. It’s a small step, then, to using today’s newspapers and websites to teach a new generation to write better prose. Of course, the final step – the writing – remains the hardest work.

Ultimately, I had to advise my students to ‘just do it’. Writing is not something that students can learn simply by taking notes and memorising – although both of these study skills can aid the process. Writing is a synthesis of many skills. As Frank Gannon said in 2001 in an essay in *Harper’s Magazine* entitled ‘English 99: Literacy Among the Ruins’, writing is ‘an activity more than something that can be studied. You don’t learn it, you learn how to do it’. Research from scholars such as Rao and Sheridan Burns supports Gannon’s thoughts. Writing is a process that needs a plan to produce a product. Using news techniques gives students an activity and framework to develop ideas into reports and essays. It is a start, but then, as always, the final job for the student is just to sit down and write it.

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Pat Winters Lauro

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

All the contributors to It Works in Practice in this issue of ETp will receive a copy of World Stories, published by Macmillan. Macmillan have kindly agreed to be sponsors of It Works in Practice for this year.

Visitors to hell

This is a wonderfully fun and effective activity for getting the students to use the present continuous. The class is divided into two groups – two families: one is a noisy family and the other is an untidy family. The students are told that they are going to receive guests but it’s so unbelievably noisy/untidy in their place when the guests arrive that they have to think of a number of good reasons to explain to their visitors why it is so noisy or untidy. You can set a time limit for the two families to brainstorm and come up with their lists of excuses.

Then they take turns to receive guests – the noisy family receives the untidy one and vice versa. After the initial greetings, the hosts have to say things like: Sorry it’s so noisy – our little daughter is learning to play the trumpet or Our neighbours are having a birthday party or We’ve just bought a new washing machine, etc. The families take it in turns to receive each other until they run out of good reasons.

Of course, this activity can be used to practise structures other than the present continuous. Just tell the students when they are brainstorming their list of reasons what the target structure is that you would like them to include.

For homework, you can ask them to write down all the good reasons that the other family came up with to explain the noise or mess.

Nataliya Potapova
Uzhhorod, Ukraine

Podcast news for business English

The business world changes every day, so keeping up-to-date with what is going on is essential for business people and would-be managers of the future. Even articles in the latest coursebooks can quickly become dated – especially if they are about a company which then goes bust. A good way to keep abreast of happenings in the world of business is with podcasts. They can be streamed from the net or downloaded as MP3s. Here are some ideas for exploiting them in the business English class, followed by a list of some good sites for sourcing business-related podcasts:

1. Use them as extensions to the lesson topic. Ask your students to find and make notes on a podcast related to a company which they have learnt about in class. This is akin to updating the coursebook, as the students are essentially bringing the reading or listening about company X up-to-date.

2. Use them to replace the coursebook. Simply use a podcast instead of the listening in the book. You can then ask the students what may have changed since the book was written.

3. Play a language lab listening version of ‘Find someone who ...’. Tell the students a topic or company you want them to focus on and give them ten minutes to find, listen to and make notes on a relevant podcast. Then ask them to mingle, explain their podcast and write down what other people say about the podcasts they listened to. If they find they’ve listened to the same one as the student they are talking to, they must ask for their partner’s opinions on it. With a higher-level class you can ask the students to find links between their story and all the others. For example: My company has already gone bankrupt and yours is losing money and may go bust in the future. The first to find a link between their story and all the rest wins.

4. Get the students to create their own podcast archive and follow the stories as they develop.

5. Post a podcast link on the class wiki and ask the students to discuss it over the week. They could also work together to create and correct a document in response, such as a letter, report or email.

6. Record weekly student podcasts on a ‘topic of the week’ or put the students into groups and allocate each group a different business topic on which they record weekly news podcasts. They can also interview other people and groups.

Here are some good podcast sites:

- www.businessweek.com
- www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/bizweekly
- www.smallbizpod.co.uk/entrepreneur-podcast-highlights
- http://podcast.ft.com
- www.london.edu/videoandaudio/podcasts.html
- www.ibizradio.com
- www.businessenglishonline.net/resources/podcasts (These ones are specifically produced for ELT and are about business topics.)

Phil Wade
La Réunion, France
To craft, or not to craft?

The idea of planning activities using paint and glitter can fill some hard-working English teachers with dread. I have the luxury of being able to teach craft with English in a CLIL environment for two-hour sessions, but less fortunate teachers may have some questions to ask ...

**Question 1: But what about in my daily classes?**

Timing and (a little) preparation should be taken into consideration, but knowing you are making a lesson memorable for your students makes it worth it. An added bonus is that you can decorate your classroom at the same time. Craft also adds a different dynamic to the lesson, developing the students’ curiosity in the lesson topic – and it can be fun, too.

**Question 2: But what about time, effort and materials?**

Use the materials available where you work (paper, whiteboard pens, card if provided, etc) and use accessible materials that are free or inexpensive (paper plates, toilet rolls, pegs, etc).

Create easy projects that can be re-used for revision purposes and which are useful for the daily classroom environment. For example: pelmanism games, mini-books, alphabet/number displays.

You can find instructions for lots of craft projects, including a pelmanism game (good for vocabulary practice), mini-book (writing and drawing new lexis) and displays for different festivals (to make classroom decorations, greetings cards, revision games, etc) at [http://craftwithjack.blogspot.com](http://craftwithjack.blogspot.com) (look in the ‘Training sessions’ section of the site). These are all very basic ideas – but easy, effective and great for revision. Here are some examples of revision games involving Easter eggs – it doesn’t have to be eggs; you could use other festival images (eg Christmas trees) or other shapes (eg circles, squares, fruit or animal shapes):

**Easter egg revision games**

**Materials**
Card, scissors, glue, colours, string, pegs

**Procedure**

1. Use a stencil like the one opposite to produce egg shapes on thin card. Get each student to cut out one egg. (Cut them out yourself for very young students.)

2. Get the students to decorate the eggs with crayons, strips of wrapping paper, stickers, etc. They can add their names if they wish.

3. Put a large number (from 1 to 6) and a common letter of the alphabet on each egg. These could be drawn on or printed on paper and cut out and stuck on.

4. Peg the eggs to the string and display them in the classroom.

5. To play the revision games, use dice or number/alphabet cards (these can be flashcards or random pieces of card with numbers or letters on that students choose like a ‘lucky dip’) for the students to take turns to get an egg.

**Question 3: But what about ensuring success?**

Always do the project first yourself, so the instructions are clear and in order, and so that you identify and anticipate any possible problems.

For the inexperienced, steer clear of glitter and ‘Santa’ projects using cotton wool and glue!

Happy crafting!

Jacqueline Toon
Seville, Spain
Most of us have probably had the experience of studying for exams at some point in our lives, using various study strategies with varying degrees of success. Exam timetables often play a part in this, with the luckier candidates having their exams spaced out over a period of a few weeks, while others end up with two exams on the same day. The candidates with the exams all bunched together will generally study for them all in parallel, so each day they will revise three or four different areas. In contrast, students with their exams more spread out often focus solely on whichever one is coming up next. The questions we are interested in are:

- Which students do better on exam day?
- Which students retain more in the long term?

Research

When I was at university I was often one of (what we considered) the lucky ones, who had their exams widely spaced out, so I could focus on one at a time. It makes more sense, after all, to focus on one thing at a time so we don’t confuse ourselves. Friends of mine who had exams on consecutive days, or even two on the same day, would be envious, and I’d have to put up with a fair amount of ribbing, but in the end we all did more or less as well as each other. So, in answer to the first question, I would say that it’s not always easy to see a difference. The second question is more relevant to this article (and to most teaching contexts), and research has shown that the students who study several different areas at once will in fact be the ones who retain the most.

Robert Bjork, whom I mentioned in my article in ETp Issue 87, has found that learning several things at once, which he calls ‘interleaving’, leads to better retention than studying them one at a time. The study most cited to support this approach was conducted with workers from the British Post Office being taught to type. Researchers found that a group being taught for one hour per day learnt as much in 55 hours as a group being taught for four hours a day did in 80, and the first group also did better in a follow-up test six months later. In this study, the first group were considered the interleavers, as they were doing more things between their study sessions, while the second group were more exclusively focused on studying typing.

Numerous other studies have had similar results, based on both skill and concept learning (see the links at the end for citations and a fascinating video interview with Bjork). I want to highlight one study in particular that best illustrates the benefits of interleaving. The subjects were shown a series of paintings by different artists, and then shown a further painting and asked them to identify which artist had painted it. The first group of subjects were shown several paintings by one artist, then several by another, then another, and so on (a ‘blocked’ approach), while the second group were shown the same paintings, but alternating between the different artists (an interleaved approach). The second group were much better able to remember the other paintings they had seen and thus identify correctly the creator of the final piece.

A final point of interest: in both the studies I’ve described, the subjects were asked how happy they were with the approach. In both cases, those experiencing a blocked approach felt they had learnt more than those who had been exposed to interleaving, despite results showing the opposite to be true. This is perhaps not surprising – as we said, focusing on one thing at a time makes more sense to us than jumping around trying to learn everything at once. The key point for me (from the video interview) is that while blocked practice can lead to equivalent or better short-term performance, interleaved practice leads to better learning.

Reality

The point about performance versus learning is an important one. Students will obviously use their own performance as a basis for assessing themselves. But how often do we, as teachers, assess the success of our lessons based on student performance in a final free-practice activity at the end of a lesson, rather than going back and looking at long-term retention weeks or months later (and I don’t mean just by giving the students a multiple-choice test)?

The reality is that while we might realise that blocked practice doesn’t help in the long run, it is easy to use this approach inadvertently on our students, especially when following coursebooks that proudly trumpet their sequenced/step-by-step/building block, etc approach. Of course, anyone reading this magazine is likely to realise the importance of adapting the coursebook, using the progress tests and reviewing material regularly, but this is interleaving old material – new material is still generally taught in blocks.

This is reinforced by the typical lesson frameworks, such as PPP or Test-Teach-Test, which are all based around the idea of introducing and practising one language point in one lesson. So what can we do?
Alternative approaches
By basing your approach around topics, texts or tasks rather than language points, you can focus briefly on whatever language happens to come out of them. Many items will come up again and again in later lessons, allowing you to focus on them again, leading to naturally distributed practice. Dogme is probably the most famous example of this kind of approach.

Alternative lesson frameworks
Instead of PPP, how about P¹P²P³? This means that in each lesson we expose the students to one language point (Presentation), teach another explicitly (Practice) and use a third more authentically (Production). This way, the students encounter new language items distributed over parts of three lessons rather than the whole of one lesson.

Alternative curriculum models
Jack Richards describes a ‘spiral sequencing’ curriculum, which returns repeatedly to previously-taught items to ensure repeated practice. An approach like this means that the items encountered first are encountered the most, so you might start the course with the more complex ones.

Opposite, you will find a framework to help you plan a similar syllabus (completed with a couple of examples), incorporating the spaced repetition approach, which, as well as distributing practice (and including a final review after the suggested P¹P²P³ framework), uses increasing amounts of time between each encounter, something which research suggests to be more effective than using a fixed interval.

Richards, J C Curriculum Development in Language Teaching CUP 2001
http://bjorklab.psych.ucla.edu/research.html
www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-1K61BalIA

Magnus Coney completed his CELTA in 2005 and, since then, has worked in the UK and Italy. He blogs occasionally at www.learningcentredteaching.wordpress.com and is currently working on his first course as a CELTA tutor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson (date)</th>
<th>P¹ topic</th>
<th>P² topic (next lesson after P¹)</th>
<th>P³ topic (two lessons after P²)</th>
<th>Review (three lessons after P²)</th>
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<td>Present perfect for unfinished events</td>
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<td>2 (08/07/2013)</td>
<td>Giving advice</td>
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<td>4 (22/07/2013)</td>
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one of the challenges of trying to use corpora to inform materials development is that many corpora are not easily searchable, nor are they accessible to all teachers for free. Even those that are accessible require a lot of effort on the part of the teacher in deciding how to make use of them. Categorising words into useful transferable sets can be time-consuming and, at the same time, it can be difficult to know which words match the level of the students. This is particularly true with words that have multiple meanings. Recently, I was using www.textutor.ca to help me grade a reading text for an exam I was writing. At this website you can paste in a text and it will highlight the words in three different colours, showing whether each word is in the list of the 1,000 most common words, in the 2,000 most common, or in the Academic Word List. One word that was highlighted as coming from the list of the first 1,000 most common words was basin. In my text, the word occurred as part of the collocation river basin – and surely in this context it is not one of the most common 1,000 words in English. In this case, I could make a fairly easy judgement that this meaning was likely to be ‘above level’ for my students, as the collocation had the effect of moving the word basin away from its more common meaning. When we take a word with significantly more meanings, such as call, how can we decide which meaning matches the level of our students? Take these sentences, for example:

1. For more information, call this number: 0862 410919.
2. Are you calling me a liar?
3. Two months later, the baby girl was born and she called her Mary.
4. I keep the bedroom door open in case the children call for me in the night.
5. My friend is called Jessica.
6. The organisation is calling for a ban on guns.

It is quite a challenge to decide which meanings we would want to prioritise at a particular level. One very useful corpora-based resource that can help teachers do this is the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP), which has been produced as part of English Profile and is available through their website: www.englishprofile.org.

English Profile is a collaborative research programme, ratified by the Council of Europe, that aims to describe in detail what the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) means for the English language. It involves Cambridge English Language Assessment, Cambridge University Press, the University of Cambridge, the British Council, the University of Bedfordshire and English UK.

The EVP has been created by extensively researching the Cambridge Learner Corpus, a vast collection of learner examination scripts from around the world. Of course, the language in this corpus is limited by the question types in the exams and restricted to the language that learners produce under test conditions. However, the EVP has been further informed by the Cambridge English Corpus, a multi-billion-word corpus of spoken and written English, and various other sources, such as coursebooks and vocabulary lists, were used as well.

The EVP tries to solve the issue raised earlier of words with multiple meanings. It assigns CEFR levels not just to words themselves, but to each individual meaning of these words. So, if we think back to the earlier sentences using the different meanings of the word call, we can use the EVP to find out that in sentence 5 call has a meaning an A1-level learner is likely to know. See if you can guess the CEFR level for each of the other uses – the answers are at the end of the article.

The fact that the EVP allows you to sort and search words in various ways, or to browse all the words in an entire CEFR level, can help you plan your vocabulary syllabus in a more systematic way, something that Paul Nation argues is often poorly done. Helpfully, there is also an advanced search function that allows you to search by topic – for example, animals, body and health, clothes – and shows you the relevant words and phrases at each CEFR level.

The photocopiable worksheet and lesson plan on page 39 uses the topic area of the EVP to create a B1-level worksheet around the topic of crime. Most of the words are ones you would expect a B1 learner to know, but some B2 words (eg eyewitness, weapon, emotional, investigation, consequences and bomber) have been included as they sit well thematically and will provide more challenge for some of the stronger learners in a class. This lesson would work well with students who have recently practised past tense narrative forms.

**Answers**

A1  A2  B1  B2  C1  C2

**Louis Rogers** is a Course Tutor at the University of Reading, UK. He is the author of @Work (intermediate and elementary levels), published by Richmond, and co-author of Oxford EAP (B1+), published by OUP, and Skillful Reading and Writing (Level 2), published by Macmillan.

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It really worked for me!

Did you get inspired by something you read in ETp? Did you do something similar with your students? Did it really work in practice?

Do share it with us...

helena.gomm@pavpub.com
Memory: Lesson plan

1 Write the following questions on the board and ask the students to discuss them in pairs.
   a) How good is your memory on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = terrible and 5 = excellent)? Give an example to support your score.
   b) How do you remember different things, such as phone numbers, directions, birthdays and facts for an exam?
   c) If you saw a thief with a knife stealing a bag from someone, how well do you think you could remember the thief and exactly what happened?

2 Give the worksheet below to each pair of students and ask them to work through the exercises.
   **Answers to worksheet exercises**
   2 b) 3 a) prison b) weapon c) crime d) witnesses/eyewitnesses’ e) jump
   4 a) crimes, murderers b) eyewitnesses c) criminals
   5 **People:** criminal, police, eyewitnesses, detectives, police officers
   **Events:** crime, attacked, killed, arrest, murder, investigation

3 Show a short video clip from a popular TV programme or movie in which a crime is committed. Obviously, do not choose one that is inappropriate for the age of your learners. Play the clip and ask the students to pay as much attention to the events as possible. Afterwards, ask them questions to test their memories. Include questions focusing on visual elements, such as What colour shirt was the criminal wearing?

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**Worksheet**

1 **Work with a partner and do the following activities.**
   a) Take turns to tell your partner about something interesting that happened to you this week. Give as many details as possible.
   b) Swap partners with another pair of students. Tell your stories again to your new partner.
   c) Write down the story you were told first in as much detail as possible.
   d) Speak to the other student who heard this story. How similar are the stories?

2 **Read the text and decide which of these statements is true.**
   a) People have good memories.
   b) Lots of people believe they have a good memory.
   c) The witnesses were correct about Jean Charles de Menezes.

You were out late one night when you saw a crime happening. Someone was attacked. The criminal had a knife and the person was killed right in front of your eyes. Now the police want to speak to you. So what did you see? Research tells us that you probably won’t remember much.

Police rely on people who see a crime to provide information that will lead to the arrest of the criminal, but memory might not be very reliable. Unfortunately, people don’t often remember exactly what happened.

3 **Read the text again and complete these sentences.**
   a) Sometimes people are sent to ___________ because of information given by eyewitnesses – and this may not be accurate.
   b) When a murder happens, people pay attention to the ___________ not the person.
   c) Questions from detectives who are investigating a ___________ can change people’s memories.
   d) Research suggests that the police may be able to change ___________ memories by suggesting they have seen things that weren’t actually there.
   e) Jean Charles de Menezes didn’t ___________ the barrier.

4 **Answer these questions using the underlined vocabulary in the text.**
   a) What events might detectives want to investigate?
   b) Who might detectives want to interview?
   c) Which people might the police arrest?

5 **Divide the underlined words in the text into people and events.**

6 **Create a set of vocabulary cards for any of the new crime words from this lesson. Include: a translation, a sentence showing the use, any collocations you can find in a dictionary, the word family, the pronunciation.**
Think differently? Think different!

John Potts charts the intricacies and idiosyncrasies, the contradictions and complications that make the English language so fascinating for teachers and teaching. In this issue, he thinks we should re-think our thinking.

Along with McDonald’s I’m lovin’ it, Apple’s Think different must be one of the most talked about advertising slogans of recent times – and certainly much talked about by English language teachers.

Some say it’s grammatically incorrect, since think is a verb and should be modified by an adverb – Think differently, therefore. Others say that it’s perfectly correct, because although think is clearly a verb, the slogan does not mean how we should think, but what we should think of. Consider this comment from an online grammar discussion forum:

‘... when my boyfriend says “I know you want to redo the kitchen, but what do you want it to look like?” and I reply “Think rustic French countryside”, I’m not telling him how to think but what to think of – an image or concept – a noun, rather than an adverb.’

The pattern think + noun is well established. Journalism is replete with the formula think + illustrative example, as in this wine review from the Portland Monthly website:

‘This wine is creamy and lush with sweet spices – think cinnamon, cloves, and allspice – and ripe berries, like a late-summer fruit cobbler in a glass.’

Reviewers sometimes take the formula to the next level, inviting to us to imagine two very different genres or cultures juxtaposed: ‘Think “The Matrix” meets Jane Austen.’

Working on this article, I half-remembered an advertising campaign from some years ago that used Think pink! as its slogan. Some internet research then turned up the 1957 film musical Funny Face (starring Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn) with these wonderful lyrics:

Think pink! Think pink! When you shop for summer clothes.
Think pink! Think pink! If you want that quelque chose.
Red is dead, blue is through,

Green’s obscene, brown’s taboo.
And there is not the slightest excuse
For plum or puce ...

As in Apple’s slogan, the pattern here is think + adjective (rather than think + noun, as found in the earlier examples). Here’s an example which puns on both patterns, from an article on a San Francisco website about the London shirtmaker, Thomas Pink: ‘Thinking tailored shirts? Think Pink.’

I can’t imagine anyone arguing that the ‘correct’ version of the song lyrics should be Think pinkly, which takes us to the meaning of the verb think itself. In all the examples so far, think has the sense of imagine, think in terms of, put yourself into this (pink) frame of mind, use pink as your reference point, etc, rather than simply cogitate or use your brain.

Taking a different tack, we could also argue that think + adjective could be considered a form of ellipsis: think (of) pink (things/clothes, etc), or think of (something) different. This would tie in nicely with the subtext of the Apple slogan, which we could paraphrase as: When you think of computers, don’t think of our boring, unimaginative and predictable competitors – think of something completely different! After all, the slogan was coined to accompany a 1997 campaign featuring the images of ‘game-changers’, ranging from Einstein to Muhammad Ali.

Interestingly, the copy text that accompanied the campaign was entirely conventional in its grammar: Here’s to the crazy ones. The rebels. The troublemakers. The ones who see things differently. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius.

More than one media and/or marketing commentator has noted that the potential grammatical ambiguity of Think different, and its apparent subversion of grammar norms (shouldn’t it be Think differently?) contributed to the success
of the campaign (which won the 1998 Emmy award for best commercial) – the slogan itself made people think differently.

However, Apple wasn’t the first company to ask the public to see things differently. Volkswagen did the same in the USA in 1959, with its Think small campaign. This campaign, considered one of the best of the twentieth century, worked in a way very similar to Apple’s in that it jolted the audience into actually thinking about the product. At a time when American cars were huge, and thinking big was the norm, it seemed counterintuitive to ask people to do the opposite: by doing just that, it worked.

From a language point of view, it didn’t have the subversiveness of Apple’s slogan: no one then or now will want to correct it to Think smally. (As a side note: although smally does exist as an adverb, it is almost obsolete these days in the sense of small in physical size. It does retain the sense of ‘low in volume’: ‘All these noises came up to the two on the tower smally, as though they were listening through the wrong end of a megaphone.’) By the same token, nobody would ever dream of saying that we need to think bigly.

And to come full circle, I found this 1978 example from National Geographic magazine in the Oxford English Dictionary entry for think: ‘When people think apple ... they usually think red.’ That’s a different sort of apple, of course, but nevertheless again we find think + noun and think + adjective.

It’s always good to personalise grammar: I know that I don’t eat enough fruit and so, in my case, as I don’t really like apples very much, I’m going to think mango and think healthy from now on.

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

Congratulations to all those readers who successfully completed our Prize Crossword 58. The winners, who will each receive a copy of the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, are:

Bastien Ashard, Saint-Étienne, France
Maria Grazia Gentili, Follonica, Italy
Philip Gibson, Cardiff, UK
Martín Serrano Huguet, Moncofar, Spain
Natalya Inokhodtseva, Ulyanovsk, Russia
Heikki Koski, Turku, Finland
Gabriel Richet, Maurepas, France
Francesca Senatore, Castrolibera, Italy
Mengmeng Tang, Cardiff, UK
Piotr Wozniak, Bushey Heath, UK
Treacherous trees
We in Europe are threatened with dieback. Not us, personally, you understand – our ash trees! I fear that I ought to whisper that I am probably the only European who can’t wait for the disease to reach my part of the UK!

Why? Because the ash tree is one of the most devious plants I have ever come across, and come across it I do with monotonous regularity in my garden. There are two large examples of the breed on the other side of my road, and they are intent on carrying out their dastardly plan to take over the world, beginning with my plot. I have a number of particularly bushy bushes and I have to keep hawk-like vigil over them to spot the first signs of an insidious ash leaf buried deep amongst the other foliage. For these plants don’t come out in the open and fight straightforwardly – they infiltrate! In the middle of other plants, mainly, but also right alongside the stems of roses and the like. This makes it very tricky to remove them without damaging the legitimate resident.

Perfidious plants
This crafty behaviour happens so regularly that it cannot be a mistake, and I found myself looking out for other evidence of underhand plant practices. I didn’t have to look far: dandelions! These are making a take-over bid for my lawn, but at least that is open warfare: wherever there is a precious long-stemmed plant in my border, the chances are strong that sliding coyly up alongside it will be a dandelion.

This less-than-honest attitude set me wondering whether there is a whole section of nature which is determined to sneak up on us through deception. At the risk of alarming you, gentle reader, the answer is: yes, there is! At least not all the sneakiness is aimed in our direction – ‘they’ spend more time trying to fool each other than us.

Plants aren’t the only deceivers, however ...

Insidious insects
The spicebush swallowtail caterpillar spends the first part of its life looking like a tiny bird dropping – when it gets bigger, it needs something a bit more sophisticated as a disguise. As a small caterpillar, it would make a tasty mid-morning snack for some bird or other predator, so it has large spots on the top of its head that do a very good job of mimicking the eyes of a snake. These spots even reflect light just as real eyes do, changing with the angle of view. There are other caterpillars which have large eyes at the tail end, achieving the same defensive result.

There are several types of katydids whose wings are exact replicas of leaves, not to mention the most spectacular (when you can get it on a neutral background!): the dead-leaf mantis. With its colouring and convoluted outline, it simply disappears on the forest floor. This camouflage serves both to protect it from predators and to further its own career as one. Some mantises emulate blossoms, so attracting hapless insects to alight and become the next course of supper!

A gruesome example of camouflage is practised by the assassin beetle. This preys mainly on ants, and when the meal is over, it sticks the carcass of the late ant on its back. Up to 20 ants can be carried in this way, and this seems to disguise the beetle’s true nature from its own predators, such as jumping spiders.

Another form of deception is practised by the dung beetle. The female is kept safe in her hole, guarded by her mate at the front door. Smaller (and therefore uncompetitive) males will often dig their own tunnel a short distance away and then veer sideways into Mrs Beetle’s tunnel to enjoy time with her while her unsuspecting mate remains on guard outside!
Rascally reptiles

The copperhead snake twitches the tip of its worm-like tail to attract hungry frogs, which then find themselves the object of the meal ...

Perhaps the most famous natural deceiver is the chameleon, which has the ability to change appearance and colour. Its name is applied figuratively to people who are changeable in character – fickle, even. Actually, not all chameleons can change colour – even among those who are able to do so, few use it as camouflage: it is mostly used as a form of communication.

Chameleons achieve fame for their other extraordinary abilities, too: their eyes are able to move completely independently of each other, and their tongues, which can be longer than their own bodies, can snatch an insect in less than 100th of a second!

Sneaky sea creatures

Camouflage has been known for many years as a tool on the battlefield. There is a wonderful World War I photograph of a Mark IV tank which looks wonderfully realistic – until you examine the picture closely and realise that the ‘tank’ is being carried by half a dozen Australian troops. It was used to deceive enemy forces on the assault on the Hindenburg Line in September 1918.

Meanwhile, in the same month, General Allenby organised a major deception to give the impression that his original garrison was fully manned when, in fact, three quarters of the troops had moved on. This effect required the building of 15,000 dummy horses made out of canvas and straw, and the lighting of 142 camp fires each night. Tedious, but it worked!

Other military falsehoods have included dummy airbases complete with aircraft, and dummy railheads.

All is not what it seems ...

Here are the names of 12 military camouflage patterns. Some are genuine, but others are deceivers which have sidled in to confuse you. Can you identify the genuine ones from the sneaky false ones? Extra points if you can say which country they are from.

For the extremes of deception, however, you have to turn to the sea. The sea-dragon, which mimics fronds of underwater foliage, is a prime example. Even when swimming in open water, it can present such a bizarre riot of colour and shape that any predators would doubtless be very confused and likely to cross it off their menu!

Most creatures use camouflage and mimicry as defensive tactics. One example of this is the stonefish. This is a flatfish which has the appearance of a rock – if stepped on, it will sting the offending foot with a very powerful venom which causes excruciating pain. Human revenge is taken in Asia, where it is considered a delicacy, sometimes served as sushi or cooked with ginger in a clear soup.

The most extraordinary deceiver of them all is, however, none of these – it is the cuttlefish. This amazing creature has skin which can not only take on the colours of its surroundings, but also the patterns. As if this wasn’t enough, it can actually change skin texture, so changing its physical outline! It uses this ‘invisibility’ not only as defence, but also to fool prey into swimming close enough to be caught. Its ability to blend into its surroundings has been tested in a tank containing backgrounds of striped, checked and patterned fabric. The creature was able to respond to all of these, except for the patterned fabric. The cuttlefish can also produce an iridescent light display which it uses to confuse and semi-hypnotise its prey just prior to pouncing on it.

However, it takes the breeding season to bring out the most devious behaviour of all: to enable a male cuttlefish to avoid being seen off by other males protectively guarding their mates, it can emulate the colour and markings of a female, so gaining access to the female cuttlefish boudoir in the guise of an innocent girlfriend. Once inside, the situation rapidly changes ...

Mendacious man

Camouflage has been known for many years as a tool on the battlefield. There is a wonderful World War I photograph of a Mark IV tank which looks wonderfully realistic – until you examine the picture closely and realise that the ‘tank’ is being carried by half a dozen Australian troops. It was used to deceive enemy forces on the assault on the Hindenburg Line in September 1918.

Meanwhile, in the same month, General Allenby organised a major deception to give the impression that his original garrison was fully manned when, in fact, three quarters of the troops had moved on. This effect required the building of 15,000 dummy horses made out of canvas and straw, and the lighting of 142 camp fires each night. Tedious, but it worked!

Other military falsehoods have included dummy airbases complete with aircraft, and dummy railheads.

All is not what it seems ...

Here are the names of 12 military camouflage patterns. Some are genuine, but others are deceivers which have sidled in to confuse you. Can you identify the genuine ones from the sneaky false ones? Extra points if you can say which country they are from.

1. Brown lizard
2. Three-colour lizard
3. Bleeding vines
4. Reticulated giraffe
5. Malay tigerstripe
6. Cactus
7. Switchable leopard
8. Clematis overtone
9. Pink choco chip
10. Croc hunter
11. Armed police
12. Blue mousse

Answers

Genuine: 1 (Zambia) 2 (Cameroon) 3 (Indonesia) 4 (India) 5 (Malaysia) 6 (India) 9 (Philippines) 10 (China)

Sneaky false: 2 (Cameroon) 3 (Indonesia) 5 (Philippines) 8 (China)
50 Steps to Improving your Academic Writing
by Chris Sowton
Garnet Education 2012
978-1-85964-655-7

50 Steps to Improving your Academic Writing is a self-study guide and coursebook designed to aid learners in academic writing. Billed as suitable for upper-intermediate to native-speaker-level students (IELTS 5+ and CEF B2+), it works through every aspect of writing for EAP – or preparation for university – from research and writing style, to grammar and avoiding plagiarism. At first glance, the book seems extremely comprehensive and competent at what it claims to be and do.

From the point of view of structure, as suggested by the title the book is split into 50 steps, and each one has the same format: reflection, contextualisation, analysis, activation and personalisation. What stand out for me are the analysis and activation sections. These are well thought-out, useful and they are what I believe students will focus on when using this book by themselves. I found the contextualisation and personalisation sections a little disappointing. In the former, there are no clear answers to help the students (although these are included in the analysis – but will learners doing self-study realise that?) and the latter is a section that I feel will be glossed over by those same students. Having said that, there are clear answers at the back for the activation stage, and the final extension part points the learner to other useful units or appendices that are relevant, which is a lovely touch.

Looking in more detail, I feel that occasionally the language of the book doesn’t lend itself well to learners of English – I’ve been teaching for 12 years and never once have I explained what anaphora or antimetabole are. In my opinion, the language needs to reflect the targeted reader, and there are surely simpler ways to describe such concepts without sounding confusing. However, the biggest downfall is a lack of practice. Packed as it is with fantastic vocabulary, extremely useful writing tips and ways to enhance writing, there just are not enough practice exercises where learners can demonstrate their understanding, which, for me, is absolutely essential; especially for a self-study book.

Even with this last point, this book is certainly of value. It is crammed with necessary, detailed information about what students need to show and use to improve their academic writing. I think it would work best as a companion to an academic English course or could even be useful in exam classes, but I think it needs guided assistance to make it really shine as it deserves to do.

Peter Fullagar
London, UK

Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ETp website and quote ETPQR2172 at the checkout.

The ELT Daily Journal
by Hall Houston
Anthimeria Press 2013
978-1481-95739-7

Who doesn’t remember starting out in the world of teaching? The first class of your pre-service training course, your first teaching practice, your first job: all memorable, often slightly nerve-wracking milestones. If you’re lucky, you work somewhere that values professional development, with colleagues who help you discover the myriad of options that exist
Reviews

for it. If you’re less fortunate, you muddle along and hopefully make those enriching discoveries yourself. Either way, The ELT Daily Journal, targeted at novice teachers, may be a valuable investment as you begin your journey.

This book aims to help new teachers make ‘the transition from newly-trained teacher to independent-minded, reflective practitioner’. It is a journal and, as such, largely consists of lined paper for writing on. However, it is the features combined with this that make it stand out:

- At the bottom of each lined page is a useful box, containing an activity idea, a little ‘something to ponder’, a small piece of advice on what not to do in the classroom/staffroom or a top tip.

- At the back of the book is a section in which ‘distinguished authors’ answer the question: What three tips would you give a new ESL/EFL teacher?

- After the three tips section can be found a selection of useful resources for new teachers, including recommended books, periodicals, blogs, websites, webinars and organisations.

In essence, The ELT Daily Journal is a very simple idea. It’s not trying to change the world, it’s not earth-shattering, but it very effectively provides new teachers with a useful, reassuring resource to turn to. Also, all-importantly, as well as offering support in the form of ideas, tips and suggestions for further reading, it encourages reflective practice.

The only thing it lacks, in my opinion, is the voices of teachers who aren’t ‘distinguished authors’: as a new teacher, it might seem a rather hopeless gap between you and the ELT glitterati. Contributions from ordinary everyday teachers would have nicely complemented this section or could have formed another small section.

That is, of course, a very minor detail. Overall, I would certainly have been very happy to have had this book when I did my CELTA or when I started my first job.

Starting out is tough, and a book like this can help to bridge the gap between those difficult early days and becoming established in the profession.

Lizzie Pinard
Leeds, UK

Grammar Songs & Raps
by Herbert Puchta, Günter Gemgross, Christian Holzmann and Matthew Devitt
Helbling Languages
978-3-85272-423-2

This book, which is for young learners and early teens, is a photocopiable resource of 140 pages with two accompanying CDs/CD Roms. Catchy foot-tapping, hand-clapping original tunes, rhyming lines and a grammar lesson all rolled into one have made this a popular addition to my elementary classroom. Truly the only disappointment was the fact that Peggy Sue and Midnight on Blueberry Hill were not similar to the original songs. I do like a bit of rock ‘n’ roll in my lessons (I have a closet karaoke habit) and often use popular music from the fifties through to the nineties; however, I find I have my work cut out preparing appropriate lessons. This book has made lesson planning less time-consuming. It is laid out in an easy-to-use way; the children pick up both the language focus and the ‘serious’ grammar element almost effortlessly; the songs are long enough that you don’t find yourself repeating the same three or four lines; and there is the added element of a musical story.

I loved this book, my kids loved this book, and their class teacher, when she discovered the grammar (Italian schools are fixated on theory), was instantly converted. I teach years one and two, and it just so happened that we had a project about monsters in a forest. Lo and behold, one of the very first songs in the book: There’s a Monster in the Forest.

The kids sang their hearts out, memorised it pretty quickly and drove everybody insane singing it over and over again. Seven weeks later at the end of summer term, some of my pupils participating in a local summer camp were still word-perfect and enthusiastically sharing the song with their fellow campers.

Each song has a teaching guide, clearly laid out with the language focus, level, time required, materials needed and the answers; plus at least two worksheets, often three. There are also useful extensions, if you wish to use the song with other related language activities, flashcards and karaoke versions.

There is a Contents page at the front of the book but the Quick Reference Guide and the CD Contents List were at the back of the book. I would have preferred them at the front, too, because these pages are a great way of choosing a song appropriate not only to the language focus and level, but also with the right subject matter. The CD page gives the track number and length of song. The illustrations are simple, clear and entertaining.

Although, so far, I have only used two songs from this book, the second being The Hungry Monster Rap, I listen to the CDs in my car and have found myself wishing I had older children to practise the songs with.

Maybe next year.

Shona Margaret Hagger
Vergiate, Italy

Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ETP website and quote ETPQR2172 at the checkout.
Sounds problematic

Charles Jannuzi investigates the issues involved in dealing with difficult sounds.

The analysis and set of procedures described here could be used to teach a variety of problem sounds in English. Some of these problem sounds are the result of similarities and differences between English and the learners’ native languages, while others are difficult for beginners, regardless of their native language. English /r/ and /l/ and contrasts between these sounds are often cited as pronunciation and listening perception problems for a variety of learners, mostly from East Asia and particularly from Japan, though I have had speakers of several other languages, including Russian and German, who expressed an interest in improving their pronunciation of them. Research into speech sound acquisition indicates that these two sounds (especially /r/) are typically among the last that native speakers themselves acquire mastery over, and /r/ is also often cited as a developmental issue requiring speech therapy. So it should not be surprising that these two sounds are ‘marked’ as difficult for many EFL learners as well.

What’s the issue?

In the case of Japanese learners of English, just what is the issue? The most common explanation is based on a simple ‘contrastive analysis’. Japanese is said to have one ‘categorical’ sound (or phoneme), whereas English has two. The Japanese sound is often referred to as a type of /r/ that is tapped, flapped or trilled. It has a very limited distribution in Japanese: it never closes a syllable, and the word-initial form of Japanese /r/ is not common in native words, being mainly limited to words of foreign origin (eg ramen, the type of Chinese noodles now a national dish in Japan). One commonly occurring form of the Japanese /r/ is as the consonant onset of the syllables used in grammatical inflections (such as verb forms which are suffixed with syllables like -ra, -ri, -ru, -re and -ro).

English-speaker descriptions of this Japanese sound – or of the Japanese English learner’s interlanguage sound – represent it as resembling English /l/, /r/ or /d/ (especially /d/ in the middle of a word, like in the word middle). Something like an English /w/ is also possible, especially at the onset of words or syllables. Phonetic descriptions in terms of articulation have also said that the American medial, flapped, voiced /t/ of words such as little or matter are quite like the Japanese /r/.

What’s the use?

However, it is not really clear how useful a cross-linguistic, contrastive analysis of phoneme inventories is in diagnosing the problems or in helping Japanese learners of English to overcome them. For one thing, the often-read argument that Japanese has only one phoneme, Japanese /r/, is arguably wrong. That is because, using structuralist criteria for determining what is and what is not a phoneme, we can isolate at least two Japanese /r/ sounds that are distinct: initial /r/, such as in the word rōu (candle wax) and palatalised initial /r/ as in ryōu (dormitory).

It is also misleading to teach learners that there is one English /r/ and one
English /l/ – they will hear native and fluent speakers of English make a wide array of both sounds in actual speech. The real issue is: What is the same across the /s/ that make them an English /l/, and what is the same across the /rs/ that make them an English /r/? Phonology as an academic pursuit has not really answered that question. Phonetic analysis shows, in terms of articulation, that there is a wide variety within both categories of sounds. Interestingly (and perhaps confusingly for learners), the distribution in the lexicon of English /rl/ sounds strongly parallels English /l/ sounds: word-initial (right versus light), word-initial cluster unvoiced (crime versus climb), word-initial cluster voiced (grow versus glow), post-vocalic (fear versus feel, stir versus still), medial (correct versus collect), and unstressed syllabic (batter versus battle).

There is some complementary distribution if we consider clusters: /trl/ as in true but no /rtl/; /sl/ (as in slide) but no /sr/; /shr/ as in (shred) but no /shl/ (except in some loan words); and /tl/ can cluster with /tr/ post-vocally (as in girl or world) but not vice versa. Moreover, since both of these sound categories tend toward being phonetically ‘vowel-like’ (voiced, relatively unobstructed in terms of articulation), perhaps it is not surprising that in some cases they might reduce to a vowel or vowel lengthening in some accents, dialects and word contexts (such as post-vocalic /r/ in the forms of English of London, Boston, New York and New Orleans, or the lost /l/ of the words chalk, talk, walk, etc).

What’s the solution?

Given the variety of English /rl/ and /l/ sounds and how they parallel each other in the lexicon of English, it is little wonder that learners, even after they have practised making a distinction between an English /rl/ and /l/ (often initial /l/ versus initial /r/, eg led versus red, light versus right, etc), lose the ability when actually communicating orally. The one distinction that they learnt gets lost in the thicket of the lexicon, the various /l/ and /rl/ sounds in all their positional variation, and all those varieties of English. Therefore, it is best to teach – over a period of time and through a variety of activities – the full parallel variety of English /rl/ and /l/ sounds as found in the most frequent words of the lexicon.

What’s the proposal?

A proposed sequence is this: first the variety of English /s/; then the variety of English /r/; then /l// versus /rl/ contrasts in common words; then a follow-up on the variety of post-vocalic /rs/ in ‘rhotic’ accents, such as US and Canadian English, where r is pronounced before a consonant and at the ends of words (as in farm and far).

One line of reasoning might say that, since English /r/ is typically the last consonant acquired by native speakers, it might be best to teach English /l// first to learners because of the inherent difficulties with the English /r/ group of related sounds. A different line of reasoning that might support this first approach might be based on interlanguage analysis. If Japanese has its own /rl/ sound, the argument goes, then Japanese learners of English would find it easier to differentiate and master English /l// first. However, as noted above, Japanese /r/ and Japanese learners’ interlanguage /rl/ and /l// sounds are often described as sounding more like English /rl/ (or /ld/ or /tl/) than English /r/. If all these arguments are considered together, the issue of which sequence to follow starts to look rather difficult to decide.

One compromise might be to conclude that the Japanese /r/ and palatal /r/ are not acceptable substitutes for either English /l// or /rl/ and to start an instructional sequence with English /l// first. So one possible proposed sequence of instruction (as a pronunciation segment of a longer class, such as 20 minutes out of a 90-minute class period) is as follows:

**Sequence of instruction**

**First class:**
English /l//

**Second class:**
Review of English /ll/, English /rl/

**Third class:**
Review of English /l//, /rl/; contrast of English /l// versus /rl/

**Fourth class:**
Review and revision as necessary

**Subsequent classes:**
Work on problem contrasts within and across the categories (eg farm versus firm, walk versus work, etc)

English /l// should be taught using the most frequent and useful words of English as possible (and teachers should be prepared to provide an L1 translation in the case of less common words) and should cover the following types of /l//:

**Types of English /l/**

At the beginning of words:
lake, let, lot, low, lamp, leap, last, etc

After another consonant (unvoiced):
clean, close, clock, place, play, please, slide, slow, slip, etc

After another consonant (voiced):
blue, blow, blood, blame, glad, glue, glow, glass, etc

After a vowel (dark l):
feel, fail, call, sale, all, deal, tall, etc

In the middle of a two-syllable word:
follow, shallow, yellow, jelly, hello, pillow, filling, collect, etc

Unstressed syllabic /l/:
settle, battle, riddle, middle, puddle, little, tunnel, etc

/lr// cluster:
girl, world, whirl, hurl, curl, twirl, swirl, unfurl, etc

Then, English /rl/ should be taught using the most frequent and useful words of English as possible and should cover the following types of /rl/:

**Types of English /rl/**

At the beginning of words:
right, raise, rise, risk, rose, run, red, road, etc

After another consonant (unvoiced):
cry, cream, crazy, tree, true, try, pray, praise, prize, three, throw, etc

After another consonant (voiced):
broom, bring, British, grow, grass, great, dry, draw, dream, etc

Post-vocalic /r/ (reduces to or alternates with ‘schwa’ in many dialects and accents):
car, fear, far, tear, fair, form, farm, dear, hear, more, war, etc

Medial /r/:
correct, Korea, porous, preferring, occurring, recurring, referring, transferring, etc

Unstressed syllabic /r/:
ladder, litter, batter, motor, runner, saddler, madder, heater, etc

/lr// cluster:
girl, world, whirl, hurl, curl, twirl, swirl, unfurl, etc
Sounds problematic

Teaching activities
Let us suppose you teach English pronunciation and spelling as a small but regular part of a general English or oral communication course. I suggested a possible teaching sequence above. Let us now look at some specifics of what to do in class.

Focusing on one sound
The traditional way to focus on sounds has been in minimal pair drills. There are at least two problems with these. First, they rush students into making listening contrasts between two similar sounds before they have learnt how to make the sounds. Second, many materials often choose relatively infrequent words in order to illustrate the sound contrasts. I propose, instead, that we first teach the sounds positively (not in contrast), across a variety of positions in words, using ones drawn from the students’ textbooks, word lists, syllabuses, the most frequent and useful words of English, and English loan words that are well-known in the students’ own language. Japanese, for example, is loaded with these and they make for very good reinforcement that there is a distinction between /l/ and /r/ in English. This gives pronunciation an added lexical focus.

I usually teach a sound of English by telling the students, for example, that we are going to practise the English sound /l/, and that first we will look at how the /l/ sound is made in vocabulary they already know. I put the list of types of English /l/ (see above) on the board.

I start with one type of /l/, the word-initial /l/, and give a few example words, writing them on the board and getting the students to repeat them after me. Alternatively, I have the students listen as I read out loud the words on the board, and then ask the students to say them as I point to them on the board. When doing simple listen-and-repeat exercises, I make the point that the students need to listen to my pronunciation and look at my face when I pronounce the words (visual clues on the face are often crucial to acquiring a sound).

Then I ask the students to give me some more examples from the vocabulary that they know. If this yields few examples, I ask them to search their textbook for some words. Another way to elicit words is to write some simple sentences on the board from which the /l/-word has been deleted, such as:

\[ \ldots \text{Biwa is the largest in Japan. (Lake)} \]

We continue the drills over the entire range of English /l/ sounds. After we have practised saying all the words, we practise saying simple sentences in which the sound appears several times, such as \( I \text{ like lying lazily by the lake.} \)

Contrasting English /l/ and /r/
The same sort of activities can be repeated for English /r/ in the next class. I like to start with a quick review of English /r/ before /l/, even though the contrast is not made directly. After these two lessons, the class is ready for a classic English /l/ versus /r/ contrast. We review /l/, then /r/, and then the repetition drills expand to minimal pairs across the different types of the sounds. These minimal pairs can be presented on the board in opposing columns. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/l/</th>
<th>/r/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>light</td>
<td>right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>led</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>climb</td>
<td>crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play</td>
<td>pray</td>
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<tr>
<td>blue</td>
<td>brew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glow</td>
<td>grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collect</td>
<td>correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>still</td>
<td>stir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>litter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a word is unknown to the students, it is a good time to add some dictionary practice to the pronunciation routine.

I lead a repetition drill, first of the /l/ words and then the /r/ words, and then a back-and-forth contrast of the contrasting word pairs. However, it is important to avoid a rising-falling sing-song tone when saying the contrasting words in pairs. As an alternative, the students could listen to the entire list being read and pronounced, and then be prompted to read the words out loud themselves.

Another way to contrast the words is to use short ‘tongue-twister’ sentences that include both sounds, such as:

\( \ldots \text{I really like red roses, yellow daffodils and white lilies very much.} \)

\( \text{She likes to read literature and writes really well.} \)

Listening perception
Having the students listen and repeat words that exemplify the sounds covers both listening perception and production (as well as short-term memory and vocabulary knowledge). However, there is a simple way to focus on listening perception to see whether or not they can perceive the differences in the categories of the sounds: a minimal pair sentence close listening. This listening perception activity could also be done before the production contrast phase.

Repeat an ‘ambiguous’ sentence six times, each time plugging in a different item of a minimal pair, so the meaning of the sentence changes. For example: \( \text{The worker cut the glass/grass.} \) The students write the numbers 1–6 on their paper and each time you say the sentence, they write down whether they hear the word with an /l/ or an /r/. It’s advisable to prepare translations of the sentences in the students’ L1 so they aren’t distracted by language that they don’t understand, and because this makes clear that what seems like a small difference in sound can result in a large difference in meaning. Note how the following sentences also include other examples of /l/ and /r/ in use, which is an important aspect of listening perception:

\( \text{She wrote a note on her ______. (list/wrist)} \)

\( \text{The teacher ______ the tests. (collected/corrected)} \)

\( \text{The children ______ at the church. (played/prayed)} \)

\( \text{In the summer heat, the wind ______. (stilled/stirred)} \)

\( \text{The worker cut the ______. (glass/grass)} \)

\( \text{The people were ______ on the concrete. (walking/working)} \)

\( \text{The student wrote her answers with a ______ pencil (lead/red)} \)

\( \text{The teacher ______ the presentation. (led/read)} \)

\( \text{The answer he gave was ______. (long/wrong)} \)

\( \text{She ______ he will quit soon. (feels/fears)} \)

A skilled doctor must ______ the patient. (heal/hear)
Student participation

Most of this sequence has been done as whole-class practice, but sometimes it is good to shift more of the performance onto the learners. However, there are ways to do this without putting them under too much pressure, which can lead to embarrassing situations. I favour ‘melee activities’ that send students to the board.

For example, prepare a list of frequent, useful words that fall into one of four categories: the word has an /l/, has an /r/, has both an /l/ and /r/, and has neither /l/ nor /r/ (eg like, long, low, bowling, flag, full, feel; red, read, wrong, right, boring, your, confirm, weather; curl, girl, world; way, day, decide, etc). You will need one word for each student and you should keep a list of which words go in which categories for reference.

Next, divide the board up into four equal areas: a space for /l/ words, a space for /r/ words, a space for words with both /l/ and /r/, and a space for words with neither /l/ nor /r/.

Announce to the class that you are going to give each student a word, that you are only going to say it once and that they have to listen to their word and then write it on the board in the correct place. I demonstrate first with an example of each type of word.

Stand in front of each student in turn and say their word to them in a normal voice. They then write what they think they heard on the board. After all the words have been written up, you can compare them with your own list to see how well they have perceived the sounds. Sometimes a student’s mistake may surprise you. One of my students received the word well and wrote bowling instead! This means that she might well have perceived an /l/ sound but didn’t perceive the word correctly.

I recommend that you then re-read aloud all the words on your list and write the ones that have been missed in a different-colour chalk or board marker in the correct space. Then you might ask the students to extend the activity a little further by suggesting some more words that fit in each category. Finish with whole-class repetition of all the words as a final reinforcement of the distinction between /l/ and /r/.

This can also be done with the students marking up a piece of paper with the four categories and then writing all the words in the correct place as they hear them read out by the teacher. Students can then compare their results with a partner (they are then cross-checked with the answers on the board). This encourages discussion and cooperation in trying to master the sounds.

Another whole-class activity is to have the students listen for the word that doesn’t belong, such as a set of four words, three of which have an /l/ sound but one of which has an /r/. Say the set of words out loud. For example, wheel, beer, deal and feel. The students must choose which word does not belong. (Answer: beer. All the other words end in /l/ and rhyme.)

Contrasts between phonetically similar sounds, such as /l/ and /r/, are often considered important for clear speech and the avoidance of a derogatory stereotyping of accents. However, if you actually look at the sounds as categories, you see, for example, that there is tremendous phonetic/articulatory variation of both English /l/ and English /r/ across the lexicon. I have argued here that, because of this variety, we need to give many examples of how the sounds are used in the frequent, most useful words of English. I hope that the explanation of the phonetic variety of English /l/ and /r/ and my suggestions for practical classroom activities prove useful for you and your learners. The approach and activities in this article are meant be applied to other problem sounds and sound contrasts as well. For example, for some language backgrounds, English /l/ and /n/ are difficult to distinguish and produce. Also, the large number of English vowels and vowel combinations is difficult for many learners, regardless of their language background.

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Learning styles are habitual and preferred ways of learning. James Keefe defines them as 'characteristic, cognitive, affective and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment'. In general, students in an English classroom acquire, retain and retrieve information in various ways. Some of them tend to learn by reflecting and acting, while others may prefer to learn by memorising and visualising. Teachers, likewise, usually carry out their English teaching in their preferred styles, which may be inconsistent with their students' learning styles.

In classroom teaching, a serious mismatch may occur between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of the instructor, with consequent bad effects on the students' learning and their attitudes to the class. For example, they may become bored and inattentive, may perform poorly on tests and may conclude that they are not good at the subject. Teachers, discouraged by the students' negative feedback in the classroom, may begin to question their own competence.

In this article, I will offer some recommendations for dealing with style conflicts between teachers and students in English classrooms. Instead of offering advice on how teachers can match their teaching styles with their students' learning styles, I propose bridging the gap by making recommendations of things teachers can do to reduce style conflicts. These recommendations fit into four categories:

- Developing awareness of teaching and learning styles.
- Adapting teaching styles to accommodate students' learning styles.
- Stretching students' learning styles to promote style harmony.
- Providing activities for different groupings.

### Developing awareness of teaching and learning styles

Rebecca Oxford and Neil Anderson suggest that classroom environments created by enthusiastic teachers and which appear rewarding to them can sometimes be extremely frustrating for their students. This suggests that both teachers and students need to be aware of their own teaching or learning styles. In fact, knowledge of one's own learning style is essential in learning how to learn, and any effort to reduce style conflicts between teachers and students will be in vain if teachers and students are ignorant of their own style preferences.

Joy Reid cites several useful questionnaires which can be used to identify learning styles: her own Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire, the Learning Channel Preference Checklist by O'Brien, the Style Analysis Survey by Oxford, the Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale by Ely and the Perceptual Learning Preferences Study by Kinsella.

However, it is not enough for teachers to find out their students' learning styles; they also need to take one of these learning style assessments themselves in order to gain insight into their own learning styles. This is because teachers often automatically teach in accordance with their own preferred learning style.
Conflicts of style

Only by understanding the differences between their students’ learning styles and their own can teachers succeed in reducing style conflicts.

Before administering an assessment, the teacher should first introduce the concept of learning styles, explaining how learning styles are determined and emphasising the reasons why it will be valuable for the students to identify their own particular styles. To prevent the students from worrying about having the ‘wrong’ learning style, the teacher must stress the fact that no style is better than another, and that honesty in responding to the questionnaire will produce more accurate and practical information about each student’s special characteristics.

Next, the teacher should spend time going over the guidelines for the questionnaire to ensure that the students fully understand what they have to do. After that, the students can start completing the questionnaire. If they have questions or need assistance, the teacher should help them individually. Finally, following the instructions in the questionnaire, the students can summarise their individual style results.

The next step is for the teacher and students to find the similarities and differences between their learning styles. This can easily be done by eliciting their results and writing them on the board. For example, after administering Reid’s Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire, which offers four modality preference categories, the teacher can write the four categories on the board, and then simply ask the students to write their names under the appropriate one. Finally, the teacher can organise a discussion of the style assessment results, in which all the members of the class can become aware of their own and their classmates’ specific learning style preferences. By sharing their learning style preferences in the discussion, the teacher and students are likely to be motivated to find ways to eliminate the potential for a teacher–student conflict of styles.

Accommodating students’ learning styles

Once everyone in the class has identified and compared their learning styles, the teacher will be better equipped to adapt their teaching style to meet the differing needs of the students. In fact, teachers who wish to address a variety of learning styles often need not make drastic changes to their teaching approach, as the way they normally teach will already address the needs of some students. For example, a teacher who has a ‘global’ learning style probably does not need to worry about searching for the main idea in a text, because this is an automatic choice. Instead, this teacher may need to be more conscientious about providing detailed explanations for new words, grammar or language structures.

One common way for teachers to adapt their teaching styles is to provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of different learning styles. Oxford and Anderson state that teachers can consciously decide to offer a myriad of multisensory, abstract and concrete learning activities that meet the needs of many different learning styles. They suggest, for example, that Chinese students are generally accustomed to learning by analytic, closure-oriented, concrete-sequential and visual learning styles. For those Chinese students with analytic, closure-oriented and concrete-sequential styles, teachers will probably need to use plenty of substitution drills, gap-fill and true-false activities; they will need to get the students to use logic to rebuild stories, employ directed dialogues, sentence builders, patterned conversations, reading or listening for details, cloze exercises, word searches and guided writing.

For those students who learn visually, Oxford and Anderson recommend that teachers should provide extensive visual input, such as bulletin boards, posters, transparencies, slides, films, filmstrips, flashcards, TV, video, photos, graphs, charts, maps, magnetic or felt boards, board games and puppets. They also need to give the students written directions on the board, on handouts or on worksheets, and ask them to write stories based on pictures, draw pictures illustrating characters in literature or summarise stories, take notes and organise them visually, create semantic maps on paper to memorise words, invent visually-oriented acronyms, use visual imagery for memorising and do extensive reading of all kinds.

Stretching students’ learning styles

Oxford and Anderson suggest that another way of dealing with style conflicts in the English classroom is to encourage the students to stretch themselves by learning through alternative styles and to guide them in expanding the ways they are able to learn. Style stretching involves getting the students to try implementing new, useful strategies that are outside their currently prevailing stylistic comfort zone. In this way, introverted students can learn to interact and cooperate with others more frequently, and students who are inclined to pay attention to discrete details can

By sharing their learning style preferences, the teacher and students are likely to be motivated to find ways to eliminate the potential for a conflict of styles

One common way for teachers to adapt their teaching styles is to provide a variety of activities to meet the needs of different learning styles

Another way of dealing with style conflicts in the English classroom is to encourage the students to stretch themselves by learning through alternative styles
develop strategies to enable them to identify the big picture or synthesise details into a coherent whole. Oxford and Anderson cite evidence that students with greater learning style flexibility are also greater achievers, and Reid points out that though learning styles are a consistent way of functioning that reflect cultural behaviour, they are actually moderately strong habits rather than intractable biological attributes. As such, they can be modified and extended by careful instruction.

However, encouraging students to stretch their learning styles is best done in a systematic and intentional way. At the initial stage, teachers need to provide guidance as to how to diversify learning styles, spending some class time talking about different learning styles and strategies and making the students aware of connections between them.

**Although learning styles are a consistent way of functioning that reflect cultural behaviour, they are actually moderately strong habits rather than intractable biological attributes**

This type of guidance from the teacher should be followed by a whole-class discussion, in which all the students can find out which learning styles they favour, and which they tend not to use. Students should then be exposed periodically to contextual demands that do not precisely match their own learning styles. This must be done carefully in order to avoid instilling in any student a feeling of incompetence or reluctance to trust this learning process. For example, most Chinese students tend to lay emphasis on linguistic details in English learning. Instead of suddenly demanding a switch of the students’ attention to the overall picture of a text, teachers should balance open-ended unstructured approaches with structured activities that emphasise language forms. They should create a structured but somewhat informal classroom atmosphere that relaxes the students. Also, as most Chinese students have developed strong traditional ways of learning, they might need to be disengaged gradually from rote learning and guided slowly into real communication in authentic language situations.

Teachers should intentionally incorporate strategy training tasks which will be beneficial in developing the students’ independent learning abilities, because it is the students who are ultimately responsible for selecting the ways of learning that are most suitable for them. One way of achieving successful strategy training is for the teacher to weave learning strategy training into regular classroom events in a natural, comfortable, but explicit way. The teacher should explicitly tell students why and how to do the following:

- Use new strategies for learning.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies.
- Decide when it is appropriate to transfer a given strategy to a new situation.

In this way, the students’ learning styles are likely to be modified and diversified to maximise the efficiency and efficacy of their English learning.

**Providing activities for different groupings**

The final approach to reducing style conflicts is to restructure groupwork within specific frameworks. On most occasions, teachers could divide their students into groups according to their different learning styles and give them activities based on their styles. However, although Chinese students show more similarities than differences in their learning styles, it does not mean that all Chinese students have the same style preferences. In fact, a variety of learning styles can be found in almost all Chinese classrooms.

There are generally two ways of grouping by learning style: style-alike grouping and style-varied grouping. In the former, the students with the same learning styles sit together and the teacher provides them with activities which are consistent with their learning style. For example, the group made up of students who learn best in an intrapersonal way may need some encouragement to share ideas aloud and may want the safety of jotting down a few notes first and perhaps sharing with one other person before being invited or expected to take part in a group discussion. On the other hand, a group made up of interpersonal learners may need the chance to express some ideas orally in the presence of one or many class members. Oxford and Anderson claim that research proves that grouping by style often provides the greatest learning efficiency.

In the style-varied grouping model, however, students are seated so that each group includes a variety of styles and the members gain practice in stretching beyond their comfort zones. For example, it is often helpful to include open students (those who tend to take in a great deal of input and postpone their decisions or judgements) and closure-oriented students in the same group; the former will make learning more lively and more fun, while the latter will ensure that the task is done on time and in good order. However, no matter how the teacher arranges the groups, the students should be made aware of the criteria and understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

This article has explored various ways of reducing style conflicts between teachers and students in English classes. It suggests that both teachers and students should, first of all, employ instruments to identify their own learning styles. Once these style differences are recognised, teachers should adapt their teaching styles to accommodate their students’ learning styles, and provide activities for different groupings. In addition, they should help the students stretch their learning styles so as to increase their learning potential.

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The value of video

A major challenge faced by trainers of future ESL and EFL teachers is that of developing the most effective classroom techniques for preparing trainees for the pedagogical challenges they are actually likely to encounter. One of the most perplexing challenges is how to simulate an instructional scenario that mimics the dynamics of a real classroom. The ideal venue would obviously be a real English classroom, but however much most trainers would like to arrange teaching practice in an intensive English institute (such as the one associated with my university), the logistics of coordinating this for 15 or more trainees can prove overwhelming. The extensive disruptions to instructors’ scheduled class routines that this involves compounds the problem, and the whole concept can simply be unworkable.

The instructional technique I have been relying on for years as a substitute for an actual classroom is ‘simulated teaching’, in which the trainees use their classmates as their imagined students, a practice which has numerous flaws and shortcomings. This kind of teaching practice is easy to set up, with the trainees teaching from a written lesson plan prepared in advance, but the lessons do not adequately mimic an actual lesson with real students. Dissatisfaction with this technique eventually led me to search for a better way and to experiment with the use of videotaping of simulated practice lessons, accompanied by self-reflection and analysis from the trainees who were videotaped, combined with peer feedback and evaluation from the trainer.

In this article, I will explain what I see as the shortcomings of simulated teaching without videotaping, and the specific ways in which the videotaping process overcomes these defects and is particularly advantageous for future language teachers. I will then describe the procedure I use for videotaping. Finally, I will list some of the benefits which the videotaping process has had for my own trainees.

Simulated lessons without video

Analysis and feedback

In my experience, the requirement to evaluate trainees by simultaneously observing their teaching, taking notes and analysing their performance usually resulted in an overwhelming cognitive challenge, and invariably produced sketchy, inadequate evaluations. Without a very detailed record of events to rely on – and knowing that most of the trainees had prepared diligently and tried their utmost to teach at their best – my feedback on such simulations tended to avoid being overly-critical, highlighting instead the positive features of a trainee’s performance. This often meant that numerous major flaws went uncorrected. Peer feedback, which usually displays the same aversion to excess (or even honest) criticism, also tended to gravitate toward uncritical, positive commentary.

Moreover, trainees are generally unable to detect their own errors or shortcomings because they, too, have incomplete memories of their performance. Their focus is mainly on
getting through the lesson, which means they may be totally unaware of their greatest defects as potential teachers. Also, in order to avoid the discomfort of being too self-critical, many trainees will naturally limit their own self-criticism, thereby omitting to mention several areas which still need attention.

**Authenticity and attitude**
The shortcomings of trainer feedback and self-criticism notwithstanding, I have found that the major liability of using simulated teaching without video centres around the issue of authenticity. This often gets translated into the degree of seriousness with which the trainee takes the practice teaching lesson. I have consistently noted that, because simulated lessons do not adequately mimic the tensions associated with real classroom dynamics, trainees often brush off obvious gaffes or flaws, dismissing them as just an expected part of practice teaching. In contrast, in a real classroom setting there is no salvation or saving grace if a lesson disintegrates in the middle. The trainee must forge ahead, finish the lesson and use it as a learning experience. The tendency not to take the practice lesson seriously also disappears when video-evaluation is used. Trainees who fumble around, trying to regain their composure or recapture their train of thought, know they will have to view their defective performance several times. As a result, they tend to prepare their verbal instructions and teaching sequences better before the actual performance, and the cavalier attitude which many trainees previously brought to the practice lesson is greatly diminished.

**Simulated lessons with video**

**Reviewing and noticing**

Videotaping practice lessons for later analysis and evaluation virtually eliminates all the deficiencies of simultaneous evaluation. Being able to watch the lesson again on video also possesses the obvious initial advantage of allowing both the trainer and trainee to review the trainee’s performance several times. Several viewings allow both major and minor flaws in delivery and content to be detected and acted upon. Additionally, minor defects related to the trainees’ classroom presence or distracting habits, such as flicking their hair or punctuating their utterances with too many *ers* and *ums*, can be picked up and focused on in ways that are generally impossible without video.

For most trainees, these recordings mark the first time they have witnessed their own teaching, and some find themselves surprised by habits and nuances of their teaching style of which they were unaware. One trainee commented that she didn’t realise that she spoke so quietly that she was inaudible to the students in the back rows. Another had no idea that he was only addressing his comments to the right-hand side of the room, and was excluding from his lesson the students sitting on the left-hand side. This extra ‘noticing’ or ‘consciousness raising’ about the trainees’ teaching techniques constitutes a key strength of the videotaping of practice lessons. As Meilan Zhang, Mary Lundeberg and Jan Eberhardt point out: ‘An important feature of this model is that teachers need to videotape their lessons and use video recordings as one of the data sources to examine their practice. Video is viewed as a powerful tool to support teacher learning because of its unique capability to capture elusive classroom practice for later study. Video recordings allow teacher researchers to replay classroom events and notice aspects of classroom situations that they are too busy to notice during the act of teaching. As a teacher participant described: “You see things that you don’t realize in the heat of teaching.”’

**Advantages for language teachers**

I believe that videotaping of simulated teaching practice sessions offers advantages for all future teachers. However, there are special benefits for prospective language teachers. Most importantly, in order to develop effective oral language and listening skills in their students, language teaching trainees must be able to engage their students in quality, meaningful activities. The ratio of teacher talk to student talk must also be balanced. Video examination of the presence or absence of these features increases the chance that these elements will occur in future teaching. Another feature that can be observed is the inclusion of all the students within teacher–student interaction. Neglected students in a language classroom are not likely to become engaged, fluent language learners.

Effective language teachers also need to be able to deliver clear, accurate instruction regarding the technical features of the target language. Videotaped lessons can detect shortcomings in instructional clarity or accuracy, especially those relating to grammar or pronunciation. Videotaped lessons can detect shortcomings in instructional clarity or accuracy, especially those relating to grammar or pronunciation.
The value of video

their teaching was too oblique or not sufficiently targeted to the stated goal.

Finally, videotaping is valuable in not only heightening the trainees’ awareness of the paralinguistic aspects of their teaching, but also the need for greater animation. An English teacher with no enthusiasm is unlikely to capture and maintain the attention of the students or to engender the enthusiasm and energy those students will need in order to achieve high proficiency in English.

Accentuating the positive

Up to this point, I have attempted to establish the value of video in correcting major and minor teaching flaws. Video forces both trainers and trainees to identify and overcome these defects. It should not be overlooked, however, that video can also be used to highlight positive teaching attributes that potential teachers already possess.

For example, one of my trainees displayed exceptional poise and positive body posture when delivering the lesson. The volume of another trainee’s voice and their use of eye contact were at a level of quality that deserved special mention. A third trainee demonstrated excellent rapport with his classmates and handled student questions and comments in an appropriately responsive manner. Thus, it made sense to use the video clips of these trainees in class to point out these outstanding features to the others. Without implying that the other trainees were defective in specific areas or lacking certain skills, these positive attributes of particular trainees served as exemplary models for the rest of the class. In the absence of these video recordings, identification of specific features like the ones mentioned would be missed, since everyone would be relying on their imperfect memory of the events of the practice lesson. The imprint left by viewing these positive models is designed to leave a permanent footprint in the long-term memory of the trainees.

The videoing process

I inform my trainees at least three days beforehand that they will be videotaped on a given day. They are also required to submit a written lesson plan well in advance of their practice lesson. This allows me to recommend alterations, if necessary, before the lesson is seen by others.

On the day of the session, a tripod is set up to steady the camera, and the filming is done by another classmate, beginning on the signal of the trainee who is taking the lesson. Only about 15 minutes of a 30-minute lesson are recorded, since the camera is turned off whenever small group interaction takes place. Several peers in the class are asked to complete an informal evaluation form as a means of providing immediate feedback.

After the lesson, the video is immediately transferred from the camera to my laptop, and the participating trainees get a copy by transferring their sequence from the laptop to a flash drive. I review the recording within two days and make written comments. These comments are forwarded to the trainee after I have received the trainee’s own self-analysis of the lesson.

The review process involves an overall written assessment of the trainee’s performance, in addition to their responses to specific questions such as: What do you think was the best aspect of your teaching? What comments can you make about the volume of your voice and your hand gestures? Did you include all the students in your lesson? Were your instructions clear and concise?

Demonstrating the benefits

To demonstrate the benefits to the trainees of this process, let’s take the example of two trainees, whom I will call Mark and Maria (not their real names).

Mark had prepared well, but he was understandably nervous during his first videorecording. For whatever reason, it became obvious that he was not responding adequately or appropriately to the students’ responses. For example, he had asked if anyone ever had trouble when ordering at a restaurant. However, when several students responded affirmatively, he failed to stop and question them about the nature of their problems. Instead, he proceeded with the planned content of his lesson. When this was pointed out to him as an area which needed attention, he was able to correct it, as evidenced by a noticeable increased sensitivity to student responses in his second and third videos.

Maria had a completely different weakness in that she became so consumed with being ‘on stage’ and sharing ideas with her students that she took an excruciatingly long time to get to the focal point of her grammar lesson. She too showed an impressive ability to self-correct in later videos.

In my experience, traditional procedures for training future English teachers lack the authenticity of real classroom settings, and simulated teaching using other trainees as ‘students’ results in a host of shortcomings. Videotaping teaching practice sessions is a way of overcoming some of these problems and has advantages for all trainee teachers, but especially those training to teach languages.

Given these advantages and the current availability of video recorders, I would recommend that all teacher trainers make this approach a standard feature of their courses.
**TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

(Wo)man the barricades!

Tessa Woodward learns from a new kind of professional development.

Over the many years I have worked in the lovely profession of ELT, I have learnt masses of things in many different ways: by attending training courses, by observing and being observed, by reading and writing, by listening to language students telling me what works best for them, by going to conferences, and by bringing my outside interests, like music and drama, into class with me. But this last year I actually got started on some new learning, mainly because I became irritated by a recurrent unfairness! Let me explain.

**Getting a fair balance**

When I was lucky enough, back in the 1980s, to be invited onto speaker panels and to give plenary and keynote speeches at events for teachers, I often found myself to be the only woman on the podium. I noticed and minded, but I had the feeling, back then, that things were improving. Pretty soon, I thought, I would have women companions up there with me. So I ploughed on over the years, just trying to make my own contributions to the field.

Last year, I was still lucky enough to be invited to share my thoughts publicly as a plenary speaker on a number of occasions. And, several times again, I found myself, as a woman speaker, in a very small minority – sometimes a minority of one.

‘Hang on!’ I thought to myself. ‘It’s 2012. The profession is stuffed full of women teachers. There are, I think, more women academic directors than there used to be. Lots of people who select speakers for conferences are women. So, how come, at plenary or keynote speaker level, in the UK, I am still looking around for female chums to join me up on the podium?’

I sent an exploratory email around to some colleagues, explaining how I felt and why I thought it important to have a good gender balance of presenters at ELT events in the UK. I got a lot of supportive messages back. So then I decided to do something about it.

**Getting on the campaign trail**

I have never actually started any kind of campaign before. Maybe, gentle readers, you have? Perhaps you have been active in trying to improve the lot of teachers whose mother tongue is not English, or of students with dyslexia or a visual impairment. Maybe you have strong feelings that in ELT we could all do something about globalisation, the use of plastics or climate change, and have been doing your bit to raise awareness. If so, then you may already have been learning the sorts of things listed here as advice for those interested in starting any kind of campaign:

- Analyse why you feel the way you do. Then think of a single, positive, simple, doable step you can take to ameliorate the situation you feel is unfair or unfortunate.
- Give it a catchy name.
- Explore the idea with as many friends and colleagues as you can so that it becomes clearer and more realistic.
- Build an email list of those interested and keep in contact with your support group as you go along. They will keep you ‘real’.
- Read on the topic and on parallel topics to learn more, to see it from more angles and also to see if anybody is already doing what you want to do.
- Meet people working on parallel campaigns. They will have learnt the hard way how to start and can help you with short cuts. (The Disabled Access Friendly team are my early mentors.)
- Build an ever broader and more inclusive coalition of individuals and groups.
- From the thinking, discussing, reading and learning so far, start to develop the clear, positive language you need to talk about your concern (without hectoring or whining!).
- Talk about your own experience and be clear about why it matters.
- Set up an email address.
- Register a domain for a website.
- Design a logo.
- Plan a website. Make sure it is completely ready before you launch it as people will probably only visit it once (especially if it has blank pages with ‘Coming soon’ written on them!).
- Make sure people interested in your website or campaign can take away something free that is useful to them (whether this is a lesson plan, a reading list or a T-shirt!).
- Record in text, audio or visual means everything you do, including events, talks, articles and meetings so that you can capitalise on it all.
- Write information pieces for newsletters and websites, but check first what length and type of offering the editor or web host is prepared to accept.
- Work out what would help your cause: A free meeting room at an upcoming teachers’ conference? A link on a website? The cost of hosting your own website?
- Contact groups you think may be interested in sponsoring you and suggest a few easy ways they can help you. What can you do to help them too?

This is what I have been learning how to do since March 2013, when I set about creating The Fair List UK, an award for excellence of gender balance in presenters at ELT events in the UK. Will all this help my teaching, teacher training, writing and editing? Well, I believe that if you do something you feel is right and which energises you, it will spill over into all kinds of areas of life, including work. And the most important thing, perhaps, for someone in education is that I’m learning!

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I imagine the scene; you’re working hard, teaching narrative tenses or attempting to elicit the idiom full of beans during a lesson on the topic of health. While you’re busily dealing with errors or questions from the learners, you notice out of the corner of your eye that one or two of them are sneaking a look at their smartphones. Our learners clearly want to be able to use their amazing devices in class time, so why don’t we just harness the power of this technological wizardry for our own advantage?

Here are some examples of activities which I have used with my classes:

**Digital storyboard**

This kind of activity allows kinaesthetic learners a chance to exercise their particular style of learning, while also allowing visual learners the opportunity to learn using their method. If you would like to see an example from my class, you can visit [http://londonstudentblog.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/peters-time-out-shuwa](http://londonstudentblog.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/peters-time-out-shuwa).

1. **Choose any topic you like and elicit ideas from the learners regarding lexis and structures they already know which might be useful for talking about this topic.** Also get them to think about any particular problems that can occur within the topic area. With the topic of work, I asked my learners to think of work-related problems, such as an overbearing boss or insubordinate subordinates.

2. **Once a lively discussion and feedback have ensued, instruct the learners to create a problematic topic-related situation in groups of three or four.**

3. **When the groups have decided on their situation, tell them they will now use their smartphones to take pictures and put them in the correct sequence to create a digital storyboard, a wordless story.** This is where the learners will look at you in a strange way, as if to say Really? Little do they know, that their clever teacher has devised a way for them to practise incidental language – instructions, sequential language and suggestions, to name but a few – all the while practising the vocabulary and possible scenarios that may occur within the topic area.

4. **Allow the learners time to get organised.** They will have fun trying to take the photos – they might even ask you to be in them! Keep a close eye on what they are up to, especially if they are outside the classroom.

5. **The finished products are perfect for display on walls or school blogs as evidence of the learners’ efforts.** Once the wordless stories are complete, it’s easy to flip this ‘doing’ activity into a written one, by asking the learners to write up the story underneath the photos – perfect for any level of learner.

**Putting your foot in it**

Here is another activity I use with smartphone technology, but using the video function instead of the stills camera. I did it with some upper-intermediate learners, basing it on the idiom putting your foot in it, which we were exploring in class by looking at different situations where you can say that people put their foot in it. The learners had such fantastic ideas that I felt sure they were bound to be able to create something special.

1. **Ask the learners to think of a situation where a faux pas could occur and discuss possible scenarios.**

2. **Get them to formulate a conversation based on this situation – in essence, a script.**

3. **Ask them to use their phones to film their conversations – not only will they be practising the target structures and lexis, but also utilising incidental language, such as stand there, move the camera lower and Action!**

4. **If you (or they) want, the learners can edit their films at home before showing them at a ‘film festival’ in class.**

My learners had a lot of fun with this. One situation involved a frustrated employee complaining about his boss and stating that she would never get married, which then cuts to a second scene outside where the employee is complaining to a different person, who turns out to be the boss’s future husband. The much-anticipated screening premiere was fun to watch and instilled pride in the learners.

**Directions**

This is a fun activity for lower levels.

1. **Study and practise the language and structures needed to give directions.**

2. **Put the learners in pairs and ask them to create a route to follow outside the school.**

3. **Send them out to take a photo of the destination at the end of their route.**

4. **Back in class, they write directions that will take other learners from the school gate to their destination, without naming the end-point or showing the photo.** Check their directions and make sure they haven’t said where the final destination is.

5. **Get the learners to swap their directions with another pair, follow the directions they have received and take a photo at the end-point, aiming to take the same one that they think the original pair will have taken.**

6. **Back in class, they compare photos with the original pair.**

7. **You can follow this up by getting them to write descriptions of their photos.**

**Moods**

This activity is suited to any level of learner, but I see it as more suited to advanced learners as it gets them to distinguish between the nuances of the English language. Studying lexis connected to moods and attitudes can be rather tricky if just seen as words on a page. Imagine what could be done if the learners posed for photographs to exemplify the moods and these were then displayed on an Interactive White Board for the rest of the group to guess. I would love to see what learners could come up with for bewildered.

There are endless possibilities for using smartphones in the classroom. Using their cherished phones provides learners with an interesting, creative activity that they can really get their teeth into. It caters for different learner styles and takes the language off the page and into an activity that they actually do instead of completing incessant coursework practice exercises.

What are you waiting for? Get smart and get snapping!

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**Peter Fullagar**

Peter Fullagar currently works at Stafford House London, PGCE- and DELTA-qualified, with over ten years’ experience, he has a keen interest in writing in the classroom and exam classes (and photography), and also works as a Cambridge and IELTS examiner.
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Reach for the Skype

Olga Kozar investigates the ins and outs of online teaching.

Teaching English via Skype is a growing industry, which is growing for very practical and compelling reasons. First of all, teaching online reduces the operational costs of running a teaching institution: there are no building rents, no travel expenses and few stationery or other costs that a traditional school would normally have, which means that an online school or online teacher is able to offer cheaper services and compete on price with traditional schools. Also, teaching online eliminates geographical boundaries. A student can choose a teacher from a different city, country or even continent. Students who want to study early in the morning or late at night, perhaps when their children are in bed, can easily find a teacher in a different time zone to study with. The same is true for the teachers: they can offer classes at times which are convenient for them. The potential pool of clients and providers in online teaching increases exponentially.

Another important element which contributes to the success of online teaching is the time that is saved. Teaching and learning via Skype removes the need to commute – and, of course, a bi-product of this is the positive impact on the environment that staying at home instead of commuting can make. These are just some of the reasons why teaching via Skype is becoming increasingly popular around the world.

But don’t just take my word for it: try typing “Skype lessons English” into a search engine – I guarantee it will return millions of results. As someone who has been running a Skype language school for over four years, I thought it was time to share some trends of Skype teaching with a broader ELT community. So I spent a couple of weeks putting together an overview of about 100 websites that offer Skype English lessons. Here is a short summary of what I have found.

- Who are the providers?
  There are hundreds of individual teachers and companies teaching English via Skype. Some of the companies are very small – one or two teachers who have got together to create a simple website and advertise their services, often as an adjunct to their main teaching job. Other providers are a part of larger institutions, eg Kaplan or AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) in Australia. The majority of the providers, however, are private online schools with anything from six to 50 teachers.

- What kinds of lessons are offered?
  The absolute ‘winner’ in this category is speaking lessons. Almost across the board, Skype providers offer students the chance to practise speaking English, often with native speakers. The second most popular category is business English, followed by preparation for various exams (IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, etc).

- How long are the lessons?
  Typically, the lessons are 30–60 minutes long. An interesting trend in Skype teaching is shorter lessons. Since location is not an issue, some schools and teachers experiment with having short but frequent lessons in an attempt to maximise efficiency. Some even offer 15- or 25-minute classes.

- Are Skype teachers young computer wizards?
  The short answer is no. Browsing through the hundreds of sites shows that a lot of teachers (especially the native-speaker teachers) are in their 50s and 60s – even in their 70s! This shows that teachers shouldn’t be afraid of the technology involved. If retired educators are doing it, why shouldn’t you?

- How do students usually pay for the lessons?
  The most popular payment method for international schools with students in different countries seems to be PayPal. This is a quick payment method, but it does charge a commission from the receiver of around $3 for every $50. However, do double-check this as different types of accounts have different commission rates.

- Are the lessons pre-paid or post-paid?
  Most teachers and schools offer pre-paid packs of lessons (eg five, ten, 15 or 20 lessons) with varying prices for different packages. Some schools have ‘monthly’ packages; some do not have restrictions on the expiry date of the purchased lessons.

- Do schools and teachers have ‘demo’ lessons?
  In most cases there are demo lessons. Some providers offer a full-length free demo lesson before a student pays for a series of classes. Other schools arrange ‘test calls’ with the purpose of testing the connection and breaking the ice. It appears to be common practice for Skype teachers and schools to have an introductory session in order to allay any possible concerns that students might have – Will I understand my teacher? Is it a real person or just a photograph?

- Are lessons for groups or one-to-one?
  One-to-one lessons seem to be a lot more popular than group classes. The latter, however, are a lot more affordable, for the obvious reason that a teacher or school can maximise the teacher’s time by teaching several students simultaneously.

There is clearly a lot to be said for the emerging new players in the ELT market, and my personal prediction is that teaching and learning via Skype will become incredibly popular in the next few years. Have you considered it yet?

Olga Kozar is the founder and DOS of an online language school (English by Skype). She has taught ESOL face-to-face in Russia, China and the United States. Currently, she is doing a PhD on teaching English via Skype in Sydney, Australia.

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This isn’t the first time I have written about Present.Me. As soon as I saw this tool, I knew it had lots of potential for the ELT classroom. The difference, however, is that I have now done lots of work with it, and I can share my results with you. I am really impressed with it and my students seem to be, too.

Present.Me

Present.Me (https://present.me) allows a teacher or student to upload Word documents, PDF files or a set of PowerPoint slides and then add their voice to them – and video, too, if they have access to a webcam. The resulting recordings can then be disseminated over the internet by sharing the link or embedding the recordings in a blog or web page. The document will appear on the left-hand side of your screen and the webcam recording on the right.

The potential of this tool is almost limitless. It is ideal for teachers who want to produce content that students can access out of the class, such as lectures, mini-presentations, vocabulary to practise, etc. Teachers could, for example, record themselves going over a particular grammar point. Their PowerPoint slides would be on the left and the video of them giving an explanation on the right.

This tool has amazing potential for students as well. They could prepare a presentation using PowerPoint slides and then record themselves going through and explaining the slides. They could choose a topic that really interests them: a place they like visiting or information about their family and friends, etc. This has real potential in EAP classes, too, as students can create mini-presentations associated with the topics they are studying, and these can easily be shared with their teacher or peers.

I also think this tool could easily be used for preparing students for oral exams. The webcam scenario means that students could work in pairs. The questions could appear on the screen, with one student conducting the interview using the questions and the other student answering them. Similarly, students could be given a speaking task to do, with the task instructions appearing on the left-hand side of the screen and the students appearing in the webcam recording on the right-hand side, doing the task.

Reflection

I really believe that developing good reflective practitioners is at the heart of what we are trying to do in education. When I think about my own learning, how it has evolved and how I have learnt to become more autonomous, then it all relates back to my ability to reflect, draw conclusions from my reflections and then attempt to act on them. Reflection and autonomy are closely related since good autonomous learners are continually reflecting on their learning and refining it.

The problem is that reflection is not easy to do. It is time-consuming and students don’t often see the point of it. They often don’t like the fact that the reflections they are asked to do are written – which means additional work. This happened to me when I did my MSc dissertation. I didn’t like the fact that I had to write a reflective diary, on top of the 15,000-word essay that I had to produce.

I have wondered about getting students to reflect orally rather than in written form. Recently, I was running a series of experimental classes, using a range of different technologies. I wanted the students to reflect on the lessons and explain to me what they thought they had learnt, what sort of language processing had taken place and how I could improve the activity in the future.

In one particular class, we experimented with a tool called Wallwisher. The students had to work in groups and create ‘tourist guides’ for various cities in Europe by finding interesting articles, videos, pictures and links and adding them onto an electronic corkboard (a ‘wallwisher’). This meant working in groups, organising the activity, finding the content, adding it to the corkboard, editing it and then finally choosing one student to present it to the class.

I provided a series of reflective questions that I wanted the students to answer after the class. They uploaded them into Present.Me and then recorded their answers. They shared the links with me so that I was able to play back their reflections and listen to what they had said.

What amazed me first was just how much they said. The reflections were far more detailed than anything they had ever produced in written form. But more important was the quality of the reflections. The students really gave me an insight into how their groups had organised themselves, how much language was actually produced and what they actually thought of the activities. This led to several changes in the way I organised groupwork and the way that the students worked on the internet. It gave me probably my first true insight into what really happens when we do groupwork, seen from the students’ point of view. I learnt more from that one reflective session done orally than I had ever learnt from any other reflective technique I had attempted.

Along with the usual training video to show you how to work with Present.Me (see below), I have provided an example recording of one of the students said, for you to listen to. This is a real example and though it is not the best and most detailed reflection I received, it does demonstrate how a tool like Present.Me could be used. Although this was not the aim of the activity, it also demonstrates the potential of Present.Me as a simple tool for developing students’ speaking skills.

Unfortunately, Present.Me requires a good internet connection, but if you are lucky enough to have one, it is an excellent tool. I do know that they are gradually developing better compression, so you might find that in a year or two it will work on much slower internet connections.

How to use Present.Me

www.teachertrainingvideos.com/presentme/index.html

Student example

https://present.me/view/47956-wallwisher-activity-feedback-reflection

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

Keep sending your favourite sites to Russell: russellstannard@btinternet.com
Prize
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ETp presents the sixty-first in our series of prize crosswords. Send your entry (completed crossword grid and quotation), not forgetting to include your full name, postal address and telephone number, to Prize crossword 61, ENGLISH TEACHING professional, Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd, Rayford House, School Road, Hove, BN3 5JR, UK. Ten correct entries will be drawn from a hat on 10 December 2013 and the senders will each receive a copy of the second edition of the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, applauded for its unique red star system showing the frequency of the 7,500 most common words in English (www.macmillandictionary.com).

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

**VERY FREQUENT WORDS**

*** With a high rank or position
*** Done or happening every day
*** Angel at My Table (film by Jane Campion)
*** The space above that you see when you stand outside and look up
*** Moving on or beside a line
*** The main subject of something, such as a book, speech or exhibition
*** Not easy to deal with or understand
*** To move or travel to another place
*** Used for saying who or what does something
*** Something missing that prevents a situation or a system from being complete or perfect
*** To take action to deal with a difficult situation
*** At that time
*** A negative reply

**FREQUENT WORDS**

** A larger amount of something than is necessary
** A change in someone’s ideas or opinions
** A thin piece of metal used to fix one thing to another
** A very fast plane

** SOMETHING YOU SAY OR WRITE THAT YOU KNOW IS NOT TRUE
** AN AMOUNT THAT SOMEONE IS OFFICIALLY ALLOWED TO HAVE
** SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU LESS EFFECTIVE, SUCCESSFUL OR ATTRACTIVE
** A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WITH POWER AND INFLUENCE
** ONE OF THE FIVE PARTS AT THE END OF YOUR FOOT
** TO RISK MONEY BY SAYING WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN
** SMALL AND PLEASING IN APPEARANCE

**FAIRLY FREQUENT WORDS**

* To leave a mark on something accidentally

**LESS FREQUENT WORDS**

– A plant that produces grain for food
– Small jobs that involve collecting or delivering something
– The sixth note in a musical scale
– To feel annoyed because someone else has got something you want
– The unit of money used in Japan
– A first degree from a university
– A food made from rice mixed with meat, fish or vegetables
– A sweet food made from sugar, butter and cream
– A tree with hard dark wood
– A sweet food made from vegetables mixed with meat, fish or vegetables
– A first degree from a university
– A bull with no testicles
– Informal word for glasses
– The work of cutting up animals to be sold for meat
– The abdominal muscles
– A tree with hard dark wood
– Fairly large
– A sweet food made from sugar, butter and cream

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