

# Proceedings of the

27<sup>th</sup> International IATEFL Slovenia Conference

## **TEACHING... IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC!**

10-13 March 2022, Terme Vivat, Slovenia

Editor  
Alenka Tratnik



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# A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

The last two years with the kind of forced pause that has occurred for all of us have been uncanny. But as we slowly begin to take stock of these unusual and challenging moments, we can see that while there have been traumas and adverse life experiences, there have also been parts that have been wonderful, or parts that have brought us to where and who we are now, personally and professionally. For us, IATEFL Slovenia, the pandemic forced us to take some professional time off, which meant no international conferences, no time for face-to-face meetings, and no one-day professional development on a larger scale.

The 27<sup>th</sup> International IATEFL Slovenia Conference Teaching... it's a kind of magic! which took place from March 10 to 13, 2022, was a special event in more ways than one. In fact, there were also many first-time events at this conference. Namely, it was the first post-Covid-19 international teacher conference not only in Slovenia but also in the region, and for many of us, probably the first live conference we have attended since the pandemic began. It was really a very special moment when everyone came together again after the pandemic, and we as IATEFL Slovenia were happy to see you all in real life. There was another novelty: this year's conference was held at a new venue, the beautiful Terme Vivat thermal spa, which offers numerous amenities for education, professional and personal self-care and well-being. Not only that, this is also the conference from which this first special edition of e-proceedings has emerged. The articles included in this publication were all presented at the conference and are listed in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author of the article. The value of these proceedings lies not only in the articles, but also in the fact that the conference succeeded in connecting numerous like-minded and active ESL teachers, as well as in providing a framework for the exchange of experiences, high-quality dialogue on various topics, and the profound mutual learning that this entailed.

Most articles are based on practical ideas and rich classroom experiences on how best to organise, manage, promote, and facilitate creative and interactive learning and teaching.

Some articles present inspiring and interesting projects; others deal with mastering virtual teaching, writing materials, formative assessment, action research, various motivational strategies and techniques; some deal with students with special educational needs; and still others are accompanied and enriched by reflections on what it means to be a better English teacher today.

All in all, the conference Teaching... it's a kind of magic! as well as the articles in this publication show us more than ever that good teaching is never a routine, but rather an art based on the ability to creatively manage, adapt, and apply a way of working, an approach, or an idea to each specific situation, group of students, or individual. Through their active participation in this year's conference and as authors of the articles in this publication, teachers also demonstrate their commitment to exploring, deepening, sharing, and reflecting on their teaching practices and contributing to the vast body of knowledge about learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

Finally, we would like to thank the people who are most important to this conference volume – the authors and the reviewers who took the time to write papers and review the articles. We know you are very busy, and we appreciate your efforts. Without you, this publication would not have been possible, and we hope you find it useful.

We hope you enjoy reading it!

Alenka Tratnik

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 9** WRITING SKILLS AND ART – THEY BOTH CAN TOUCH ONE’S HEART  
**Katja Apat Rožič**
- 14** DOES THE NEW ERA OF TEACHING REFLECT IN STUDENTS’ SUCCESS?  
**Meta Arnež**
- 18** SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE  
**Nada Đukić**
- 22** LET’S FIGURE THE PHRASAL VERBS OUT  
**Tanja Fajmut**
- 30** MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL ...  
**Nives Fratina**
- 34** POLITICOPOLY AS A LEARNING TOOL  
**Miloša Gogala, Anja Plemelj, Andrej Pogorelec**
- 41** MINECRAFT EDUCATION EDITION – HOW TO USE IT IN THE CLASSROOM?  
**Manca Golob**
- 46** THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER TEACHER TRAINER GUIDE  
**Vesna Gros**
- 51** IMPLEMENTING ACTION RESEARCH INTO TEACHER TRAINING: A COURSE PLAN  
**Katalin Hubai, Zsófia Széll**

- 56** WHAT A NOISY ENGLISH CLASSROOM!  
**Damjana Jerše**
- 61** USING WORD CLOUDS IN THE SECONDARY ELT CLASSROOM  
**Breda Jesenik Kolar**
- 66** TEACHING LISTENING AND SPEAKING TO YOUNG LEARNERS  
**Dušica Kandić Najić**
- 71** ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM? WHY NOT!  
**Bojan Kašuba**
- 76** SPARKING IMAGINATION IN THE CLASSROOM FROM A TO Z  
**Bernarda Kejžar**
- 81** VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE OF ERASMUS+ KA1 LTT ACTIVITY  
**Mateja Kolar**
- 86** CREATIVITY IN MATURA LITERARY TEXTS  
**Lea Koler**
- 91** HOW TO READ LITERATURE LIKE A PROFESSOR  
**Klavdija Krempļ Slana**
- 96** HOW LITERATURE BROADENS HORIZONS  
**Nina Kremžar**
- 101** WHERE WERE YOU ON 9/11?  
**Petra Krhlanko**
- 106** ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR LESSONS  
**Lucija Kuntner**
- 111** LEARNING NUMBERS WITH THE HELP OF 5-MINUTE ACTIVITIES  
**Nataša Kuselj**
- 115** A MAGICAL CULINARY TOUR OF SLOVENIA DURING ENGLISH LESSONS  
**Jana Kusterle**
- 121** SETTING UP A VIRTUAL EXCHANGE  
**Nikola Lehotska**

- 126** CARROT OR STICK  
**Milan Mandeljc**
- 137** LET'S GAMIFY OUR ENGLISH LESSONS  
**Urška Mejač**
- 142** POSITIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION  
**Sarah Mercer**
- 146** LET'S TRAVEL ONLINE – CULTURE SHARING PROJECT  
**Nataša Merkaš**
- 150** WE ARE HIRING!  
**Jana Mlakar**
- 155** ADHD, ASD, SEN. BUT WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?  
**Dr Claudia Molnár**
- 159** MATERIALS WRITING 101: TIPS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM  
CONTENT CREATOR  
**László Németh**
- 165** DIGITAL BRIDGES  
**Bojana Nikić Vujić and Nenad Stamenovic**
- 170** TASK ACHIEVEMENT AT THE MATURA: A TOUGH ROW TO HOE?  
**Anže Perne**
- 176** ENGAGING STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF INTERACTIVE WORK MODES  
**Uwe Pohl**
- 184** LET'S PLAY ENGLISH  
**Julija Preac**
- 189** THE MAGIC OF MINDFULNESS IN CLASSROOM  
**Tanja Primožič**
- 193** A PORTFOLIO OF TECHNICAL ARTICLES  
**Tina Rajhman**

- 197** GETTING LEARNERS AWAY FROM THE COURSE-BOOK  
**Lee Shutler**
- 202** PROJECTS WITH RELATIONS AT HEART  
**Daniel Starski**
- 208** INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS – YES OR NO?  
**Lidija Strmšek Pisanec**
- 212** WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ... THE TOPICS WE FEAR TO DISCUSS  
**Jasna Šebez**
- 218** USING ONENOTE IN ENGLISH LESSONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
**Rok Škrlec**
- 222** I BELIEVE I CAN PROJECT  
**Mojca Šterk**
- 226** ELEMENTS OF MOTIVATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM  
**Tjaša Šuc Visenjak**
- 229** FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ESL CLASS  
**Mateja Trebec**
- 235** SURVIVE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL  
**Sandra Vida**
- 240** TURNING ARNES CLASSROOM INTO EFFECTIVE AND INTERACTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITH H5P CONTENT  
**Mojca Zadavec**
- 264** ATTENTION-GRABBING OPENERS  
**Ivana Zidanšek**
- 250** DO, DID, DONE – IRREGULAR VERBS CAN BE FUN  
**Mateja Žgur**



# WRITING SKILLS AND ART – THEY BOTH CAN TOUCH ONE’S HEART

**Katja Apat Rožič**

## **Abstract**

Creativity can be fostered in many different ways – through Art lessons, Music, reading sessions, and during English lessons as well. Starting in the sixth grade, our pupils create little projects, related to various topics. This article will give you a glimpse of these projects and provide some examples for further use.

**Keywords:** projects, creativity, pupils

## **Introduction**

We rarely realise how creative our pupils can be until they are given the chance to express themselves either through music or art. Most of the children just love creating and they really enjoy their creations as long as they are allowed to express themselves freely.

At our school, we try to encourage this creativity in many different ways – through Art lessons, Music lessons, reading sessions etc. In a slightly different way, we also do this during English lessons.

In sixth grade, we start with our projects and continue them through the end of Primary school. Pupils make projects that relate to the topics we discuss during our lessons. They create their little projects in special notebooks that they get in sixth grade and keep till the end of ninth grade. These »project notebooks« look really amazing after four years. They are also tangible evidence of the immense progress every pupil has made over the years.

My presentation will give you a glimpse of these projects and provide you with several examples for further use. It will also give you a chance to take a peek into some of the most inspiring examples.

## **How do we do it?**

My colleague and I started doing this a few years ago, and I must say the majority of students like doing these little projects. Some of them really put a great amount of effort into their projects and end up feeling proud of what they have done. And as their teacher, I am proud of them as well, mostly because of their achievement.

We decided to start these "little projects" with students from sixth grade. So, at the end of their fifth grade, when they get the list of what they need for the sixth one, the project notebook is included. And as mentioned above students keep it till the end of ninth grade. We usually do 2 to 3 projects in a school year. Pupils are given precise instructions on what they need to include in their projects and the topic of the project always refers to what we are currently doing in English class.

The topics that mostly occur in sixth grade are connected to the family or their home, the typical day in the life of their family member ...

The 7<sup>th</sup> grade students develop their writing skills and art in creating a postcard and writing it, then reflecting on their last weekend in pictures, and finally travelling to space and designing their space town.

What we usually have in eighth grade are topics of natural disasters and ecology, students write about an imaginary event from the past, or they just present their idols.

The ninth graders give even more thought to a particular topic. They think and write about their future and also express themselves through art by creating a comic.

### **An insight into the projects**

All instructions for creating the project are given in Slovene language and students have one week to complete it. We know that we all need some time to think, prepare, and maybe do some research before we start writing. When they hand their work in, we read it, correct the mistakes and then give the students feedback. We have to respond to the students' writing. This makes it clear that we are interested in what the writing conveys.

Not all projects are exquisite, but they are special in their own way. Some students put a lot of effort into creating their little projects, others a bit less, and there are some who think that this is a waste of time. As promised, I will share one of these examples with you. I think it really should be featured in this article because it is so great.

### **The student's masterpiece**

The students were familiar with the story because we had read it together and talked about it in one of our previous lessons. I am adding the instructions in English to give a better idea of the finished work.

#### *The title: **Opposites attract***

*Firstly, take your Students' Book (Touchstone 9, Skela, 2006), open it at page 122 and then read the comic **Opposites attract** one more time. Think of how the story continued. Will Susan and Kev stay together? Did they quarrel a lot and split at the end? Have they found another partner? Or do you think they were made for each other and ... lived happily ever after? Write the continuation of the story into your project notebook. It can be written in the form of a comic or as a simple text but you have to add some pictures or drawings.*

*The text should be around 150-180 words long.*

1.

19th April,  
2021



Kevin  
the lazy  
bones....

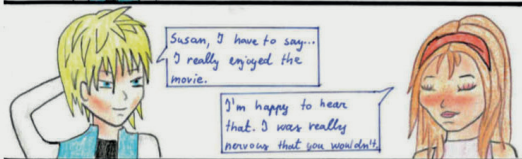
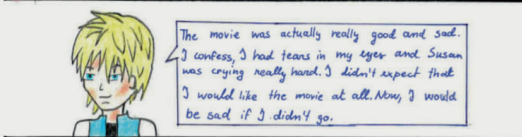
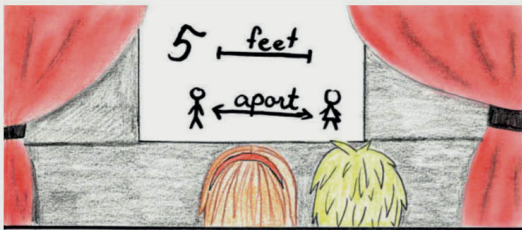
OPPOSITES  
ATTRACT

By Sara Turnick

...and Susan  
the  
sport addict



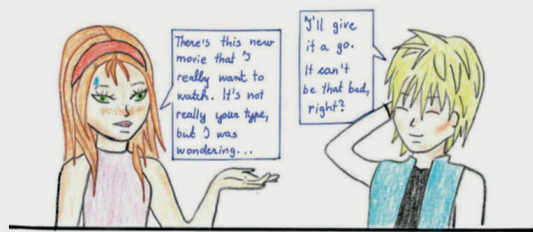
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2.

... CONTINUING

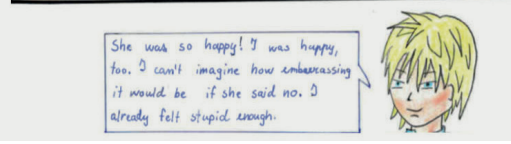
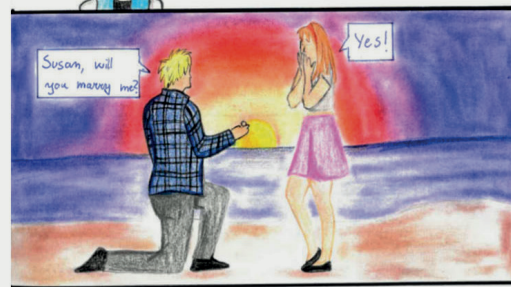
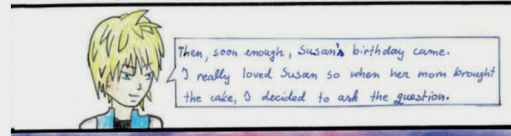
So, we started dating... again. This time we were both ready for all the challenges. We started off strong.

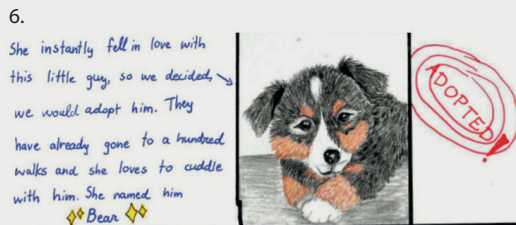
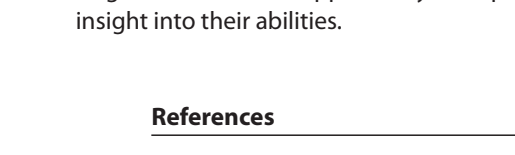
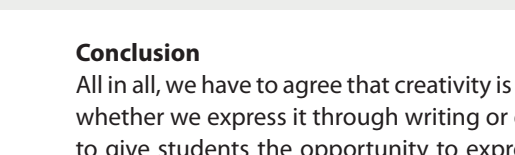
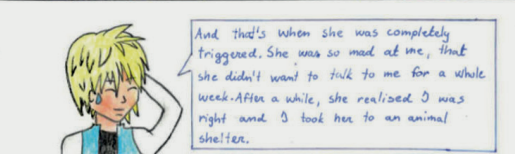
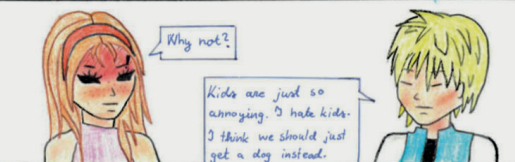
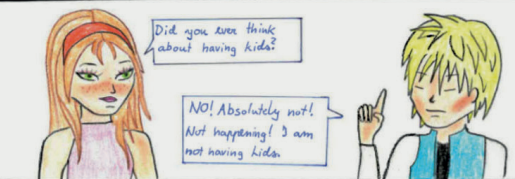


At 6pm, I picked her up and we went to the cinema.

4.

So we kept on dating for about 3 years. We went through a couple of fights, but it was nothing a little calm talk wouldn't save. I also introduced her to my family. They absolutely loved her.





**THE END!** *Justin*

## Conclusion

All in all, we have to agree that creativity is one of the most important concepts in our lives, whether we express it through writing or drawing, music or art. And as teachers, we have to give students the opportunity to express themselves freely while giving us a deeper insight into their abilities.

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# DOES THE NEW ERA OF TEACHING REFLECT IN STUDENTS' SUCCESS?

**Meta Arnež**

## **Abstract**

Education, like many other fields of life, has been subjected to a huge mind shift in the past two years. We know how many things have changed in teaching, but does this also reflect in the way graduate students succeed in life after finishing school? They have certainly benefited from remote learning while they were at school, and they successfully implement new skills in their new working positions.

**Keywords:** education, pandemic, students, success

## **Introduction**

As an English teacher, I have been a part of the huge shift in the mindset among teachers in the last couple of years due to the covid-19 situation. What used to be more or less a hobby for those more enthusiastic about ICT is now a common standard in most school environments. We hear talks about how to adapt to the new, more remote teaching methods, how we try to bring our subjects closer to the students, how successful we are in doing so, what goals we have achieved, and what sort of prizes and certificates our respective schools have received for this. However, as I am also a part of various business entities, that gives me the opportunity to reflect from the other side - are the knowledge and the abilities of graduate students any different, perhaps better than they used to be before the corona crisis struck? I will give specific examples of where students have become stronger and weaker.

## **Old and New Teaching and Learning Methods**

I believe that until recently there has not been a major change in teaching pedagogy, it has remained remarkably similar for decades. If during the first wave of the epidemic we focused mainly on teaching, in the second wave we had to make a big leap in the assessment of knowledge, as we could not delay it due to the length of the school closures. At the same time, the innovation, skill, and success of the teacher's work depended a lot on how much time and effort they had already invested in their digital literacy before the epidemic. Just as it is an indisputable fact that Slovenian teachers had had many opportunities to educate themselves in the field of e-learning over the last decade, it is also an indisputable fact that they did not seize those opportunities to a sufficient extent. According to the TALIS study (2018), by 2018 on average in Slovenia only 37% of teachers "often" or "always" allowed students to use ICT for projects or classroom work, which is lower than the average of OECD countries and economies that participated in TALIS (53%).

Nevertheless, the situation has definitely initiated new possibilities; we simply have to pursue the path that we have actually been forced to take, because it has brought so much good, so many benefits, new technologies, and new challenges, that it would be a major mistake to go back to the old ways and methods of teaching and learning.

As Professor Norman R. Scott (Eduvoice Exclusive) puts it in his interview, "I think the hybrid model will be the future of learning, as I believe face to face discussion holds a better value and develops the teamwork approach amongst students. So even if you are having a face-to-face class, it can be recorded as well, this ensures that the students can revert to it later for revision."

## **Traditional Methods**

In traditional teaching methods, teachers ask students to recite and memorize the content of study and what they teach in the classroom. Students recite the lesson one by one when their turn comes. Except for those who are reciting, the other students listen and wait for their turn. Traditional classroom teaching environment increases interaction among students



and provides a conducive environment for learning with fellow students. It also encourages a higher level of competitiveness among students. Nevertheless, there are many disadvantages in the traditional methods as well, such as traditional education being too rigid, too conservative, and, to some extent, lacks critical examination. It is full of dos and don'ts as well as fears and threats. It is not open and so does not give enough room for research and improvement.

### **Remote Learning**

Remote learning is where the student and the educator, or information source, are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment. Information is relayed through technology, such as discussion boards, video conferencing, and online assessments. Remote learning can occur synchronously with real-time peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration, or asynchronously, with self-paced learning activities that take place independently of the instructor. The term was formerly used to refer to individuals attending school via correspondence courses wherein the student corresponded with the school via mail.

### **Blending Methods**

Many people might use the terms "hybrid" and "blended" interchangeably, but in fact they mean different things. That difference is based primarily on the proportion of face-to-face and online sessions and/or instructional material in a given course. Whereas the term hybrid refers to teaching that is roughly balanced between its two formats (think 50/50), blended refers to a mostly traditional face-to-face course that also includes a few class sessions' of online instruction (think 25/75).

### **Coping with pandemic and its consequences**

There are many advantages and disadvantages to this post-pandemic situation from the students' point of view. On one hand, we have students who have developed high competence in remote learning, they can use ICT even more than they used to (and mind, they were avid computer users already in pre-pandemic times!), they have absolutely no problem switching from one form of learning to another, some of them got to express their better personality sides while learning from home or remotely. They vast majority of students at School Centre Kranj declared they would opt for remote learning over face-to-face at school.

On the other hand, we have students who have one through crises in the past two years. Students who did not feel safe and comfortable being away from their usual school environment, those that felt stressed, and even those who actually felt comfortable enough working from home, but now realize that remote learning was not as smooth as they had thought, and left them with huge gaps in their knowledge.

And of course, there is the third counterpart – the employers that come in touch with our students when they finish school. Those entities should in fact benefit from our students' knowledge. It had always been a fact that our graduate students appreciate the balance between students' theoretical and practical knowledge. Let me at this point mention that



School Center Kranj's Higher Vocational College educates for the professions of the future so that they get as much practical work during studies as possible. In practice, that means that each year they spend 3 months on practical education, i.e. working in a real working environment (e.g. in an office, in production, on the field etc.), which gives them a unique advantage over other students that leave school mainly with theoretical knowledge.

The companies that our school collaborates with and mostly employ our graduate students, have expressed that they see an improvement in the way students keep their time management and work - free time balance. They are said to complete their tasks before deadlines. Furthermore, students themselves quote that they have gained broader networking opportunities. Before pandemic, learning was mostly limited to local, now with online development they can learn worldwide from masters. And thirdly, the whole world of education is now well prepared to switch from online to face-to-face at any given time, should the circumstances arise. And the latter seems in the eyes of many people one of the biggest advantages of the post-pandemic world.

## Conclusion

We should embrace the fact that the pandemic is not going away any time soon. WHO Official Nabarro recently said in a BBC interview, 'Coronavirus is a new reality and the world will have to learn to live with Corona in our midst.' Decisions made today in the context of COVID-19 will have long-term consequences for the future of education. To create a holistic view of education, we need a high-quality table talk with policymakers, academics, and educators to take needs-based decisions that should be guided by shared principles and visions of desirable collective futures. The rise of Artificial Intelligence which was predicted to happen sometime in the future might be already here. It is vital to stay vigilant, adapt to the current situation and plan well for the future.

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# SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE

**Nada Đukić**, *Osnovna šola in vrtec Ankaran*

## **Abstract**

Three types of the problem behaviours are analysed in order to find out the underlying unmet special educational needs. It is pointed out what the teacher and learners need to do. Special attention is drawn to inclusive approaches, assessment for learning and multi-sensory ways that can help learners with special educational needs.

**Keywords:** special educational needs, language teaching, inclusive approaches

## **Introduction**

There exist at least three types of the problem behaviours that teachers perceive in their classes: disruptive behaviour, passive behaviour and negative feelings, and attention-seeking and dependence on outside help. In the first case, the learners behave badly and do not do what the teacher tells them. In the second case, the learners do not say anything and look worried. In the third case, the learners shout out and ask for help. All these behavioural patterns are probably indicators of unmet needs (Dexter et al., 2019). There is probably a slight difference between mixed-ability classes and classes with learners with special educational needs. In the latter case, class management is very difficult due to the lack of social cohesion in the class. Cooperative and collaborative work would be a big challenge in such a class. None of the three groups of learners is happy: they either do not feel accepted, or they do not feel safe, or they do not feel secure. Each problem might be telling us about the learners' possible special educational needs. Disruptive behaviour might be caused by the learners' inability to stand classroom pressures, to concentrate and to build rapport with their classmates. Passive behaviour and negative feelings might be caused by the learners' inability to understand what the teacher is saying. Attention-seeking and dependence on outside help might be caused by the learners' inability to pay attention, to focus, and to get organised. These learners might find it difficult to follow instructions because they might challenge the teacher's authority, or they might have hearing impairments, or they are not independent or self-reliant in their learning.

## **Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties**

Some learners might be shouting out all the time due to different reasons. Verbally aggressive behaviour is the only one that they know. They frequently lose their temper and have excessive mood swings, go to extreme lengths to attract attention, and tend to provoke and distract other classmates from their work. Their teacher needs to set boundaries, be consistent that the rules they introduce are obeyed, and notice and praise them when they do behave well. These learners need to develop an awareness of the effect that their behaviour has upon their classmates' and teacher's feelings (empathy), stop and think and then respond instead of reacting impulsively, learn turn-taking and respect in social interaction.

## **Hearing impairment**

Some learners might never say anything and look worried because they do not understand verbal instructions and fail to respond to verbal cues, feel unusually high levels of frustration in class and have emotional or behavioural problems not previously observed outside class, and need to focus on the teacher's mouth to understand language. These learners need to have access to learning. A suitable seating plan has to be introduced for them. They need to see the teacher's mouth, and they need peers' help. Any undue noise or disruptive classmates can be distractions and obstacles in their learning. They need visuals in giving instructions and in clarifying their understanding, a lot of praise when they do well, and encouragement to continue doing well, also by non-verbal communication. Gradually, they need to develop independence in their learning by relying on their strengths.

### **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder**

Some learners might ask for help all the time and need constant support from the teacher because they have difficulty waiting for their turn, do not seem to listen when they are spoken to, and do not want to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort. They are easily distracted because they are hyperactive or impulsive. These learners need a learning environment without distracting elements and concept organisers. They need to develop the ability to wait for attention, understand that they cannot obtain “all knowledge” at once, but in stages. That is why clear sequencing and scaffolding is very suitable for them. They need to be praised and encouraged when they show independence in their learning and output, also by helping other learners, i.e., being their teachers.

### **Inclusive approaches**

The teacher would be advised to consider carefully the seating plan, the group dynamics, class management and learning styles, and to act accordingly. Some disruptive learners would need to sit alone. Some learners who cannot understand the teacher due to possible hearing impairment would need to sit in front, so that they see the teacher’s mouth. Some attention-seeking learners would need to sit with learners they can give their attention to. The teacher would need to introduce bonding activities and test different groupings (e.g., think-pair-share). A few clear and positive rules, and boundaries for disruptive students would need to be set, and the teacher would need to be consistent about them. The teacher would need to avoid public confrontations and discuss privately instead, and give positive reinforcement for good behaviour. Varied activities, materials and techniques to support the learners’ preferred learning styles would need to be provided.

### **Assessment of learning and assessment for learning**

The teacher can use assessment of learning and assessment for learning. The first kind of assessment is summative, i.e., the end of term test, grades in the school reports. The advantages of this method are standardised tests and unified marking according to the criteria set in advance. They are suitable for verbally strong learners with a visual learning style and for learners with a very good memory. Sometimes they can cater for auditory learners as well (e.g., listening comprehension). The range of tasks is varied, especially in terms of low and high order thinking skills. The disadvantage of this method is that it is not always suitable for learners with auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, and learners with special educational needs, as they can feel demoralised and give up (be demotivated). It does not provide all the students the opportunity to show what they know (have learnt). It puts a lot of external pressure on learners, teachers, schools, parents (and carers) and even states, and it can be the sign of status, prestige and power.

The second kind of assessment is formative. It is learner-oriented, as it is measuring the progress of each learner in their learning against their own goals. There are no grades. The advantages of this method are in the fact that it gives the learner control upon their own learning by measuring their own progress and independence by setting their own goals accordingly. It gives each and every learner the choice how to show what they know (have

learnt). Motivation to learn comes from within, and this is a good basis for life-long learning. This method concentrates on learning strategies that promote learning and gaining (useful) knowledge in general, and it enables (self-)reflection and self-regulation. The disadvantage of this method is that the progress of some learners cannot be comparable to the other ones at a certain point in time. Some learners might not be willing to try it, as it demands engagement from the learner (reflection, self-regulation).

## **Conclusion**

Inclusive approaches, assessment for learning and multi-sensory ways (Dexter et al., 2019) can help learners with special educational needs. They can show understanding according to their preferred learning style. They can fill the gaps in knowledge easier, as they are acquainted with them first-hand. They can sequence their learning more easily, and in such a way experience success on a regular basis. They experience learning as manageable instead of overwhelming, and do not feel helpless, demotivated and frustrated any more. They can get feedback from the teacher more often and learn how to get it. They understand what they do wrong in their learning and correct it. Assessment for learning can be introduced effectively as a part of learning process on a regular basis (every lesson), and combined with recycling and reviewing. The teacher could try visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities, such as showing answers in a poster instead in writing, using a non-verbal method to show understanding (e.g., thumbs up/down, traffic lights), using a kinaesthetic approach (e.g., showing answers on mini whiteboards, ABCD cards), making up an audio recording/a play to show understanding and using a running dictation (Mordue et al., 2013).

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# LET'S FIGURE THE PHRASAL VERBS OUT

**Tanja Fajmut**

## **Abstract**

The article tackles the problems learners and teachers face when dealing with phrasal verbs in English lessons. It presents some methods and approaches teachers can use to help students learn phrasal verbs more effectively. To top it up, some practical ideas and hands-on activities are introduced which can make it easier for students to master phrasal verbs.

**Keywords:** phrasal verbs, different approaches, contextual approach, classroom activities

## Introduction

Phrasal verbs are very frequent in spoken and written English discourse (the news), so students start dealing with them quite early in the learning process. Similar to other multi-word verbs, phrasal verbs usually represent a problem for learners, because their meaning and use are not always straightforward or logical. However, simply by anticipating and being prepared for problems students may have their teachers can do a lot to lessen the confusion (and fear) that surrounds phrasal verbs.

## Problems that occur when learning phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs present problems for learners both in terms of their grammatical form and their lexical meaning. Teachers mostly report of learners' confusion that arises from various meanings, collocational patterns, grammatical forms, different particles that phrasal verbs associate with (Steel, 2022a):

### a) Phrasal verbs have various meanings

Phrasal verbs (PVs) are typically classified as a type of idiomatic expression, with ranging degrees of idiomaticity. Many PVs carry a literal meaning, e.g., *sit down*, *stand up*, but many have a non-literal (idiomatic) meaning, e.g., *I usually hang out with my friends on Friday*.

To further complicate things for learners, many PVs have more than one meaning. Thus, learners who are familiar with the meaning of *pick up* in the sentence *He picked up the trash.*, can have problems interpreting the meaning of *He picked up some Spanish while he was staying in Madrid* (meaning *to learn, acquire*).

In this case, it is probably best to deal with the meaning of the verb that is transparent from the text at hand. If the meaning of the verb in focus is to *learn, acquire*, then it is better to teach this meaning, without going into the other numerous possible meanings of *pick up*. This approach might be clearer and less confusing for students. Of course, teaching different meanings of polysemous words is our aim, but we must bear in mind that such competence comes with time and try not to burden students with too much at once.

### b) Particles

The meaning of the particles, i.e., *up*, *on*, *in*, can also present problems for students because sometimes the particles can have the same meaning in a large number, but not all, phrasal verbs. For instance, the particle *up*, is said to express the idea of *completing or totally finishing something* as in *clear up*, *sweep up*, *jumble up*, *split up*, but this idea cannot be applied to the verb *heat up* or *grow up* for example, where it carries the idea of *increase*.

### c) Collocational patterns

For learners, phrasal verbs present problems in terms of the words with which they

collocate. The phrasal verb *to call off*, for example, collocates strongly with *match*, i.e. *The match was called off due to the rain.*, and it also collocates strongly with *engagement, wedding, meeting*. Students often understand the meaning, i.e. *cancel*, but then apply it to other nouns with which it has no relationship. For example, *I called off my English class.* sounds strange to native speakers, as generally we can only *call off* events which have been specifically arranged or that are unique.

Teachers are advised to raise students' awareness of collocation by asking them to underline the nouns which follow certain verbs and by matching phrasal verbs to their common collocations, thus making a collocational grid, e.g., *call off, set up, put off* all collocate with *a meeting*.

#### d) Grammatical forms

In terms of grammatical form, phrasal verbs present problems for learners as to whether,

- i) they are separable or inseparable
- ii) they are transitive or intransitive

When trying to tackle these problems of form, teachers can either focus on the rules, i.e., whether phrasal verbs are of type 1 or 2 etc., or use a more spontaneous, contextual learning approach where they expose learners to lots of examples, preferably in short contexts which demonstrate their syntactic behaviour. Using a language can be a powerful way to learn it, even without explicit focus on linguistic forms and grammatical rules.

### **Mistakes that teachers/students make when teaching/learning phrasal verbs**

Teachers (and consequently students) make the following "mistakes" when dealing with phrasal verbs, which can sometimes make the learning process more difficult and cumbersome (Steel, 2022b):

#### a) Categorizing

Most common, traditional approaches to the teaching of phrasal verbs focus on the *studying* of phrasal verbs. Many ELT coursebooks and grammars categorize them into four different types, according to their grammatical forms, whether they are intransitive or transitive or if the verb and particle can be separated or not. Students study the rules, and then try to match phrasal verbs (generally not linked thematically) to their appropriate type. This method could be useful for some students, usually analytical learners. The terminology can also help students resourceful enough to study in their own time, using grammar books and dictionaries. Usually, however, this approach does not work so well, as learners are often overburdened with terminology, and the sheer wealth and complexity of the rules can put students off. Furthermore, too much classroom time is taken up with grammar terminology, with little time left to engage students in real language use, such as reading and speaking.



#### b) Focusing on lexical verb

Another commonly used approach is to group phrasal verbs according to the lexical verb they contain, e.g., *take up, take off, take in, take away, take back*. Exercises designed according to this approach are usually made to test knowledge of the difference in meaning between verbs in a group, e.g., through gap fill, such as this one:

*I shouldn't have called you a liar. I \_\_\_\_\_ it \_\_\_\_\_. (take back)*

The lack of co-text in exercises such as these makes it difficult for students to remember the phrasal verbs. Moreover, if it is only the particle which changes the meaning, and being confronted with so many different particles, students easily confuse them, producing sentences such as, *She takes to her father, for take after, and Don't be taken over by his friendly manner, he is not as nice as he seems, for take in*.

### **How should it be done (alternative methods and approaches)**

Teachers have been trying to find ways how to make it easier for students to cope with so many phrasal verbs. What seems to work better are the following approaches (Steel, 2022b):

#### a) Grouping by topic (lexical sets)

More recently, approaches have tended to group phrasal verbs into lexical sets. Thus, a text about relationships may include PVs like *get on with, fall out, make up, catch up with, hit it off*, etc.

Recent grammar books on phrasal verbs group the verbs in this way and have a number of advantages (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2017). The verbs are presented through text, which makes their meanings clearer, so students can use the co-text to work out the meanings themselves. Such cognitive engagement may also make the exercise more memorable.

Learners generally move sensibly from recognition to production and there is usually a final exercise in which students get to personalise the verbs, e.g., by asking each other questions.

However, again, the potential for confusion could still be high, when the lexical set contains words of very similar meaning. For instance, students could have problems with the text about relationships, which contained the verbs: *go out with, get on with*, etc. Words of similar meaning could interfere with each other, especially those which have a similar form, here, *go out with* and *get on with*.

#### b) Grouping by particles

Instead of grouping them by verb, organizing phrasal verbs by particles can help students make relevant connections between them (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2017). That is because the particles have tendencies (or meanings), and if students understand

these tendencies, it will make learning phrasal verbs a bit easier. So, exercises which focus on particles make learners aware of the shared meaning of a group. These can increase students' confidence in dealing with phrasal verbs, as they can feel they have a tool which helps them unlock the meaning of potentially incomprehensible items.

As long as the teacher highlights the fact that the generalised meaning of the particle in question is not the same with all phrasal verbs, then these exercises can be useful in understanding the phrasal verbs better, thus helping memorise them and ultimately use them correctly.

c) Teaching through texts (learning in context)

A more natural approach perhaps is to teach phrasal verbs as they occur in a text. Language is used in a context and is usually better learnt in a context (McCarthy and Carter, 1994). Teaching in this way means students are not weighed down by complex explanation or categorisation, which leaves more classroom time for authentic language use. If presented through texts, learners can sometimes interpret meanings of phrasal verbs quite accurately, picking up clues from the topic of the text and the co-text, but isolated or even heard or read at sentence level, phrasal verbs can be very confusing for learners.

A possible approach is to underline in a text all the phrasal verbs which students should notice. Then, in groups, the teacher asks the students to try to work out their meanings. The students will thus be able to use the co-text to help them. Guessing the meaning of a new word from context is a key vocabulary learning skill, as is well known.

The next step is to move from recognition to production. The teacher can do this by setting up a situation, and then asking students to make the phrasal verbs their own by producing a text along the similar lines to the original. Thus, if the original text they read was a story about a date between a boy and a girl, then the teacher asks them to write another story about two friends meeting up after a long time.

McCarthy and Carter (1994) emphasise the importance of learners finding meaningfulness for themselves in words and in relationships between words they encounter in texts. One way of making exercises more communicative and personalized is to set students the task of constructing sentences about themselves, using the phrasal verbs given, in order to make the meaning *real for them*. In that way, students have an anchor with which to connect the meaning of the PV to their own life, making PVs easier to memorise. Such personalisation tasks thus make it more likely for students to successfully learn the vocabulary.

## Classroom activities

The following section presents different activities for learning and practising phrasal verbs.

### a) Cartoon representation

The abstract meaning of some phrasal verbs is sometimes difficult to grasp and therefore memorise. This is done best with the help of a cartoon: phrasal verbs can be learned with comic strips, like in the following example where students guess the meanings of the PV with the help of the picture:



*put out*

1. to take sth out of your house and leave it there
2. to stop something from burning or shining

### b) Phrasal verbs in jokes

If students find something funny and entertaining, they will more likely memorise it. So, teaching phrasal verbs with the help of jokes is a very good method – having some laughs with the students will brighten up any lesson. Most of these jokes containing PVs came from *Lessons with Laughter* by George Woolard (1996). Jokes must be printed on two pieces of paper: one has a question, the other has the punchline. The papers are mixed and given to students, they must go around the classroom and find their pair, then find the phrasal verb in the joke (its idiomatic and literal meaning) and write it down.

Two examples of the jokes:

Doctor, doctor, I can't sleep at night.

*Sleep on the edge of the bed and you'll soon drop off.*

Waiter, I asked you to bring my order quickly, but why is my food all squashed?

*Well, sir, you did tell me to step on it.*

### c) Making it up – a story with phrasal verbs

Students write their own story, using PVs they learned (a fictional short story or a paragraph related to their life). I found this activity on the web page of the British Council (McAvoy, 2022).

### d) Personalizing the use of PVs

After learning a set of PVs the teacher writes a couple of questions that students could ask each other to get them practising PVs in a personalised way. This helps

students create connections between the words and their experiences and that, as we mentioned earlier, helps them immensely in memorising PVs.

The other option is that every pair of students is given 2-3 phrasal verbs that they must use in a conversation. The students must come up with a dialogue, put it down on paper, and then act it out in front of the class.

Alternatively, the teacher gives each student a set of phrasal verbs that they must use in an e-mail to a friend or family member. For example, they may use phrasal verbs connected with food to write about their holiday meal.

e) Bingo

Bingo games work every time! Students can practice connecting the meaning of the PVs with their single-verb synonym (e.g., *put off* – *postpone*) with the help of bingo. A collocation bingo works well, too, as students have a set of nouns on a card, which they cross off according to whether they think they collocate with the phrasal verb which the teacher reads out.

When practising collocations of PVs, *odd one out* tasks are also very useful as students are involved in a deeper level of processing, discussing why certain words don't combine.

f) Memory game Pelmanism

Students may know the meanings of many phrasal verbs but cannot always use them appropriately. For example, if students know that *turn up* means *arrive*, this can lead to inappropriate use as in *What time did you turn up?*, implying criticism where this may not be the intention. So, the game Pelmanism, with the appropriate set of cards, gives an example of how to revise such collocations in a subsequent lesson. It is a usual "memory game", where students, in groups of 3-4, get a set of cut-up cards, and are instructed to place all the cards face-down and spread them out on the table. They try to find the pairs of PVs and their collocations, the winner is the person who has most pairs at the end. An example of this exercise can be found on the British Council website (Morley, 2022).

g) Peer teaching

Students can also practice PVs with the method called peer teaching: they get a selected set of phrasal verbs on cards and working in pairs, a student explains their phrasal verb on the card, listens to the explanation of their partner's and then they make turns with other students. After matching with all students, they get a handout with all the used PVs, where they must supply the definition of the PVs in the column.

h) Phrasal verbs in news

Students read a newspaper article which contains PVs that can be underlined or not (advanced level). They work out the meaning of the PVs from the context and provide the glossary with PVs below the article. For one example of an article containing phrasal verbs check the link to magazine Time (Paramaguru, 2014).

### i) Learn PVs with videos

British Council offers quite a lot of materials which can help practise PVs, such as these video lessons with different topics that present the use of PVs in form of animated films (<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/vocabulary/advanced-vocabulary>). Videos on this site are supported with various tasks, which facilitate the acquisition of PVs.

## Conclusion

To sum up, there are different approaches how to tackle phrasal verbs in English lessons, but it seems that the approach which combines frequent and contextualised exposure to phrasal verbs with work on raising the awareness about the collocations and different meanings of particles may work best. A memorable presentation, personalisation tasks, and importantly, recycling, can do the trick and drop in learners an anchor of a phrasal verb in connection to their own world, which ultimately leads to memorising and using it frequently.

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# MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL ...

**Nives Fratina**

## **Abstract**

Communication has been with since time immemorial. Since the first cave dwellers started to use the first sounds to build communication, it has progressed immensely. In fact, it has developed to the point that it is conducted mostly electronically. The question to be answered is: Why is face-to-face communication important and what techniques can we use to tailor it to our own wishes and needs?

**Keywords:** communication, body language, mirroring

## **Introduction**

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary the definition of communication is the “process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour.”

It is a fact that communication as such has existed since man appeared on Earth and has been the most significant part of human expression. Some scholars speculate that already in prehistoric times humans communicated through (hand) gestures and onomatopoeic words. The latter served as a basis for evolution in communication because those humans who could talk were able to cooperate, share information, warn others of danger, ..., and the progress of which eventually led to the development of “talking era”.

With the development of paper, telegraph, telephone, radio, television, cell phone and later internet communication has come a really long way from first words to modern social media sites and b/vlogging. We see that communication is necessary for the survival of the human race, but have we taken it too far?

## **Communication in 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Today the lives of young people revolve around social media and this is not necessarily healthy. You lose sense of reality with all the communication conducted electronically and the incidence of depression connected to the use of social networks has already been established. The Covid-19 pandemic has created an environment which further on exacerbated mental health disorders.

The explanation behind it is clear. With no socializing – face-to-face communication - you lose genuine contacts, mutual feeling of trust and engagement. The question which arises at this point is - should we resort to the old and most reliable way of face to face communication to keep our sanity? The answer is a definite YES!

## **Non-verbal communication**

Face-to-face communication is much more effective than written or audio-only conversations. This is because seeing one another allows us to pick up on nonverbal cues and body language. A substantial portion of our communication is nonverbal. Experts have found that every day we respond to thousands of nonverbal cues including postures, facial expressions, eye gaze, gestures, and tone of voice. From our handshakes to our hairstyles, nonverbal details reveal who we are and impact how we relate to other people.

According to Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 rule just 7% of your message is communicated through words. Your tone of voice contributes 38%, but your body language communicates 55% of your message, as shown in the figure below.

## Elements of personal communication

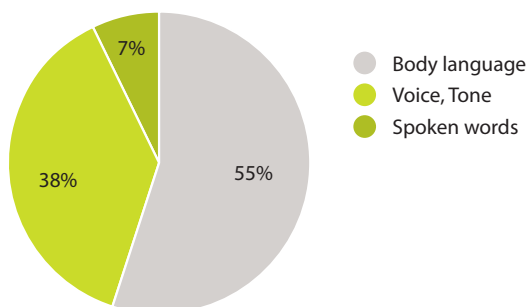


Figure 1: Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 rule

Having read all these facts, one can conclude that listening to words only cannot be enough to fully comprehend the message. Sometimes a person can say one thing but mean something entirely different or even intentionally mislead the other person through telling lies. But misleading people with body language is much more difficult, since most of it happens subconsciously. And if you are able to interpret body language correctly, you have a huge advantage in communication. Through someone's gestures and facial expressions you are able to read how a person is feeling because these non-verbal elements can present a listener with important clues to the speaker's thoughts and feelings and thus substantiate or contradict the speaker's words. What is more, mastering some techniques can even enable you to make instant connections and achieve good communication results without the other person even noticing it.

### Mirroring

Mirroring is a neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) technique that leverages body language to make instant connections and build rapport with anyone. It is basically a process of simply mimicking a person but in a very subtle way so that it appears to be unconscious. Mirroring can be achieved by copying body language (posture, gestures), speech patterns, pace, volume, and more. And the key to its success is that by mimicking we show empathy and we feel connected to another person. That other person will in such a way automatically find you more trustworthy because you are just like them and that gives them a feeling of safety. One very common and "contagious" everyday situation is yawning; you start to yawn after you see someone else does, or crossing your legs after the person sitting next to you does so. So, the whole point of mirroring is that you are able to create great interaction and strengthen the rapport with your partner. When you do it often enough, so that it becomes automatic, your interpersonal skills will definitely improve.



## Conclusion

Non-verbal communication is often times neglected in today's digitally oriented society. However, when you know how to "read the signs", it conveys a much deeper message than only the words themselves. Or as A. Mehrabian said: *"The non-verbal elements are particularly important for communicating feelings and attitude, especially when they are incongruent: if words and body language disagree, one tends to believe the body language."*

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# POLITICOPOLY AS A LEARNING TOOL

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## **Abstract**

The innovative communicative brand new board game is introduced through intermediate to advanced speaking opportunity on the topic of politics branching into the fields of political freedom, parliamentary democracy, political irony, etc. The participants are expected to use the speaking skill of negotiation throughout the board game thus practising their fluency in the English language and acquiring new vocabulary provided by scaffolding.

**Keywords:** board game, learning tool, communication skills

## Introduction

Politicopoly, an innovative communicative brand new board game has recently been created by Andrej Pogorelec, for the purpose of enacting the learning process of the speaking skill involving the communication skills of mediation, negotiation and appeal in a pleasurable way, under the umbrella of sociocultural theory (Thornbury, 2005). The practice of the language occurs through social and cultural activities, which enable students to achieve autonomy through the process of 'other regulation' – that is the mediation of a 'better other' – another player and a teacher. A teacher's role in this case is to provide a scaffold in the form of vocabulary – terminology on the topic of politics branching into several different fields such as political freedom, parliamentary democracy, political irony, etc.

It is assumed that players already have an advanced command of the general knowledge of grammar, register and discourse, thus being able to take an active part in the game's demands for the communication of mediating, negotiating and appealing. The exact rules for playing this innovative brand-new board game have been described in the article.

## Political topics in our learning environment

It is well known that games can be an excellent learning tool, allowing spontaneous learning. In particular, the themes that are especially relevant to the learning environment and to the pupils of our institution are: defence training, tactics and strategies of warfare, competition, war, weapons, etc. However, since as a society we want any military methods of regulating relations between peoples and nations to be used only as a last resort and in the context of defence against possible attack, it would not be superfluous to recall Carl von Clausewitz's well-known dictum: 'War is the continuation of politics by other means'. So, instead of waging war, let us rather concentrate on politics and make sure that we are so successful in doing so that it will never have to be continued by other means. Hence the idea of shifting the theme of our game as a teaching tool for our students from military doctrines to the vocabulary of politics. To begin with, domestic politics, which takes place on home soil in Slovenia, and instead of violence, promotes healthy competition, tolerance of diversity, respect for differences and a humorous view of all that divides us. Namely, despite our differences, we can be united in our desire for a better, richer and happier future for all of us and for our descendants.







## The rules of the game

Politikopoly is a combinatorial-strategic game of 6 players (can be fewer, minimum 2) representing 6 political parties (extreme left, left, moderate left, moderate right, right, extreme right). The game contains: a playing field (a map of Slovenia with 8 regions and 36 municipalities), 3 dice, money, a bank, a figure of the party leader in different colours for each player, 19 figures of the party voters for each party, 35 "?" cards, 30 "Confrontation" cards, 15 "Appeal" cards and 6 cards with the political programmes of the parties, which are distributed among players at the beginning (6 if there are 6 players and, analogously, fewer if there are fewer players). The allocation of a party programme to a player also determines for which party he/she will play.

Players start the game at the start, each with one of their pieces. They roll a dice for order. They then roll a dice in order. The game proceeds clockwise. They have a choice of a blue or orange dice, blue to move in the direction of arrows, orange in the opposite direction (it is not possible to go back to the start). Some arrows are also bi-directional. A roll of 1-6 leads them along different paths, which they choose after the roll of a dice. A player can place a figure of his constituents in the municipality he enters, but he has to pay €100 to do so. He has thus won the municipality. After the roll of a dice, the player moves forward (or backwards) in the announced direction, but in doing so he must never arrive at the starting point or at any municipality that he has already “passed” at the time of that roll.

There are also secret two-way underground tunnels leading from some municipalities. From the starting point of such a municipality, the player may choose to go through the tunnel, but must roll a passage dice which tells him the result of his attempt to pass through the tunnel. A dice has six symbols instead of numbers which determine the player’s fate after the passage attempt.

The meaning of the symbols:

	Successful passage to the other side. You go to the exit municipality.
	You have encountered extremists who have slandered and spat on you. You have come through a tunnel, but you do not throw once because you are in shock. You are waiting at the tunnel exit. When it is your turn, you roll a dice and continue the game.
	You have found a treasure in the tunnel. You go to the field on the other side of the tunnel you have successfully passed through and sell the treasure for €300, which is paid to you by the bank.
	The extremists have prevented you from crossing, so you cannot cross the passage this round. Roll a dice and go elsewhere.
	Secret agents have caught you in a meeting with the political underworld. You go to jail (do not roll once) and pay a €200 fine.
	You have fallen into a cave and hurt yourself. You go to hospital and for once you do not throw. You get €250 in compensation.

If a player encounters a “?”, he draws a “?” card and follows the instructions given. The “?” cards include the region promoter cards. These cards allow customers to make money. If they buy one, they can earn €100 for each »occupied« municipality in the region. The money is paid in a lump sum when they visit any municipality in a given region. These cards can also be exchanged or traded between players at the time of purchase (before the purchase price is paid to the bank). The initiative always lies with the player whose turn it is.

If two players meet in a field of the same municipality, the one who has come second in the field must draw a “Confrontation” card and follow the instructions (compulsory confrontation). The same applies if more than two players meet in the same field. The last one to arrive chooses who to confront, but must preferably confront the player who may already have voters in the municipality. A player who rolls a dice with more than three points and arrives in a municipality occupied by another player with voters may also (optionally) request a confrontation if he so wishes. The player occupying the municipality is called upon to confront, but the challenged player’s figure does not travel to the municipality of the challenge, as the confrontation in this case is done via Zoom. It may happen that two figures meet in a municipality occupied by a third player with voters. In this case, the third player will in all likelihood lose his municipality to the challenger or the challenged. Not necessarily - depending on the outcome of the confrontation.

The player who wins the whole region gets a one-off prize of €80 for each municipality in the region. On each subsequent roll, if the entire region is retained, €10 for each municipality in that region. By conquering the whole region, he also gains the security of his conquests within that region in terms of challenging confrontations by other players. The only possible way for a confrontation to still occur in such a region is for any two or more figures of the parties’ leaders to meet in the field of the same municipality. However, with the most common form leading to confrontation (i.e., a roll of a dice over three and the resulting arrival in a municipality controlled by a political opponent), or any other form, in the case of a monopoly over a region, political opponents cannot provoke confrontation.

If a player has no more money, then he cannot place his voter on the field, even if he arrives in a free municipality. At the start, each player receives €600 (if 6 players are playing), €720 (if 5 players are playing), €900 (if 4 players are playing), €1,200 (if 3 players are playing) and €1,800 (if 2 players are playing). A player cannot take over the already occupied communities, even if he has money. He is only a visitor and goes forward or backward on the next roll of a dice, depending on the choice of the colour of the dice (if he rolls more than 3, he has the right to provoke a confrontation with the player who occupies the field with his voters).

A player is out of the board game if he goes bust. He is bankrupt when he cannot pay his debts. Only when he has no more money and has to settle a debt can he sell control of the municipality (the voters) to the bank, but he only receives €80 for each municipality (he has bought at €100). The player can appeal and thus delay the implementation of the sanction when he obtains an explicit permission to appeal. In this case, he draws an “Appeal”

card and follows the verdict written in the “Appeal” card. When the result of the appeal is a **SAC**, this means that the appeal has been fully upheld (**S**anctions lifted, **A**ll decisions reversed, **C**onfrontation result reversed).

Once all the municipalities have been won, the electorate has allocated political power to the parties to form a government. The player who wins the most municipalities and manages to form a government wins. The player who wins 19 municipalities can form a government. In a two-player game, the Prime Minister forms the government with at least 19 municipalities of his own, but in a more than two-player game, the government can be a coalition government, the Prime Minister must collect at least 19 municipalities that are jointly occupied by the coalition members, and at least one political party must remain in the opposition. The mandate holder is the one with the most municipalities. If two players have the same number of municipalities, then the one with more money is the mandate holder. If the mandate holder, i.e., the player who has won the most municipalities, fails to get enough coalition partners to form a majority (at least 19 municipalities) in his coalition because of different political programmes and positions, then a different coalition can be formed with a different mandate holder. From the outset, each party has a 17-point programme. Each player therefore has a programme card from the start of the game. To form a successful coalition, the partners must agree with the mandate holder on at least **seven points** and with the other coalition members on at least **five**. Otherwise, it is not possible to form a coalition. As mentioned above, the player with the most fields (municipalities won) has the right to the mandate; if he fails to form a coalition, then the next player (political party) with the second highest number of municipalities is next in line to form one. If he also fails, the player with the third highest number of municipalities won has the right to it. In any case, the main winner of the game is the player who becomes Prime Minister, or the party that leads the government.

Table 1: Political themes

Theme	EXTREME LEFT	LEFT	MODERATE LEFT	MODERATE RIGHT	RIGHT	EXTREME RIGHT
democracy	-	+	+	+	+	-
private sector	-	-	+	+	+	+
migrants	+	+	+	-	-	-
freedom of speech	-	-	+	+	+	-
drinking water	+	+	+	+	+	+
capitalism	-	-	+	+	+	-
national corporatism	-	+	+	+	+	-
tolerance of dissent	-	-	+	+	-	-
international corporatism	+	+	+	+	-	-
LGBT	+	+	+	-	-	-
condemnation of post-war killings	-	-	+	+	+	+
the attitude toward attainment of independence	-	-	+	+	+	+
the attitude toward »National Liberation Front«	+	+	+	-	-	-
the fight against	+	+	+	+	-	-
climate change						
COVID- measures	-	+	+	+	+	-
a strong army	-	-	-	+	+	+
NATO	-	-	+	+	+	+

Table 2: Political parties' common denominators

	EXTREME LEFT	LEFT	MODERATE LEFT	MODERATE RIGHT	RIGHT	EXTREME RIGHT
EXTREME LEFT	X	12	6	3	1	7
LEFT	12	X	9	6	3	4
MODERATE LEFT	6	9	X	13	10	5
MODERATE RIGHT	3	6	13	X	14	9
RIGHT	1	3	10	14	X	12
EXTREME RIGHT	7	4	5	9	12	X

Conclusion

In order to activate a player's/learner's knowledge, the innovative communicative brand new board game Politicopoly will make the communicative speaking skills such as mediation, negotiation and appeal for the use in a fluent group speaking activity involving two stages:

- The integration of four speaking communicative skills and new vocabulary into the player's/learner's existing knowledge base, the so called appropriation.
- The development of the capacity to encompass all the communicative speaking skills and vocabulary in real-time conditions and unsupervised – autonomy.

Thus, the purpose of this innovative communicative brand new board game called Politicopoly is to include the development of all the criteria necessary for the speaking tasks such as productivity, purposefulness, interactivity, challenge, safety, authenticity, feedback and correction.

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# MINECRAFT EDUCATION EDITION – HOW TO USE IT IN THE CLASSROOM?

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## **Abstract**

The paper introduces the educational version of the well-known computer game Minecraft. It examines the reasons for using Minecraft Education Edition in EFL, gives a description of the features of the game and ideas on creating interactive lessons with virtual chalkboards, signs, structures, non-player characters and assessment tools. It provides examples of exercises that can be used in order to develop students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as well as to practice grammar and vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Minecraft Education Edition, EFL, teaching

## Introduction

Minecraft is a very popular game among primary school students at the moment and using it in the classroom will definitely impact the atmosphere and students' engagement in learning. The traditional teaching method is the chalk-and-board method, but it is high time to implement the use of digital tools and technologies into teaching and learning. Beatty (2003, p. 54) sees the main point of (educational) games in unconscious learning and this is precisely what Minecraft Education Edition enables.

## Why use Minecraft Education Edition?

"[...] learning does not necessarily have to be a boring and tedious chore (which it very often is). If we could somehow make the learning process more stimulating and enjoyable, that would greatly contribute to sustained learner involvement. This is an assumption that most motivational psychologists subscribe to and which also makes a lot of sense to classroom teachers - indeed, many practitioners would simply equate the adjective 'motivating' with 'interesting'". (Dörnyei 2001, p. 72) According to Dörnyei (2001, p. 76) a lesson is interesting when it presents a challenge to students, includes interesting content and when it is at least to some extent personalized and new.

What makes Minecraft Education Edition interesting, is that students enter a virtual world while being guided by non-player characters (NPCs), posters, slates, chalkboards, books and signs. The world can be designed as an escape room; students have to pull the levers next to the correct answers to open the door, find the correct path in the maze by turning in the direction with the correct answer or simply collect information from NPCs, chalkboards and complete a worksheet. NPCs can interact with students by displaying a text or an external URL that leads students to a video or any other website.

## Assessment

There are two possibilities to assess students inside Minecraft Education Edition. The first one is a portfolio in which students upload photos of the world. Inside the game they have the option to use a virtual camera. This is useful when students need to do a building challenge; once finished, they take a snapshot of their final product. The portfolio can be exported into a pdf format so that the teacher can save it and see the progress of their students.

A similar way to assess students' work is with »Book & Quill«. The difference between the portfolio and »Book & Quill« is that in the book the students can add a text and combine it with pictures. When the book is signed, its icon changes and can no longer be edited.

## Pre-made lessons and worlds

The official Minecraft Education Edition website offers countless lessons pertaining to different fields such as science, maths, computer science, languages, history & culture, art & design, digital citizenship, social skills, climate & sustainability (Minecraft Education Edition).

Each of the subjects has its own search bar that helps teachers find a lesson that meets their aims. It is also possible to adjust the search criteria according to the learners' age. If none of the Minecraft lessons fit the teacher's goal, they can edit the pre-existing world or create their own world instead. The created world doesn't have to be highly detailed as Minecraft's worlds usually are. The simplest way is to choose a biome (a forest, grass, desert) and construct a few buildings or walls with chalkboards and NPCs.

Since students are very familiar with Minecraft, they might try to escape from the playing area or wander. This is why border blocks exist; teachers can place them anywhere in the world in order to block any kind of movement through, over or under them.

### **Teaching languages with Minecraft Education Edition**

The only limit in Minecraft Education Edition is the teacher's imagination. Minecraft can be used for teaching literature, grammar, writing, reading, listening and speaking skills.

Teaching literature can become very exciting if it's done in a virtual world. Teachers can import or create a world with the typical objects or personae from the book. E.g. if analysing the fairy tale Three Little Pigs, the main place with exercises can be in each of the three houses. For the Little Red Riding Hood the world could be made of a forest, a house and a well. When it comes to more advanced pieces of literature, such as Shakespeare's Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet, the main object in the Minecraft world could be Yorick's skull which students can enter, the balcony with Romeo and Juliet as NPCs or even the Globe Theatre where Shakespeare's plays were first shown. The characters that students encounter inside the virtual world have names above them and they can ask students for a helping hand or introduce themselves and share any kind of information. Additionally, teachers can create a separate room or a hall with chalkboards, books and slates that hold biographical information on authors.

Grammar can be practiced in various ways; one of them is a maze that students need to escape. Their decision on turning left or right is based on the students' answer to a grammatical question. A simple gap fill question on the chalkboard can be: I am \_\_\_\_\_ (work) at the moment. Under the chalkboard there should be arrows pointing to the left and to the right and under the arrow there should be one incorrect and one correct answer. If a student chooses the right turn, they may continue walking along the path. If not, they reach a dead end. This type of maze has already been created by Digital School and can be observed in the section World Safety on the Internet (see Digital School).

A very popular topic in teaching foreign languages is giving directions. Teachers can give instructions to students using NPCs or chalkboards. While getting to the final point students take snapshots of the objects they go past, the characters they meet and any other interesting observations that later need to be included into the virtual portfolio. To check the students' understanding of the learned grammatical structures, the task can

include students writing a report on how they reached the final point and perhaps describing the objects they've seen and the characters they've talked to.

In order to develop writing skills, students can enter a world with an unusual, interesting object such as a shipwreck, a strange character, a statue or a monster and write a story about it. It is worth taking into consideration questions such as how the object ended in the same world with the students, who is responsible for it and what kind of superpowers or functionalities it has.

Students can also become the creators of the world and create a presentation about themselves, their favourite animal, a celebrity or their home inside Minecraft Education Edition. They can write on chalkboards, put signs on the ground and spawn NPCs.

All of the ideas require the students to be in a computer lab in school. However, Minecraft Education Edition can be played on the main computer in the classroom and projected on the projector screen. A teacher can simply play the game while leading a discussion with the students. If the topic is nature, teachers can import, edit or create a world with mountains, hills, rivers, bridges, lakes, seas, tree alleys, etc. and while passing the objects with a character, teachers can ask students to name objects and talk about their characteristics, usage, functions and importance for the humanity. The lesson can be personalized with questions (e.g. who likes hiking, swimming, walking, photography, etc.), so that the students participate as much as possible despite the fact that they are not playing the game themselves, but watching the teacher or one of the students playing it.

Minecraft Education Edition can be implemented into numerous school subjects, thus making a cross-curricular connection between foreign languages and geography, history, biology or math immensely intriguing. This kind of teaching involves teachers of two subjects, meaning that the lesson preparation can be split and the length of the lesson doubled. In a 90-minute lesson the students can learn much more and the world can be much more detailed. In the end it is the teachers' choice how much time they want to spend on the preparation of the lesson and which topics could be discussed this way.

## **Conclusion**

Minecraft Education Edition gives unlimited possibilities to make lessons more engaging and at the same time encourages teachers to explore new ways of teaching. That certainly does not mean replacing the traditional teaching methods with digitalized ones, but using them as an additional resource. Minecraft Education Edition requires a certain amount of teacher's input, but rewards them with a lesson the students will not forget.

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# THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER TEACHER TRAINER GUIDE

**Vesna Gros**

## **Abstract**

Language teachers have this incredible trait of happily sharing materials. By helping others thrive, we thrive. During the challenging period of online teaching, I took a teacher trainer course and started good practice workshops for all my colleagues – not just language teachers. The following article is a summary of how anyone can unleash the teacher trainer within and discover the magical joy and fulfilment one gets from caring to share.

**Keywords:** professional development, teacher training, needs analysis

## Introduction

The initial idea behind the project was the need for increase of computer skills among the teaching staff at the school where I work, which would hopefully result in teachers' confidence and diminish computer-related stress during the period of online teaching. My plan was to share some tools and ideas that helped me get students motivated and engaged during the lockdown. Since I was participating in a teacher trainer course at the time, I could immediately apply the steps of organizing a teacher training. I conducted a needs analysis and pitched my training. The idea was welcomed by our head teacher and that led to forming an internal working group for professional development within our school. Since school funds were and are currently still low, we are replacing external professional developments to some extent. It is all based on free will, but the speakers as well as participants are given credit according to national rules on promotion in education.

## How to start?

Being an IATEFL Slovenia member offers a great opportunity to join OPEN courses sponsored by the American Embassy. Professional Development for Teacher Trainers by Arizona State University is one among several global online courses one can choose from and it was a choice I shall never regret.

The course started by examining differences between classroom teaching and teacher training. As classroom teachers, we mostly give language knowledge to students. As trainers, we work with peers and build up on fellow teachers' extensive prior knowledge, experience and expertise. When I first acted as a teacher trainer, I was very anxious about how many colleagues would express interest to participate. With school pupils this is easy – attendance is compulsory and if students are absent, they or their parents get a note. They will be there no matter what. On the other hand, if your audience are teachers, you first have to convince them to choose your training. Participants of teacher trainings are motivated to attend by career-related goals, however their attendance might be either voluntary or required by the head teacher. Class length is also different to school teaching and if you plan to combine both as I did, your choice about whether to offer single workshops or ongoing trainings should be well thought out.

The shift of mindset in terms of classroom management is needed as well. While teachers act as authority figures for students, trainers act as facilitators for their course participants. Since all this may sound a bit daunting, bear in mind that your teacher skillset can be of a great help despite the different audience. Murray (2010) explains how feeling empowered is a prerequisite for pursuing professional development. Transforming the skills and the "toolbox" you as a classroom teacher use to help students with their learning will enable you to give teachers practical advice on skills, ideas or activities to help their teaching. Or as motivational speakers express it in their pep talks: You've got this!

## Needs Analysis

Once you have plucked the courage to embark on your teacher trainer journey, the crucial next step is to conduct a needs analysis. A thorough needs analysis will help you plan an engaging and useful training. Take some time to think about the teaching context of your potential participants and identify possible professional development topics. This is similar to taking a diagnostic test with your students in order to decide what you should review in your language lessons and what your students' needs are. As teacher trainers, we do exactly the same thing to gather and analyse objective and subjective needs of our participants. Objective needs are for instance skills and knowledge demanded by school administration or head teacher. Subjective needs, on the other hand, are "needs as seen through the eyes of the learners themselves" (Brown, 2007).

The way I approached this at my school was by sharing a Google Forms questionnaire with the colleagues during distance learning to find out if they would be interested in participating in Zoom workshops on useful online tools. The reason for this was that I felt some of the (older) colleagues were really struggling to use different online tools. My plan was to make their lives easier and their students' lessons more interesting, interactive and engaging.

My initiative was well-received, so I conducted a more in-depth needs analysis by posing questions, such as:

- *How computer savvy do you consider yourself?*
- *Which ICT tools are you a competent user of?*
- *Which ICT tools are you a semi-competent user of?*
- *Which ICT tools do you find difficult to handle?*
- *Name any tools / apps / websites that have caught your interest but you haven't had the time or know-how to explore and use them.*
- *What is most time-consuming for you concerning distance learning?*
- *How well do you manage your Google Classroom?*  
(GC was a prescribed tool for distance learning at our school)
- *What is the most difficult thing for you in GC?*
- *Do you use Google Forms?*
- *Would you like to learn how to implement a collaborate board in your GC or in your lessons?*
- *Do you implement YouTube in your online lessons? How?*
- *How do you give your students individual feedback?*
- *Have you done online assessment? What challenges did this bring?*
- *Would you like to learn how to make an interactive worksheet?*
- *Name some difficulties / problems you encountered with using Zoom / Meet.*
- *When would you have time for a workshop?*
- *Would you prefer to have it online or in person?*
- *Do you prefer individual training or training in pairs / groups?*

I received some answers that surprised me, which proved to be very valuable information. Gaining my colleagues' responses before preparing my workshops gave me insight into



what my participants would really like to learn. Without knowing, that my colleagues don't actually want to learn about tool A, but rather tool B, I could have made a big mistake. Planning a workshop on tool A would be a waste of my and my participants' time.

### **Internal Work Group for Professional Development**

It turned out that almost half of the teaching staff expressed potential interest in attending good practice sharing workshops at some point or another. As far as the main problem during online teaching goes, only half of the teachers at our school felt they had satisfactory computer skills to successfully motivate, encourage, and monitor their students during distance learning. In fact, some have found the online experience very challenging, even stressful. On the other hand, there were also some who managed to keep up the pace of learning as they would within the normal circumstances. However, what many had in common was that they wanted to upgrade their skills or learn about certain new and engaging tools.

I realized I would never be able to cater for everyone's needs, nor did I myself master all the things others were struggling with. This was how the idea about starting an internal work group for professional development within our institution was born. Me and some other enthusiastic advocates of lifelong learning decided to organize a series of workshops about successful and meaningful implementation of computer and online tools. Later, topics like physical and mental wellbeing, classroom management, collaborative playful learning and social games for young learners, common mistakes in formal writing in Slovene etc. were added. Anyone was welcome to chip in and share what they were good at.

### **Acknowledging the Work**

The internal workshops have been going on for over a year now. They are well prepared, well received, and strive to follow Doran's S.M.A.R.T. criteria in terms of objectives. S.M.A.R.T. stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented (Doran, 1981). The professional development work group meets several times a year to prepare workshops with clear and specific intentions in mind. We make sure to think about what skills the participants need and how to make the outcome visible and tangible. Initially it turned out that especially some more complex ICT objectives could not be accomplished within the time frame so we broke them down into a series of shorter separate workshops. We also draw on our experience and teaching context when choosing topics and skills teachers will use in their real life. We present the planned time frame for the whole academic year in advance.

The head teacher is satisfied with the work we do and has decided to acknowledge the effort we put into sharing knowledge. Therefore, it was agreed to give our workshops formal credit as well. According to the National Rules of Promotion in Education in Slovenia, three pedagogical workshops or lectures for teaching staff are credited one point in the category of additional professional work (Article 20, line 10). The head teacher issues a certificate of completed workshops for the lecturers which they can then submit when applying for

promotion with the ministry of education. At the same time, attending a professional development program lasting at least 8 hours is evaluated with 0.5 points which fall in the category of further education and training (Article 19).

## Conclusion

Being a teacher comes together with a constant drive to improve your teaching. Nowadays, teachers seem to seek and pursue professional development more and more. Although there are many free resources and courses available online, not all are officially given credit. However, not everyone can afford the sometimes rather pricy official teacher training courses. Even schools, like in our case, are being forced to curb on external professional development due to high costs. Yet there are many inspiring teachers among us, who have incredible knowledge, skills and ideas to share. This person might be the one standing across the staff room, who just needs a slight push and some guidance to start spreading their know-how. Embracing the alternative of providing for the lost professional trainings, by doing it pro bono among colleagues, proved to be an inspiring and fulfilling project. We are aware that what we do within our school is semi-professional, but it has proved to serve us well. Should any beginner teacher trainer want to pitch a more serious teacher training outside their own institution, they would of course have to gather funds and prepare an action plan with clear objectives, assessment plan and a detailed training outline. For now, we leave this to professional teacher trainers.

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# IMPLEMENTING ACTION RESEARCH INTO TEACHER TRAINING: A COURSE PLAN

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes a training course for professional development for teacher trainees or practicing teachers intended to build positive attitudes towards research and to equip participants with the necessary skills to successfully conduct their own research. After defining action research and the original context for the course, the paper provides a general outline to demonstrate the structure of the training, then focuses on describing two important areas selected from the training program.

**Keywords:** action research, teacher training, attitude formation, reflective teachers

## **Introduction**

Action research is an important area of engaging in professional development for teacher trainees, practicing teachers, and teacher trainers. However, teachers often have a reluctant attitude towards research in general, both towards staying informed on the research and conducting it. One way to counteract this problem is to form a favourable attitude to research and to equip teachers with practical knowledge on how to do research early on, i.e., during pre-service training.

Such attitude formation may not be emphasized in pre-service teacher education, partly simply due to lack of time. Having said that, teacher trainees studying towards a degree are expected to write a thesis in many countries, which means engaging in at least one form of action research, e.g., designing a student questionnaire or conducting interviews with teachers while focusing on a specific area of teaching they are interested in.

Furthermore, providing teacher trainees with enough space to gain insight into action research designs and areas would encourage them to develop their competences of becoming reflective teachers, for whom self-development is an ongoing lifelong process.

## **Action research**

Action research entails teachers doing research in their own classrooms to analyse and find solutions for teaching-related problems (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Well-organized, practical, and following a cycle of “observing, analysing, acting, and reviewing” (p. 171), it provides an opportunity for teachers to reconsider their position by taking ownership of their own areas of development. Action research as a means of professional development is focused on one or more teaching-specific foci, finding answers to questions, and employing a range of data collection methods (Wallace, 1998). As Phillips and Carr (2010) emphasized, action research “enables preservice teachers to grow a strong and trustworthy professional voice to engage students, parents and colleagues in critical conversation for change” (p. 2).

## **Context**

This training course is originally intended to be part of a degree programme for teaching English as a foreign language. The original context is Hungarian higher education; however, it is suitable for programmes in other countries, especially if the degree programme necessitates writing a research-based thesis.

In Hungary, teacher training programmes run for 5 or 6 years depending on the level of education the teacher will be qualified to teach (5-year for primary, 6-year for secondary education). The course was designed as a seminar for trainees in their fifth year and planned to run parallel to or immediately after the compulsory short teaching practice of 15 hours.

Additionally, the course could easily be adapted to suit other, non-degree forms of teacher education, or even as a way of restarting professional growth and development for practicing teachers who have fallen out of touch with their researcher selves.

## General outline

The course consists of thirteen 90-minute units, ideally distributed over a time span of 13 weeks. The first part of the course is dedicated to creating a cohesive group as well as detecting where the participants' starting point is regarding attitudes, skills, and knowledge. The first half of the course focuses on creating a positive and open attitude to research (sessions 2-3), as well as laying the theoretical foundations for action research (sessions 3-4). In the second half of the training programme the focus shifts to action research through specific focus areas, partly supplied by the trainer (sessions 6-9), and partly selected based on participants' needs and interests (sessions 10-12). The course concludes by reviewing, organizing, and reflecting on the skills acquired and focusing on its uses for the future.

Session 1: Introduction, 'Getting to know you'

Session 2: Attitude building (*detailed below*)

Session 3: Attitude building / Action research theory

Session 4: Action research theory, types of action research

Session 5: Focus areas, general preparation (*detailed below*)

Sessions 6-9: Trainer-led focus areas

Sessions 10-12: Trainee-led focus areas

Sessions 13: Looking back and ahead

## Zooming in on attitude (session 2)

This session is intended to raise consciousness and reflect on participants' own position and attitude on the teacher-researcher scale, to raise participants' awareness of the advantages and possible uses of language pedagogy research, to identify concerns and reluctance that could be addressed in later sessions, to familiarize participants with the purposes and aims of doing classroom research, and to allow participants to reevaluate their position based on this.

An excellent source that can be used to achieve this aim is Grundy's (n.d.) article on attitudes to research and research-driven teaching. In the first part of the article, he vividly describes characters named the Smiths to show how greatly attitudes might diverge on the teacher-researcher scale.

*Andy Smith is a second language acquisition researcher whose interest is in the extent to which universal grammar remains available to adult second language learners. His papers regularly appear in leading international journals. He has no interest in classroom teaching and has never heard of Headway (John and Liz Soars, Oxford University Press).*

*Mandy Smith teaches English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and treats her classrooms as opportunities for testing hypotheses about second language learning. She regularly publishes in refereed journals.*

*Randy Smith has taught in several different institutions and is well known in ELT circles. He regularly writes up descriptions of the teaching techniques that he has pioneered for professional journals.*

*Sandy Smith is an effective teacher who knows that career enhancement also depends on publications and research but is not very happy at the prospect of becoming a writer/researcher herself, to some degree because she doubts the relevance of research to classroom teaching. She has never seen an edition of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.*

*(Grundy, n.d.)*

This is an excellent starting point for discussion and self-reflection. Participants could be asked to decide whether they are a “Mandy”, a “Randy”, or a “Sandy” – and whether they are happy being who they are. Such self-reflection about identity and the future is key to addressing any potential problems or reluctance that could prevent participants from taking the next step on the path of research. From there, it becomes easier to address these concerns and to slowly take participants towards seeing and understanding the importance and usefulness of doing research.

### **Zooming in on creating research questions (session 5)**

This aim of this session is for the participants to focus on different areas of development, to help them ask themselves questions that are useful and can be answered, and to get trainees to start their own action research project through formulating research questions. Good research questions are the heart and soul of any research project, thus allowing the researcher to move towards how to answer those questions (i.e., the details – the methods).

In this session, participants are introduced to the concept of micro, macro, and meta questions (Foord, 2009, p. 21); and are encouraged to formulate such questions in different topic areas (as illustrated in the table below). Practicing this will equip participants with the skills to create suitable research questions.

	Motivation	Assessment	Course participants’ chosen areas
<b>Macro Qs</b>	How can I motivate my students to learn and actively use the new vocabulary items?	How many and what forms of assessment should I plan for this semester?	
<b>Meta Qs</b>	What do I think of the role of motivation in the classroom?	How do I view traditional assessment practices?	

## Conclusion

Action research is a useful tool that will allow any teacher, pre-service or in-service, to improve their self-reflective practice, to build more autonomy, and to invest into their own professional development. Thus, training teachers to become more open towards doing research and equipping them with the necessary skills is of vital importance.

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# WHAT A NOISY ENGLISH CLASSROOM!

**Damjana Jerše,** *Osnovna šola Janka Modra, Dol pri Ljubljani*

## **Abstract**

Using noisy activities in the English classroom is not only very engaging for all students from extroverts to introverts, from diligent to disruptive students etc.; it is also very efficient as all students are active at the same time. Noisy activities provide a stress-free learning environment and are used mainly to improve speaking and loud reading skills. There are numerous benefits of using noisy activities in an English classroom and many possibilities of creating them.

**Keywords:** noisy classroom, efficient and stress-free learning environment, teaching strategies



## Introduction

The word classroom is usually associated with the words quiet and diligent. However, an English classroom needs to be noisy at certain times in order to let the students improve their speaking skills, to encourage them to express themselves automatically and spontaneously. Every classroom is a mixture of extroverts and introverts and everyone in-between. A perfect English classroom is a well-maintained blend of quiet and noisy activities which, if used at the right time, can engage every single student to participate. The most outstanding lessons are never quiet. If the noise in the classroom is done with a purpose, then there are multiple benefits of a noisy classroom. I would like to present some of the most useful noisy activities that have resulted as very efficient teaching strategies in my English classrooms over the years of teaching English in primary school.

## What are the benefits of a noisy classroom?

Over the years of teaching English, I have found many benefits of using noisy activities in my English classroom. Noisy activities are far away from clicking on computers and swiping, liking, hearting on mobile phones. Noisy activities are very basic, natural and yet very productive and efficient activities in a language classroom. Why do I use them?

- They provide a safe environment for learners, therefore engaging all students in learning English. Even the most introverted or reluctant students are willing to participate. Moreover, the most disruptive students are tamed by using noisy activities.
- They are perfect for improving pronunciation, intonation, loud reading skills and speaking skills.
- They are good for memorising new vocabulary and grammar structures.
- They generate spontaneous speaking activities.
- They can help students socialise and connect, which is of great value particularly in the post-pandemic and post distant-schooling period.
- They are perfect inserts to help students refocus and continue to work hard.

## How to create a noisy classroom?

A noisy classroom can be created in many different ways, including:

1. Listen-and-repeat activities
2. Choral reading
3. Reading texts aloud in pairs/small groups simultaneously
4. Grammar and vocabulary chants
5. Running dictations

### 1. Listen-and-repeat activities

A listen-and-repeat activity is essential when introducing new vocabulary. After displaying the words and word phrases or collocations on the board, the students listen to the pronunciation of each unit and repeat it as a chorus. To attract even the most reluctant students and to intensify memorising, the words can be read and repeated in many different manners: normally, sadly, in whispering manner, angry manner, marching manner,

read as top secret, chanted in a rhythm. Students of all ages love repeating the words, especially when repeated in a special manner. After repeating the list of words for several times, students are confident enough to read the words in pairs to each other in order to memorise the words even better. By using this teaching technique students improve their pronunciation, their vocabulary improves, they acquire new sets of words. Above all, all students are utterly active in a very short period of time. Students love this activity because they learn new vocabulary and its pronunciation in an enjoyable way. The listen-and-repeat-activity is a teaching technique which helps students build their fluency and confidence in speaking and reading.

## **2. Choral reading**

In order to improve fluency, confidence and motivation in reading, the teaching technique of choral reading can be used. It means that a certain text is read aloud simultaneously by the whole class or by a smaller group of students. There are several benefits of choral reading:

- It makes classroom reading more engaging.
- It is a stress-free activity for struggling or anxious readers.
- It is an inclusive experience for all students, which is of great importance in this post distant-schooling period.
- Through choral reading, the students improve pronunciation, intonation and fluency in loud reading.

Choral reading can be done in different ways. The teacher either models how to read a sentence and then the students read the sentence together; one group reads a part of a text and another group reads the other part etc. Another option is that the whole class read a text together. Students usually find choral reading enjoyable. Not being exposed in front of the classroom, they feel confident in loud reading, thus making them willing to participate. If students enjoy choral reading, they might have more motivation for reading which is very important for struggling readers. Students who have difficulties with fluency can really benefit from choral reading, because they are provided with a model of practice and can become more confident before they read in front of the class. Furthermore, reluctant students are easily involved in this noisy activity. I usually use choral reading with students in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, because I believe they need a lot of practice in reading aloud in order to become confident and fluent readers.

## **3. Reading texts aloud in pairs/small groups simultaneously**

Once a new text is introduced and new vocabulary acquired, students can read dialogues/trilogies in pairs or small groups simultaneously. By using this teaching technique, the students read in pairs or small groups all at the same time. The noise produced by all pairs/groups reading at the same time creates a stress-free environment for struggling readers, therefore they feel confident enough to read. The noise also creates an inviting environment for reluctant and disruptive students who are willing to participate. By using the teaching technique of simultaneous reading, the classroom is very noisy with several pairs or groups reading a text at the same time. Students do not care about the noise. They enjoy reading

their parts, because they feel safe not being exposed. This teaching technique is very efficient, since instead of individual students reading a text to the rest of the class where some of the students do not listen at all, and those reading a text struggle to survive the tension, all students read at the same time. Simultaneous reading enables each and every student to actively participate. In a very short time all students get their turn to read. I use this activity every time there's a dialogue, triologue to be read. Students are always eager to form pairs or small groups and start reading. This activity can be conducted even with some students attending the lesson online from home. Students online can be put into pairs or small groups as well as those in the classroom and simultaneous loud reading can begin. For longer texts, a paired reading strategy can be used. Each pair consists of a fluent reader and a less fluent reader. Firstly, the text is introduced by the teacher or by the sound track and new vocabulary is explained, pronunciation of new words practised. For revision the text can be read in pairs. Students read paragraphs alternately to each other. What is achieved by using the pair reading activity? Again, all students are active at the same time. Half of them are reading, the other half are listening. The roles are swapped at the next paragraph. By doing so, students gain fluency in loud reading and they also practise their listening skills. They also have to focus well in order to continue reading when the new paragraph begins. Pair reading can be used as a revision at the end of a lesson or as warming up at the beginning of the next lesson. As I do want my students to be good and fluent readers, I believe that if they are good at reading short texts, they will more likely start reading English books for pleasure.

#### **4. Grammar chants**

Chanting is basically repeating lines of vocabulary, phrases or sentences in a rhythmic way, usually together with clapping hands. Chants use repetitions and are as rhythmical as possible to help the brain learn and remember. They are great for introducing and practising vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Chants are useful for students of all ages and are used to learn difficult things in a fun manner. In my opinion, the best chants are those created by students and the teacher together. Students are very creative and with a touch of their imagination very simple but useful chants can be created. Some of them can even be elevated into raps. Raps are usually so appreciated that students want to repeat them again and again. Even those students attending English lessons from home can join rapping.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade my students formed a rap to practise The Present Simple Tense. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the students created The Irregular Verbs Chant which, by adding the beat, resulted in a rap. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade the students were asked to make a chant to practise The Present Perfect Tense to talk about experiences. Any grammar structure can be practised by creating a grammar chant. When forming grammar chants, students work very hard in small groups. They are usually very motivated. The classroom is extremely noisy because it is quite a challenge to create a certain chant. Students think, exchange ideas, provide some lousy and silly chants, there's a lot of laughing, but the goal is achieved: they are all engaged in the activity. The noise provides a stress-free learning environment. Finally a chant is consented by the whole class and chanted for several succeeding lessons. To sum up, if

you really want all of your students to be utterly active and motivated, ask them to create a chant, find a beat, and off they will go rapping and practising some difficult grammar structures.

## **5. Running dictations**

A running dictation is another very noisy and yet very engaging activity involving all students in the classroom. Nobody objects to do it. The struggling students are not exposed, therefore they feel confident and willing to participate. Another benefit is that all students are active at the same time. A running dictation is a fun reading, speaking, listening and writing task where students work in pairs. One student from the pair is seated and the other one goes to the text on the wall and back to the sitting student until the text is dictated and written. The students who run to the text on the wall and back to the sitting students have to keep in mind a part of the text and dictate it to their partners and supervise their writing. The students who sit have to listen carefully and write down what they are told correctly. A running dictation generates genuine communication between the partners. In order to exploit the benefits of this activity, both students should have the running role. It is also very beneficial if the text is of high grammatical or vocabulary value. Students of all ages love doing running dictations. I use this activity to introduce or revise a set of vocabulary, but more often to introduce or revise some more difficult grammatical structures:

- Present Simple WH questions in grade 6.
- Describing a picture using There is/There are structure and the prepositions of place in grade 6.
- Past Simple WH questions in grade 7.
- Passive voice in grade 8 and 9.
- Conditional clauses in grade 8 and grade 9.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, a noisy classroom is a well-structured English lesson with some very noisy parts engaging all students, even the most introverted or reluctant ones to participate and to respond spontaneously. Not only do noisy activities generate spontaneous production of English, they are also very efficient, inclusive and stress-free teaching techniques that should be regularly included in a language learning process.

# USING WORD CLOUDS IN THE SECONDARY ELT CLASSROOM

**Breda Jesenik Kolar**, *Prva gimnazija Maribor, Konservatorij za glasbo in balet Maribor*

## **Abstract**

The article describes some tried and tested activities using word clouds, which can be introduced in all lesson stages: as a warm-up activity, during the presentation stage or at the end of a lesson, offering reflection and revision. However, their versatility does not end here since this tool can be used to foster students' engagement and develop different skills. The examples from the lessons with my secondary school students will be presented to illustrate the fact how widely applicable and engaging word clouds can be.

**Keywords:** word clouds, tool, versatility, engagement, skills

## Introduction

Teachers are constantly in search of strategies and procedures that would motivate students. One way of ensuring students' participation and their active engagement is using word clouds (see Tiny TEFL teacher). Here is their definition taken from the online word cloud generator WordItOut.

"A word cloud is an image made of words that together resemble a cloudy shape. The size of a word shows how important it is e.g. how often it appears in a text — its frequency. People typically use word clouds to easily produce a summary of large documents (reports, speeches), to create art on a topic (gifts, displays) or to visualise data (tables, surveys)." (Stannard, 2010)

In a nutshell: word clouds are a versatile and simple tool stimulating (visual) learners, which can be used in different stages of a lesson, enhancing all four language skills. There are numerous word clouds generators available (Ferlazzo, 2010); however, the activities presented in the article are based on three: Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>), WordArt (<https://wordart.com/>) and WordItOut (<https://worditout.com/>). They are teacher-friendly because they are easy to use and free.

The activities using word clouds will be presented according to the stage of a lesson they might be used in.

## Warm up stage

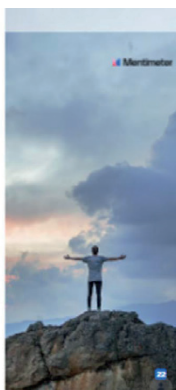
Interactive digital tools, such as Mentimeter, are frequently used for brainstorming (Millin, (2020) The students are given a short prompt, such as: Which three words or phrases do you associate with INSPIRATION? They respond individually. Since their answers are seen immediately, the teacher can set up a follow-up task based on the responses gathered.

Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code 9207 6259

Which words/ phrases do you associate with the expression INSPIRATION? Give 3.



Press S to show image



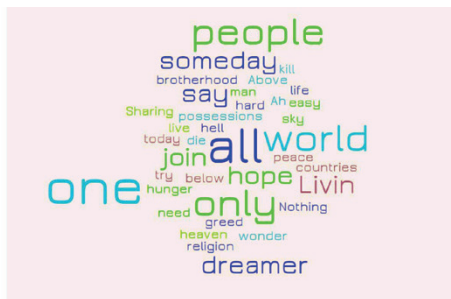
Here are two examples:

Who is the word cloud based on?



*The answer: Nelson Mandela*

*Which song are the following words from?*



*The answer: Imagine by John Lennon*

In both cases the word cloud generator WordItOut was used.

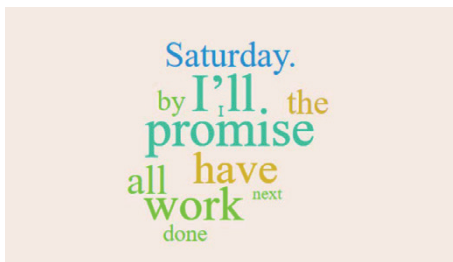
The students may also be presented with a word cloud based on a text of a particular genre (e.g., a poem, an article, a film review, etc.) and asked to predict what text type the word cloud illustrates. They need to justify their decisions. Such an activity is not only useful for eliciting students' knowledge, but can generate a lot of discussion and might be followed by a writing task, such as creating a text using the words from the word cloud.

### Middle stage

In the central stage of a lesson there are many options on how to use word clouds, depending on the lesson's aim. They can be used to practise vocabulary, a certain grammar point or a skill.

The students are given a word cloud and may be asked to complete a variety of tasks such as matching words in the word cloud with their synonyms or antonyms, categorising the words, using them in sentences or ranking them.

The example below illustrates the use of a word cloud practising the future perfect simple tense.







## Conclusion

Word clouds are an extremely useful teaching aid for numerous reasons: they offer a lot of learning potential and are widely applicable to different teaching contexts. Apart from fostering students' motivation and scaffolding the learning process, they can also develop learners' (and teachers') creativity.

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# TEACHING LISTENING AND SPEAKING TO YOUNG LEARNERS

**Dušica Kandić Najić**, *ELTA Serbia*

## **Abstract**

Teaching young learners has always been a challenging but at the same time a very rewarding experience. It is a privilege to be the first person to introduce a foreign language to young learners. As young learners are energetic, curious, creative, and restless it is important to have all these characteristics in mind when planning a lesson. They learn a foreign language through context and meaningful repetition, through body movement and gestures, through visuals and realia. Stories, songs, and cartoons are all excellent sources for learning a foreign language. What they need from us is scaffolding and modelling the expected outcome. Movement is fun and helps with the retention and comprehension of the new vocabulary. To get young learners talking, we have to make them feel comfortable so that they feel confident to take part in classroom activities. One of the easiest and most important things is to smile when we enter the classroom – to show them that we are happy to be there. The emphasis should always be on the fluency, getting the message across, not on accuracy. It is very important to show them what we expect from them to say and to repeat patiently and slowly as often as it is necessary, to scaffold. One of the ways is to use classroom language for routines and to slowly expand the vocabulary we use in everyday communication. It's important to understand the type of learning that students enjoy and activate it in the classroom.

**Keywords:** young learners, listening, movement, classroom routine

## **Introduction**

After more than twenty years of teaching English to young learners I have decided it is time I share some useful insights. Especially the insights I gained or refreshed during an OPEN online teacher training course in Fall 2021. This is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and delivered by George Mason University, Virginia USA. The course developer is Dr. Joan K. Shin. Much of my work is based on her articles and videos from the course. Teaching young learners has always been challenging but at the same time a very rewarding experience. It is a privilege to be the first person to introduce a foreign language to young learners. We should strive to create a microcosm where we can learn, play and enjoy together with our learners.

## **Characteristics of young learners**

There are many different views and definitions, but according to Dr. Joan Kang Shin (2006, 2017) a young learner is between 7 and 12 years old. A very young learner is a learner below 7 years of age. It is difficult for young learners to sit still. They have short attention spans. They enjoy singing, dancing, running and jumping, as well as games and puzzles. They are success oriented, and they get easily frustrated if they do not succeed. That is why they need constant support and encouragement. They are an extremely demanding audience. As young learners are energetic, curious, creative, and restless it is important to have all these characteristics in mind when planning a lesson. It is also important to vary the activities and keep them short – no longer than 10 to 15 minutes. Including a variety of activities will provide interest for each individual student and it will keep them focused for longer.

## **How children learn?**

According to Piaget (1970) they learn by doing and interacting with their environment which means that they are active learners and thinkers and that's why we should bring realia when teaching English. They also learn through social interaction. Vygotsky (1962) helped us understand that we learn through interaction with others. That is how children learn to walk and talk – with guidance from their parents. For our students the interaction with us, teachers, is extremely important – they need a guide to learn new things. They learn through scaffolding by adults. Bruner (1983) suggested that we can scaffold by creating interest in the task, breaking the task down into smaller steps, giving them a model (model our expectation), reminding students of the purpose of the activity, controlling frustration during the task. Similarly, they learn a foreign language through context and meaningful repetition, through body movement and gestures, through visuals and realia. Stories, songs and cartoons are all excellent sources for learning a foreign language. What they need from us is scaffolding and modelling our expectations. That is why lessons should be supplemented with realia – that they can touch, brightly coloured visuals – that they can see, and songs and stories for them to hear, because they understand the world primarily through their senses.

## **Keep listening active**

Listening is not a passive process. It involves both bottom-up and top-down processes and requires the use of non-linguistic as well as linguistic knowledge. According to Nunan (1998), two views of listening have dominated language pedagogy over the last 20 years. These are the 'Bottom-up' processing view and the 'Top-down' interpretation view.

The 'Bottom-up' processing model assumes that listening is a process of decoding the sounds that one hears in a linear fashion, from the smallest meaningful units to complete texts, in which meaning itself is derived as the last step in the process.

'Top-down' view, suggests that the listener actively reconstructs the original meaning of the speaker using incoming sounds as clues. In this process, the listener uses prior knowledge of the context and situation within which the listening takes place to make sense of what he or she hears. An important theoretical foundation to the 'top-down' approach is schema theory. Schema theory is based on the notion that past experiences lead to the creation of mental frameworks that helps us make sense of new experiences. Schema building tasks should precede the listening.

How can we keep listening active? Some people might think that listening is a passive skill. On the contrary, you cannot see if someone is listening just by looking at them. There is nothing passive about listening. It is an interpretive skill. That is why it is important to always use movement with songs and chants or give students some other tasks like 'Listen and...' to show their comprehension. If they know that after or during the listening there is a task, it will focus them on the listening and make them more active in the listening process.

Many English language book series usually have songs with audio or video resources for every unit, but we can opt to use traditional English chants, rhymes or even pop songs. It is important to incorporate movement with songs and pre-teach movements that go with each line of the song. Movement is fun and helps with the retention and comprehension of the new vocabulary. We could include some variations to songs to make it more exciting and useful for fluency and pronunciation. Those variations could be in tempo – fast/slow, volume – quiet/loud, and rhythm – clapping, tapping etc. Children could use some homemade instruments to tap to the rhythm, or they could personalize a song to make it more interesting and memorable. Songs could also be used for classroom management, to begin the lesson, to end it, or to mark the transition from one activity to the other.

## **Get young learners talking**

How can we get young learners talking? First of all, we have to make them feel comfortable so that they feel confident to take part in classroom activities. One of the easiest and most important things to do is to smile when we enter the classroom – to show them that we are really happy to be there. The emphasis should always be on the fluency, getting the message across, not on accuracy. We should avoid explicit error correction with young

learners at all costs. Therefore, it is very important to model our expectations: to show them what we expect from them to say and to patiently and slowly repeat as often as it is necessary, to scaffold.

One of the ways is to use classroom language for routines and to slowly expand the vocabulary we use in everyday communication. We should teach students useful chunks of language that they can often use in class (I don't understand. Can you repeat that? I need help. What does that mean? How do you say \_\_\_\_ in English? What page is it? I have a question.) We could also create wall posters with these chunks and point to it whenever they ask question in L1.

We start by greeting them 'Hello, how are you today?', then we wait for them to respond and ask the same question. It may take a few weeks but very soon you will be rewarded by the whole class answering and asking like a choir. Then you can add a small talk about their weekend or their routines at home. Or you can ask them 'What's the weather like today?' Very soon they will acquire the necessary vocabulary. One useful idea is to have flash cards for different weather conditions pasted next to the whiteboard. Other ideas would be to introduce a short conversation about feelings and again we can paste a few basic emoticons on the wall. Taking attendance is also a great opportunity to ask many questions to the whole class or individually. Talking about the objective of the lesson is an amazing way to expand the existing phrases that you already use with young learners. If we want our learners to talk more in English, they first have to feel comfortable and confident. To achieve this, we should create fun, interesting, and motivating atmosphere in the classroom.

### **Providing opportunities for meaningful interaction**

There are many opportunities during the lesson and the easiest way is to 'turn and talk' to the partner behind you, or next to you. As young learners are very cooperative they will turn and talk, especially younger learners.

As they grow, they tend to be shy. It is sometimes tricky to have shy students participate in the activities. I sometimes pair a shy student with a more outgoing one, so that an outgoing student takes on the role of a leader and a shy student has someone as a language model to follow. Sometimes students can help each other be more involved in an activity more than a teacher can.

Pairing students with varying levels of mastery is a wonderful idea to support learners and allow them other avenues to explore language – through other students. I tend to use small groups to support students of varying proficiency and allow for students to show their leadership skills in the classroom. This also helps beginner learners see the possibilities with language and learning.

Before pair work or group work, we should always ensure they have some time to think about the topic for themselves and then share with the pair and finally with the teacher

and the rest of the class. Another important point to pay attention to is to set the time limit to finish the task and to signal the beginning and the end of the activity. Sound signals can be effective and fun, for example a bell, a whistle, a fife, etc. It is important to understand the type of learning that students enjoy and activate it in the classroom.

## Conclusion

Always have the characteristics of your young learners in mind when planning a lesson. Keep in mind that you teach their 'favourite subject in primary school' as my students usually say (second favourite only to PE). You should also be aware that you are working on the foundations of future experts in various fields. They still believe in magic at this age and that's why they believe in us, English language teachers, because *we teach... it's a kind of magic*.

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# ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM? WHY NOT!

**Bojan Kašuba**

## **Abstract**

The article deals with concepts such as entrepreneurship, project-based learning and CLIL, and attempts to put them into the context of English teaching and learning. Basic definitions are provided. The main part of the article enumerates and details a few practical examples where and how entrepreneurship, project-based learning and CLIL might be used in an English classroom. While the examples have been tested and have shown excellent results, they can also be modified to one's own needs.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, competencies, project-based learning, English language

## Introduction

Developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills should be one of the main objectives of every educational system. In this article, concepts such as entrepreneurship, project-based learning, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) will be examined. The paper will provide basic definitions of these concepts, evaluate them in the sphere of English teaching and learning, and provide practical advice on how to successfully plan and carry out lessons. While the main focus will be on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial competencies, project-based learning and CLIL must be mentioned as well, as the concepts are intrinsically intertwined.

## Entrepreneurship

As the primary focus of the article is developing entrepreneurial competencies in an English classroom, it is important to first define what entrepreneurship is. In the entrepreneurship competence framework titled *EntreComp into Action* (McCallum et al., 2018), entrepreneurship is defined as a capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas to create value for others. The value created can be social, cultural or financial. Entrepreneurship is a competence for life. It is vital that teachers not only teach the prescribed content, but also provide opportunities and encourage students to develop skills and competencies such as taking the initiative, mobilising others or valuing ideas. *EntreComp into Action* (McCallum et al., 2018) lists a set of 15 entrepreneurial competencies that should be developed. They are divided into three competence areas as illustrated below.

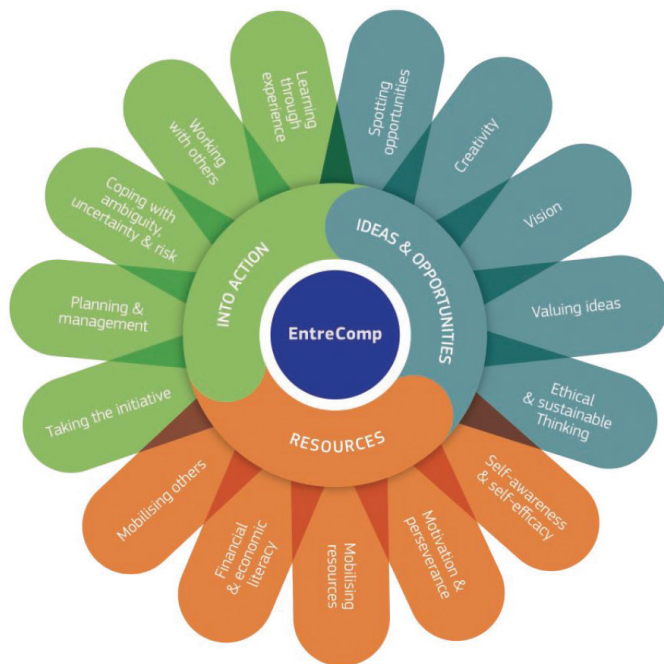


Figure 1: The EntreComp wheel (McCallum et al., 2018)



There is no single core competence and they are all of equal importance. Teachers are autonomous when deciding what competencies should be developed at what time and in what manner. Therefore, when planning for specific lessons, teachers must not only take language goals into consideration, but also entrepreneurial competencies.

### **Project-based learning**

One cannot discuss entrepreneurship without mentioning project-based learning. In a broader sense, they are two sides of the same coin. Nik Peachey (n.d.) defines project-based learning as a student-centred form of learning that involves students spending sustained periods of study time exploring and attempting to solve real-life problems. He enumerates key elements that a project should contain. These are: a challenging problem or question, public product, key knowledge and skills, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice, reflection, and critique and revision. Project-based learning must be carefully planned out as it can provide a considerable obstacle for students with a lower language level. Additionally, teachers must also take group dynamics into consideration. An ideal group is a group of students which have different strengths and interests, but can work together as a unit that accepts each other's opinions. Each member of the group must be empowered to contribute to the best of their abilities.

### **Planning for the lesson**

Teachers have a vast array of original and authentic materials available to them. These range from songs and films to magazine articles and other texts. Not only is the number of materials large, so is the selection of topics. Teachers and students often discuss topics such as the environment, music and film, tourism, food, animals, geographical features, etc. Therefore, teachers of English do not teach only language, but other topics/subjects as well. While planning for a specific lesson on, e.g., the USA, it is advisable that the English teacher gets in touch with a geography teacher to discuss the students' knowledge on the matter. Cross-curricular cooperation should be encouraged as much as possible. CLIL deepens the students' knowledge in different subjects while developing language, primarily vocabulary, and cultural awareness. The planning stage can take up a substantial amount of time, but if done properly, the lesson can yield excellent results.

### **Entrepreneurial activities in English lessons**

This section will provide practical situations where students can develop language skills and entrepreneurial competencies. While specific situations and possible activities will be described, the activities can be amended to suit one's personal needs. The situations and activities have been carefully chosen to showcase the development of the 15 entrepreneurial competencies.

#### *Interior designer*

Students are faced with the task of decorating and refurbishing a client's house or apartment. They have a set budget, e.g., £5,000. Students must draw a floor plan, buy furniture and other accessories, prepare an invoice, and present the plan to the client. This is best done

as a group activity. Each student chooses an activity that best suits their strengths. However, they are all dependent on each other as one cannot complete the task without the others contributing their part. The final product can be a poster, a PowerPoint presentation, a video, a webpage, or something else. Students learn and practice vocabulary associated with house, furniture, and numbers while developing the following entrepreneurial competencies: creativity, vision, valuing ideas, financial and economic literacy, taking the initiative, planning and management, and working with others.

### *Saving the environment*

While it is important to have a global perspective on the challenges the environment faces, it is vital to have a local one. Hence, this activity is aimed at recognizing local problems and possible solutions to remedy the problems. As this activity demands a higher language level, it is important that grouping be done accordingly. Students work together in groups to find environmental problems facing their community. They must come up with creative solutions and present them to other groups. They can create practical products, poster ads, short videos, etc. This can also be a school-wide project done in a span of one to two weeks. Students can create financial plans in mathematics, they can create various products in technology, or they can talk about environmental issues in biology. Thus, students develop competencies such as spotting opportunities, creativity, valuing ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking, self-awareness and self-efficacy, mobilising resources and others, financial and economic literacy, taking the initiative, planning and management, working with others and learning through experience.

### *Travel agent*

The following activity can be done individually. Students are tasked with organizing a holiday trip to London for a family of four. They are given a description of the four family members, i.e., their likes and dislikes. They must book a flight to London, arrange accommodation, plan a tour of London, and other activities. Their goal is to convince the client, i.e., the teacher, to book their trip to London. Students learn and practice vocabulary associated with means of transport, buildings, numbers, personality traits, and other. They also get to know London and its culture. This activity can be done for any city. It is advisable to give each student their own city. If they are learning about Australia in geography, instruct them to organize holiday trips to various Australian cities. The final product can be a PowerPoint presentation, a poster, a video or an interactive map. Students develop entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, financial and economic literacy, planning and management, and learning through experience.

### *Future jobs*

The final example includes examining the future world, particularly a future job. Students can complete the activity individually, in pairs or in groups. It is up to the teacher and the students to decide. The aim is to get students thinking about the future and what skills will be required for a successful career. Additionally, they must predict what jobs will no longer be needed and what jobs might arise because of a changing world. They must settle on

one future job and describe it. The final product can be an oral presentation, a poster, a video, a sketch, or any other form they might find interesting. The vocabulary taught and learnt deals with personality traits, skills, occupations, the future, etc. The activity is geared towards thinking about what competencies and skills students might need in the future while at the same time developing these same competencies. Some of the entrepreneurial competencies developed during the activity are spotting opportunities, creativity, vision, valuing ideas, self-awareness and self-efficacy, and working with others.

## Conclusion

Having the necessary skills and competencies ensures that students will prosper in their lives. It is the job of us, the teachers, to encourage students and provide them with opportunities to develop the needed skill set. The article dealt with entrepreneurship, competencies, project-based learning, and CLIL. It provided a brief overview of the concepts and framed them within the English language teaching and learning. Some practical examples were shown to inspire other teachers and educators to think about not only teaching the English language but also developing students' competencies. To conclude, while it takes a lot of time to prepare and plan lessons accordingly, it is a worthwhile task that can create fun learning, creative studying and ingenious products.

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# SPARKING IMAGINATION IN THE CLASSROOM FROM A TO Z

**Bernarda Kejžar**

## **Abstract**

This paper presents a range of activities as well as some guidelines that may enhance a child's transition into the magical world of English. Based on my own twenty-year teaching practice and numerous resources, I have collected some ideas for effective, engaging, and enjoyable English lessons.

**Keywords:** creativity, ideas, imagination

## Introduction

Imagination and creativity are an essential part of language learning. As soon as we enter a language classroom, either a physical or virtual one, we need to switch into a different world and start thinking and interacting in another language in order to make progress. This entails a great deal of imagination and creativity from both the students and the teachers who need to prepare such tasks to make this possible. The general definition of imagination is “the ability to think of all things as possible” (Kangas, 2010). Imagination is one of the most precious cognitive capacities and can be perceived as the vehicle of active creativity (Gaut, 2003). To exercise the imagination is to be creative. Creativity is often described in terms of “creative thinking” or “ability,” “problem solving,” “imagination,” or “innovation.” Let us have a look at some activities that may spark some imagination in a language classroom and enable students to develop their creative potential.

## Creative ideas from A to Z

- A** All-inclusive. At every lesson, I believe teachers should be attentive to different types of students and their learning styles, thus including all sensory receptors as much as possible: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Besides that, we should consider fast and slow learners, introverted and extroverted ones as well as students with special needs in order to prepare a more holistic lesson and cater for as many various needs as possible. Differentiation is a must.
- B** Booklets. Mini-books made of A4 sheets of paper are useful for word lists on various topics, grammar reviews, emotions dictionaries as well as for tasks such as short stories, guidebooks, must-sees in a town, etc. They are handy and ready to use and a nice memory of a hands-on activity at an English lesson.
- C** Charts. Boring charts of tenses, irregular verbs, phrasal verbs and vocabulary lists, for example, can be made more interesting for students, which in turn can increase their curiosity and allow for some gamification. Guess the words (by giving the first and the last letter; giving the words with consonants only, scrambled words ...), order the words by the level of importance for you, invent new categories of your favourite English words: the sweetest, the juiciest, the smelliest, the most revolting one, etc.
- D** Dynamic. There can always be something literally flying across the classroom: a ball, a soft toy, a paper plane. Include some stomping, clapping and voice modulations to break from the routine and allow for some play and relaxation after a drill practice.
- E** Energizers. They are great as icebreakers, or to pick up the mood when students have low energy. They also work great as team-building exercises (see 52 Games and Activities for the Classroom English, 2021). Some of my favourite ones are: Line up next to wall according to the alphabetical order of your name, height, colour of

socks, etc. Ten seconds – students are divided into smaller groups and given an object or phrase they need to form by using their bodies. Write on my back – students write numbers or draw simple objects on the backs of their classmates and they need to guess what it is. Tongue twisters and chants may also come in handy to allow for some break during the lesson.

- F** Forget. Forget some stereotypes about a particular student, forget about yesterday's confrontation, or even the lesson plan (if something more important pops up), and do behave – as well as you believe – that every lesson is a fresh start. Never hold grudges. However, be consistent and demand an apology when necessary. I have heard recently that the essence of teaching is about the presence of the teacher. So always try to be present at that very moment of teaching.
- G** Grammar. It becomes magic when students master it to the point where they can apply the rules in new situations and you witness it after so many drill exercises.
- H** Heroes. Real-life people or fictional characters, there is something in their life stories and (heroic) deeds that surpasses everyday life, bringing the sense of superpowers into a mundane daily routine. Always explore people in your coursebook and relate to them.
- I** Images. They can be a great starting point for a discussion, to speculate about, to stop and think, to develop a story, or simply enjoy and chill out. There are numerous free resources available online. Fiona Mauchline (2015) is definitely a resourceful and trustworthy author on this topic.
- J** Joy to the class. What can be celebrated today? Note various special days to commemorate and relate to them, birthdays included. For example: apart from April Fool's day, this month will bring a National Sibling's day in the USA, a World Rat Day, a National Tea Day in the UK .... Festive seasons are a great opportunity to contribute to the joyful atmosphere, especially at Christmas.
- K** KISS. Keep it short and simple – and in Slovenian. Grammar explanations, always. Provide terms in English but relate to Slovenian grammar as well.
- L** Listen to this ... Stories, anecdotes, 'gossiping', real-life events, current affairs, etc. should provide a good listening comprehension practice and enable students to express their opinions as well as encourage their critical thinking.
- M** Monkey business. Prepare a boot sale of all the stuff collected during the lessons – and students' possessions can be regained (key rings, sellotapes, correction pens, fidget spinners, crumpled paper balls, scissors, sweets, ...) only by completing a task.

- N** Newspapers. A reading wall with articles from Mary Glasgow Magazines or other ELT materials is a great way to peek into another world and compare it with your own culture, customs and habits.
- O** Online. You can find a wealth of resources there. Let me use a metaphor: It can be a deep ocean full of ideas, ready-to-use materials, music, images, memes, and videos to support and further explore the topic from the course book, but it can also be a dangerous jungle where you can easily get lost without appropriate equipment and vision. Limit yourself and search online only for relevant resources. Teach students to distinguish between real and fake news, how to use a search engine, etc.
- P** Personalise. 'How do you relate to this issue, person, and idea from the course book?' Magic moments of self-reflection can be found in students' notebooks, which they are too often not ready to share in front of the class. Do collect notebooks occasionally and assess their writing privately with some in-depth comments, questions as well suggestions for further practice.
- Q** Questions. Always allow for questions. Set up an 'Ask me anything you want' box, a chart with answers where students need to provide the questions, the beginning FAQ about any topic, question starters (Could you tell me ...? Have you ever ...? How often do you ...? Can you remember ...? Do you think you will ...?).
- R** Rapport. Establishing a good rapport with students is of key importance for any further activity.
- S** Stories and songs. Using just your own voice, with some visual aid and music, can spark lots of imagination. Online resources are of great help.
- T** Time machine. Moving (fast) forwards or backwards in time always turns the imagination on.
- U** Umbrella term. Given as a hypernym when introducing a new topic, it can produce a lot of vocabulary, and we usually end up with a board all scribbled over. Umbrella is also used here as a form of lesson plan – try to be flexible and connect the activities in some logical order but do not be afraid if the course of the lesson takes unexpected turns.
- V** Vision. Where do I want to get? Where do I want to take my students? Imagine you are a human alarm clock from the 19th century. Describe your various techniques to wake people up. Imagine you are the new head of the school. You need to update the school rules.

- W** Wonder. It relates to Joy to the class. There is always something that is worth wondering. Always have some data nearby (for example, how many kilometres of blood vessels are there in the human body; How many thoughts run through your brain every day?) Showcase wonder. Bring information to the class. »Did you know that ...?' By doing so you can perfectly follow the aims of CLIL.
- X** X-ray. Students scan you all the time. What is inside your head, what is your plan for today, what mood are you in when standing in front of them? Make them think they know you better and, by appreciating it, reveal your plan. And vice versa: make sure you empathise with their situation and respond to it appropriately.
- Y** Yo-yo. What you get is usually the consequence of what you give – and vice versa. Give some magic, and you will see what you receive in return. Show your honest curiosity and you may get an entrance ticket to the teenage world.
- Z** Zeal. In order to pass on the love for the language and culture you are teaching, you need to be a zealous believer yourself. Tell them what you read, share some good music during the break time, spread interesting and possibly humorous quotes on the walls. Browsing the net should be helpful as there are many web pages with a great selection of quotes (see The Language Nerds, 2022). Drop around 'crumbs' of language, of your passion for English and hope they will pick it up from you.

## Conclusion

Forget the saying 'Out with the old, and in with the new'. In this paper, I have tried to sum up some of the tried-and-tested ideas that help me keep my students engaged and curious as well as some guidelines that I have been following over the years. They have built a safe and creative environment where each student can feel appreciated and supported, allowing them to explore their creative potential.

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# VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE OF ERASMUS+ KA1 LTT ACTIVITY

**Mateja Kolar**

## **Abstract**

Our school has been involved in several Erasmus+ projects, also during the “distance learning era”. To maintain quality cooperation between school partners, we tried our best to transfer the activities which could not take place as a live mobility to a virtual environment. The presentation will focus on challenges of virtual LTT activity for teachers – job shadowing. Three teachers from IES Port d’Alcúdia in Mallorca got a thorough insight into the life and work at our school. In a three-day programme we provided detailed information on the Slovenian school system, the organisation of work at our school, virtual tours of school, our town and country, online lesson observations and more. Similarities and differences between Slovenian and Spanish schools were discussed. School staff, students and local partners were actively engaged in the project activities and we can say we came as close to the real experience as possible. Although, Erasmus+ international school projects are now taking place in almost every Slovenian town, KA1 projects for school staff are slightly less common, therefore the aim of this article is to encourage potential applicants for this opportunity of professional development.

**Keywords:** virtual job shadowing, KA1, Erasmus+, lesson observation, teachers

## **Introduction**

Within Erasmus+ KA1 opportunities, school staff can choose among the following mobilities:

- teaching assignments (teaching at a partner school abroad);
- structured courses or training events (supporting professional development of school staff);
- job shadowing.

Focusing on the last, a transmission of live job shadowing experience into a virtual one will be presented in this article from the perspective of the host school.

A job shadowing activity provides an opportunity for teachers, school leaders or other school staff to acquire knowledge and teaching experience abroad in a partner school or other educational organization. The goal of such an educational visit is to gain competencies that indirectly but primarily affect the improvement of learning conditions of students, with an emphasis on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It can last short or long periods of time, from the minimum of two days and the maximum of two months. Teachers and other members of staff gain opportunities for professional and personal development. Apart from that, they develop and strengthen their intercultural competences. Profiles of all areas of education and training can participate in KA1 programme – from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, higher education, universities, adult education and youth workers.

When applying for Erasmus+ funds, the applicants submit an extensive application form to the National Agency. With its efficient guidelines for sustainable goals, Slovenian National Agency – Cmepius plays a decisive role in promoting various forms of international cooperation in Slovenian educational organizations, thus raising the quality of educational profiles and learning environment in our education system.

The applying school should address some of the priority topics in the application form as cited in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, as for example, social inclusion, educational staff, quality and efficiency in education and training, which were chosen by the sending institution in our case. The conditions for obtaining funds change every few years, so it is necessary to follow the latest version of the guide when applying.

## **Planning the hosting of virtual job shadowing**

We first got in contact with our partner school IES Port d'Alcúdia while searching for partners for our separate KA1 project. We used e-Twinning platform and School Education Gateway, which are two of several options to look for project partners.

Prior to taking any action considering the mobility (e.g. flight reservations, accommodation) the sending and receiving organization needs to prepare and sign a mobility agreement to avoid unjustified costs and to reach a consensus on expectations. Besides formal data of participants and planned time of the mobility, the agreement includes a detailed proposal programme, tasks of the participant before, during and after the mobility, competences to

be acquired by the participant, monitoring and mentoring of the participant, evaluation and recognition of the mobility.

In our case, before the mobility the participants agreed to prepare the presentation of their school system, organization of work at school and examples of good practice. The receiving school committed itself to enable lesson observations and discussions with teachers after, prepare detailed presentation of the Slovenian school system, organization of work at school, information on immigrants' inclusion and inclusion of students with special needs. The coordinators of the sending and the receiving school had regular contact by email to obtain information needed. Both organizations anticipated strengthening intercultural competences. Working meetings and sharing examples of good practice were a significant part of the programme planned as well.

After the mobility the participants committed themselves to transfer new knowledge into teaching process, to present the experience in detail to their co-workers and to encourage others to participate in the following international activities.

The Slovenian coordinator undertook mentoring, monitoring and coordinating activities during job shadowing taking place. Regarding the pandemic, we had to transfer the planned live experience into a virtual one.

### **Hosting a virtual job shadowing**

A virtual job shadowing took place from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021. During this time, we tried to get as close to the originally planned programme as possible.

The event started with a greeting and welcome speech of the coordinator and the headmaster, which was followed by an introduction of both teams. After that we all took a virtual tour of school, so the guests were able to create a picture of the school building and the school district and get acquainted with basic facts about our institution and the organization of work in it. They learnt about staff members, classes and numbers of students, the history of school, indoor and outdoor area, compulsory and non-compulsory programme.

The mayor also kindly responded to our invitation to greet the guests and share a few thoughts and information about the municipality.

Another virtual tour, prepared by our geography teacher, provided information on our town and the region. In short videos, photos and carefully prepared texts the guests learnt about the history, geography, culture and basic contemporary facts about the area.

After a short break, a set of detailed presentations of the Slovene education system and organization of work at our school followed. We obtained the general data from Eurydice network, which provides videos, folders, publications and articles with information on education systems of 37 countries, including Slovenian. The guest teachers got a clear

insight into basic and extended basic school programme at our school, we provided detailed information on age levels and groups of pupils at our school, organization of the school year, school day and week (daily timetables, out of school classes, extended school stay, extracurricular classes ...). As mentioned, the guests also prepared the presentation of the Spanish school system and organization of work at their school which was a good foundation for opening a debate on similarities and differences of both working environments.

The counsellor presented the inclusion of students with special needs and immigrants, which were both on the list of the sending institution's prior topics of interest since at IES Port d'Alcúdia they face many students with special needs and immigrants, as the town offers many opportunities for seasonal workers. After presenting our work with students from Brazil and Belgium who attend classes at our school and exchanging information about immigrant students in Alcúdia, we came to a conclusion that both schools provide similar additional support in smaller study groups for immigrant students. However, there are slight differences in approaching other students with special needs.

The second day consisted of virtual lesson observations. A computer and a tablet were placed into each classroom to cover different angles of the learning area. Since this event took place at the start of online learning opportunities due to Covid-19 restrictions that dictated distance learning, the preparation required strong collaboration and teamwork to provide quality sound and picture and prevent technical inconveniences. The observations took place simultaneously in two different classes, so that the teachers could follow as many lessons as possible, split up or switch classes without any interruption. Observations were carried out in grades 5 to 9 and included the lessons of: Music, English, Technics and Technology, Natural Science, Experiments, Physics, Mathematics, Slovene and Physical Education.

The last – Physical Education observation – was offered on the last day of the event, before proceeding to a meeting where members of both schools shared examples of good practice, including other Erasmus+ activities and adjusting teaching process to distance learning. Since both schools participated in teaching and training activities in Finland, we exchanged our views on the Finnish school system. Then we discussed the way we approached distance learning. Our team of teachers also practically presented the escape room as a learning tool, which was prepared for our students at cross-curricular learning activity, and Google sites as a teaching/learning tool for teachers and students. The Spanish team presented the integration of Genially app into learning activities at school, and students' work with Chromebooks at regular lessons.

Before the concluding part the guests were invited to take a virtual tour of our country which acquainted them with the main historical, geographical and cultural features of Slovenia. In the end, we analyzed the project activities with the help of evaluation questionnaire, and we awarded certificates of participation as it is a common gesture in live mobilities, too.

## Conclusion

The analysis showed that the virtual mobility met the expectations of the guests and the host school in general. The guests' wishes were taken into account during preparation, and taking COVID-19 affection into account, the activities were carried out as close to the original plan as possible. The coordinator, team members and other staff were cooperative, reliable and responsible which encouraged trust and respect of attendees from the sending institution. The programme provided new ideas that can be integrated into the educational process and professional development. It reinforced a positive attitude of the sending institution towards sending more staff on teaching assignments, job shadowing or training abroad. It strengthened the cooperation with the partner organization and encouraged it to start or join new European or other international projects.

KA1 projects can mean both, a challenge on the one hand and a stronger motivation to use a foreign language on the other, but in both cases they offer a stimulating environment and many opportunities to improve language skills of all attendees. They are definitely not meant for language teachers only. Hosting job shadowing live or virtually has a high impact on strengthening teamwork and collaboration of staff members, which is an additional indirect impact on students whose welfare at school and high stimulating and quality learning environment are the main goals of all KA1 activities.

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# CREATIVITY IN MATURA LITERARY TEXTS

**Lea Koler**

## **Abstract**

Students have to study two novels and five poems in the course of their studies before Matura. To ensure they approach the subject of literary analysis with glad expectation instead of impending dread, several activities were introduced into the lessons, ranging from short, fifteen-minute tasks, to longer projects. Students were given free rein where possible, to maximize their engagement.

**Keywords:** creativity, teaching literature, Matura

## Introduction

While planning the tasks for teaching literature for Matura, a secondary goal of fostering creativity came to mind. In addition to covering literary analysis, themes and styles, and other relevant theoretical and practical concepts, it became clear that the focus should be academic, but does it necessarily need to remain so? To ensure the students have the opportunity to express their individualism, their understanding of the texts covered, and to introduce an element of light-hearted fun in an otherwise very serious and rigorous field of study, several creative exercises were introduced. We covered the two novels, W. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and K. Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, as well as the five poems for higher level of Matura.

## The activities

The idea was to design exercises and activities that will give the students enough structure to still achieve the desired outcomes in terms of understanding the text, but provide enough free rein for the students to express themselves to a degree they feel comfortable with.

With that in mind, the first creative activity was seemingly simple, but offered quite a lot of room for interpretation and ensured the students read the text in depth. The students chose a meme in connection to Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The activity was conducted after a thorough study of the text to ensure all the students had enough information with which they could choose or make their own memes. The option to either choose an existing meme or make their own was deliberate, to ensure that all the students can participate in the activity, even the students who are unsure of their knowledge, or are simply tired and do not wish to be active. The students uploaded their memes to our Teams group, which ensured that they can access them at any time they wish. The understanding of the memes was checked through group work. Students formed groups and chose memes that other students made and explained them to the rest of the class. After each explanation, a short discussion followed, where the students who chose the meme defended their choice and explained its significance in the wider context of the novel.

The second creative activity asked the students to think of their own dystopian society and produce several pieces of written or drawn examples that illustrated their made-up society. The activity was conducted before the students had read Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Although the novel is a dystopian one, its significance is far greater than the genre. Despite this, I felt it was a time well spent, as the dystopian and science fiction elements of the story emphasise the story itself and are an effective backdrop to the novel's exploration of human nature. The great injustice of the clones' too-short lives, their dehumanisation in the eyes of society, and their constant surveillance are all well-established tropes of dystopian fiction.

The activity was a simple group work task with a short, five-minute presentation at the end. The students worked in groups of their own choosing and were provided with some prompts through which they explored their made-up society. Each group had some

elements in common and some elements that were unique to their own group, so the presentations had an element of surprise, to ensure students listened to other groups carefully. The common elements were the society's map, propaganda poster, and a diary of a citizen of their state or city and the unique elements were a description of the government, an average citizen, how they deal with infractions, and similar (Hying). The short project served as a jumping board for a more substantial project they presented a month later.

A lengthier project was introduced a month later, giving the students more freedom to express their thoughts and opinions. The students were given dates and chapters of *Never Let Me Go*, and asked to prepare a presentation on the plot, themes, characters, and symbols. The presentation had to include a creative element, but it was unspecified what the element should be, with the express purpose of giving the students enough freedom to choose their own direction. A general timing of ten minutes was provided, as well as a rubric, but with the addendum that they can change it if they so wish. The purpose of the presentation was not to provide an opportunity for rigorous testing, but rather to allow the students to show what elements they themselves feel are important in their projects. In addition to keeping the standard elements of Delivery, Content, Language, and Organisation, the students requested that we add a separate element of Question and Answer, Teamwork, which should be self-graded, and Whole experience, which should be class graded, and bonus points for the groups that provide a handout. They also requested we eliminate eye contact from the rubric, as they felt it was exclusive and did not take into consideration social anxiety some students may have. Their suggestions were implemented and I added a separate rubric for Creative elements with double points to ensure the groups spend time and thought on how to make their presentation creative.

The results varied, with some students simply making a quiz or a Quizlet set, while some provided a poem, original drawings, and a videogame. As expected, the students graded the Whole experience segment very fairly, with mediocre presentations receiving an appropriate overall mark and excellent presentations receiving the highest marks. I believe that making the grading anonymous, via Google Forms helped ensure the students stayed impartial, without the risk of their classmates learning who it was that gave them a lower mark.

### **The activities – poems**

The activities connected to poems were all done in such a way as to take no more than fifteen minutes of the teacher's time. As the time for studying literature is very limited, the necessity for short activities was very evident. The activities are presented here in order from the oldest to the newest poem.

For W. Shakespeare's *Sonnet 130* the students received a blank Tinder profile and were asked to fill it in from the speaker of the poem and his Dark Lady. Since the space for a photograph was provided, the more artistically inclined students had the option to spend



more time on the photographs and less time on the descriptions, or vice-versa for the more literature-minded individuals.

W. B. Yeats' *Lake Isle of Innisfree* lent itself perfectly to exploring soundscapes. After studying the imagery and listening to several readings of the poem, including one by the poet himself, the students were grouped and asked to prepare their own reading, with sounds to accompany their text. The students were given an example website for finding their selected sounds, [freesound.org](http://freesound.org), but instructed to use whichever library or app they wanted. Some students lined up their cell phones to play the soundscapes, while others brought their laptops and compiled a sound file. The students listened to each other's performances and commented on their choices.

J. McCrae's *In Flanders Fields* was covered while the students were quarantined and in a different class as a face-to-face lesson. The students were asked to provide either a pro-war or an anti-war poster, using imagery from the poem, and defend their choices. The students who did this as an online activity provided their posters as image files, with elements found online, while the students working in class worked on the posters with their coloured pencils and pens. Some posters were highly stylised where the author's vision was more complex than what the time allowed, but all the students finished their projects in the allotted time. There was a stark difference in the students who covered the lesson before the war in Ukraine broke out and after. While the students before the war all produced anti-war posters, the students after the beginning of the war provided examples of pro-war posters, with a common theme being justice and defense of the country and loved ones. I cannot speculate whether this difference was because of the war breaking out or if the students in that particular class had different views than their peers.

R. Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* proved to be quite a challenging obstacle. Often labelled as one of the world's most misinterpreted poems, the choice for the activity tried to reflect this same fact. The students became acquainted with the circumstances surrounding the making of this poem and then were asked to write a letter as Robert Frost's friend, Edward Thomas, for whom the poem was written, where they give their opinion (in character). They were instructed to mention that they suspect it was a joke at their expense, but to remain firmly polite. The results varied, with some students giving it serious thought and even respecting the layout of a letter and some giving hasty scribbles. All of them, however, addressed the meaning of the poem as they themselves saw it, and supported their opinions with quotations from the poem.

M. Angelou's *Phenomenal Woman* was an exceptional opportunity for my class, as we have only three girls. I firmly believe it is imperative for the students to read about experiences different from their own and to gain insight into stories and viewpoints that they cannot immediately identify with. I believe it helps the students grow into accepting and gentle human beings, ones that can approach other humans with empathy and understanding. At the time of writing, we have not yet covered the poem, but the idea is to find a part of

themselves that is different from the norm and think of ways in which they can celebrate it, either in word or in art.

## **Conclusion**

Creativity and art in all its forms are what make us human. The short creative activities will hopefully stay with the students for years to come, and the aim is that they will remember the stories they explored and their own contribution to the vast experience of human creativity, not only the grade they received in Matura.

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# HOW TO READ LITERATURE LIKE A PROFESSOR

**Klavdija Kreml Slana**

## **Abstract**

The paper focuses on my approach to teaching literary texts in class, specifically prose texts such as short stories and novels. The following areas of analysis are discussed: the setting, plot, types of plots and plot pyramid, characterization, conflict, themes, motifs, symbols, and narrative technique. This way you will be able to read and teach literature like a professor.

**Keywords:** literature, prose, chronological analysis, thematic analysis

## Introduction

As language teachers the main part of our job is to develop and teach language skills and language systems. This is mostly done through the lenses of different non-literary texts, either consisting of purely textual, visual or a combination of textual and visual modes of meaning. However, reading and teaching literary texts both for educational and enjoyment purposes is part of the ride. Teaching at least some literary texts is obligatory since they are one of the requirements of the English school leaving exam. In addition, many of us tend to incorporate literature and teach literary texts, whether poetry, prose, or drama, to help our students understand the world around them and to be able to understand themselves. To develop their life-long passion for reading literature. To spice up our lessons and to make classes more meaningful.

## Key to reading literature

Pablo Picasso once said that art is the lie that enables us to realize the truth (Philpot, 2019, p. 58). As teachers we should help our students ask themselves to what degree is reading fiction about finding the 'truth'. The truth about themselves, their experiences, expectations, the world they live in and the connections they make with other people. The more the students read, the more experienced readers they become. Foster (2014) believes that English teachers should introduce their students to the "language of reading". What he is talking about is the "grammar of literature, a set of conventions and patterns, codes, and rules, which we learn to employ in dealing with a piece of writing. Every language has a grammar, a set of rules that govern usage and meaning, and literary language is no different" (p. xxv).

Foster (2014) states that there are two layers of reading: First, when students "encounter a fictive text, they focus on the story and the characters. As such, they respond to their reading on an emotional level: the work affects them, producing joy or revulsion, laughter and tears, anxiety or elation" (p. xxvi-xxvii). Nevertheless, "when an English professor reads, he will accept the affective response level of the story: Where did that effect come from? Whom does this character resemble? Where have I seen this situation before? By learning to ask these questions, one will read and understand literature in a new light, and it will become more rewarding and fun" (Foster, 2014, p. xxvii).

According to Foster (2014), "there are three items that separate the professorial reader from the rest of the crowd: memory, symbol, pattern. Whenever literature teachers read a new work, they look for correspondences and connections in their memory: Where have I seen this face, do I not know the theme?" (p. xxvii). "They also read and think symbolically. Everything is a symbol of something until proven otherwise. A related phenomenon in professorial reading is pattern recognition: they learn to take in the foreground details while seeing the patterns that the details reveal" (p. xxviii). As teachers, what we should strive to do in class is give readers a broad introduction to the codes and patterns that inform our readings. We should want them to be able to reach conclusions without us. And for them to be able to do that they need a lot of practice, patience, and instruction. (Foster, 2014).

## **Key elements of analyzing literature**

When analyzing a literary work, you should discuss the following structural elements of fiction: the story/plot, the setting (time, place), the character and the importance of narrative techniques as devices that help us understand the message and that influence the way we understand any given text. It is not enough just to identify these elements, but to establish why they were chosen and how they influence our understanding of the text.

### **Story versus plot; plot pyramid and types of plots**

Story is the chronological sequence of (true or fictional) events. Plot is a literary device that helps you tell the story. It is the series of events that make up a story. The story need not be told chronologically. The narrator may interrupt the chronological sequence of events and may start digressing, explaining past events (flashbacks) etc. In 1863 the German novelist Gustav Freytag developed a simple visualization of plot, known as Freytag's Pyramid. He identified five elements of plot: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement or resolution. Exposition comes at the beginning of the story, where the reader learns key information about the characters, the setting, and the plot. Rising action is the part in which the plot develops, and the characters come into a state of conflict. Climax is the turning point in the story, where the tension reaches its highest point. The climax usually comes shortly before the end. Falling action is often very brief, as readers discover the result of the climax. Denouement is when the story becomes resolved in the end.

Have you ever noticed that a lot of stories seem to be variations of the same plot? Journalist Christopher Booker argues that there are seven basic plots: Overcoming the monster: The protagonist sets out to defeat an antagonistic force (often evil) that threatens the protagonist and/or protagonist's homeland. Rags to riches: The poor protagonist acquires power, wealth, and/or a mate, loses it all and gains it back, growing as a person as a result. The quest: The protagonist and companions set out to acquire an important object or to get to a location. They face temptations and other obstacles along the way. Voyage and return: The protagonist travels to a strange land. After overcoming the threats or learning important lessons he returns with experience. Comedy: Light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion. Tragedy: The protagonist is a hero with a major character flaw or great mistake which is ultimately their undoing. Their unfortunate end evokes pity at their folly and the fall of a fundamentally good character. Rebirth: An event forces the main character to change their ways and often become a better individual (Wikipedia).

### **The setting**

The setting is the time and place the story takes place. The setting may be a real or invented background to the story, including the outdoor scenery and/or interiors. Details about the way characters behave, are dressed etc. add to the social setting of the story. However, the setting also includes the entire physical and emotional backdrop of where and when a

story takes place and may, as such, reflect the ideas of the time/place in which the characters are set. According to Philpot (2019), the setting may also have further functions: it can act as a mirror of the characters' problems; it can also act as a mould in shaping the characters' personalities; it can be depicted as an escapist setting where the setting may represent an escape from our own reality; and the degree by which characters are alienated by their surroundings (p. 63).

### **Characters and characterization**

Writers mostly engage readers through the portrayal of the characters involved. When studying the characters in your literary texts, you should answer these two questions: What function do the characters serve in the story? How does the author bring their characters to life? Authors bring their characters to life by using the following techniques of characterization: character's name, character's words (dialogue), actions and behaviour, character's thoughts, character's physical appearance and personality traits. In most works, there are main and secondary characters, all of which contribute to the story in their own way. Thus, we distinguish between the following types of characters: protagonist (the main character who propels the story towards a certain goal), antagonist (who stands in the way of protagonist), round / complex character (a fully developed, psychologically believable character that undergoes development) vs. flat character (static, built around one main idea), foil (a character whose qualities contrast those of the main character to expose them to the reader), antihero (the protagonist who lacks the traditional heroic qualities), and stock character (a one-dimensional stereotypical character, often included to make a point or represent an idea rather than a realistic portrayal of a person).

### **Conflict**

According to Philpot (2019), "at the heart of any story is conflict, and there are several types of conflict: individual vs. society, individual versus another individual, individual versus circumstances, and individual versus himself" (p. 63). Every story we read includes a problem which needs to be solved. Helping students determine what type of conflict prevails in a text will help them understand the text better.

### **Themes, motifs, symbols**

The theme is the central topic a text treats and answers the seemingly simple question "What is the text about?" A story may have several themes. Themes often explore historically common or cross-culturally recognizable ideas, such as ethical questions, and are usually implied rather than stated explicitly. In addition, students should also know the distinction between motifs and symbols. A motif is any recurring element that has significance in a story. Through its repetition, a motif can help produce other aspects of the text. It can be created using imagery, structural components, language, and other elements throughout literature. To illustrate, the motif of bathing in the Holocaust novel *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink stands for the cleansing of sins or crimes. Another example from modern American literature is the green light found in the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. A symbol, however, is literary device that contains several layers of meaning, often concealed

at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts, or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbol is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning, such as Mama's plant in *Lorraine Hansberry's* play *A Raisin in the Sun*. The plant stands as a symbol of the Younger family's perseverance despite the societal obstacles in terms of racial segregation in the 1950s USA.

### **Narrative technique**

All stories are narrated but in fiction the narrator is not to be identified with the author. The narrator is a literary construct, through which author speaks to their readers, while the narrative voice is the way the story is told. Often, it is more important how the story is told rather than what the story is about. As noted by Philpot (2019), narrative technique consists of the following four elements: narrator's point of view (who the narrator is and to whom he is speaking: first / second / third person point of view), narrative voice (how (un) reliable the narrator is: omniscient / all-knowing; limited; subjective / objective account), speech and tense (how the story is told, which verb tenses are used: past, present, future; direct speech, reported speech, free indirect speech) (p. 64).

### **Conclusion**

Foster (2014) claims that every reader's experience of every work is unique, largely because each person will emphasize various elements to different degrees, and these differences will cause certain features of the text to become accentuated. As readers we bring an individual history to our reading, a mix of previous reading, but also a history that includes, but is not limited to, educational attainment, gender, race, class, faith, social involvement, and philosophical inclination. These factors will inevitably influence our reading of literature (p. 110). Nevertheless, it is our job as teachers of literature to help students decipher the codes of a text; and we can do this by familiarizing them with the "language of reading".

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# HOW LITERATURE BROADENS HORIZONS

Nina Kremžar

## **Abstract**

This article suggests that using contemporary works of literature in class environment is one of the most stimulative methods for starting and leading topic discussions, since literature, with its complexity and aesthetics, sparks the students' curiosity more than other types of texts. What is more, while working with literary texts students learn methods of close reading and develop critical thinking, they acquire new rich vocabulary in an authentic context, and get the opportunity to be creative, thus deepening their understanding of the discussed topic.

**Keywords:** literature in the classroom, vocabulary acquisition, topic discussion, creativity



## Introduction

In this article I will suggest that introducing contemporary works of fiction into topic-related discussions is one of the most engaging and stimulative ways to get students actively involved and incite their interest in the topic at hand. From personal experience I have learned that students respond to literary texts more positively than to other types of non-fiction texts, since they are motivated by the complexity of literary language, the broadness of topics the texts touch upon, cultural references, and the opportunity to independently discover deeper meanings of the text.

I will provide ideas and insights based on my work in the classroom, where I used two different works of literature as a warm-up activity to guide two different topic discussions. The first text is the short story *Girl* by the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid (1978), and nicely connects to the topic of family. The story is a to-do list a mother gives to her daughter on how to behave and learn certain chores. It is written in the form of one sentence only, and includes an abundance of cultural references to the Antiguan culture. The mother's speech comes across as strict and demanding, however, she also gives her daughter empowering advice. The variety and the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship tie in perfectly with real-life experience of every student, making the discussion related to family a broad and lively one. The second text I use as an activity when introducing the topic of migration is a poem by Javier Zamora (2017) entitled *To Abuelita Neli*. The poem is a letter by the narrator who, like the author himself, immigrated to the USA as a child, and nostalgically remembers his childhood in El Salvador and struggles with the sense of belonging.

After working with these two texts, I not only realized that the students became more engaged after trying to discover the themes of the texts and actively participated in the discussion that also appealed to their general knowledge of the world and life experience, but also that literary texts include an abundance of useful vocabulary. In this article I also point out that literary texts come in handy when we want to teach our students the methods of working with literature and encourage their creativity.

## Developing strategies for working with literary texts

When using literary texts in the classroom, the first obvious skills that students develop are strategies for working with literary texts. Since language used in literature is highly stylized and full in meaning, literature demands a different approach to other types of texts that communicate with the reader in a more direct manner and with which our students are mostly in contact in the classroom. Applying certain methods of the close reading method teaches the students to read slowly and carefully, to focus on the hidden or double meaning, to take figures of speech into consideration, and, maybe most importantly, to engage with the text on an emotional level and thus try to discover its underlying meaning. Appropriate questions that the students are given to consider are indispensable in order to get the students to delve into the text. This demands a level of literary knowledge on the part of the teacher, who should mostly understand that questions such as "what did

the author mean?" and insisting on "right and wrong interpretations" negate the main purpose of working with literary texts, which is to emotionally engage the students and spark their curiosity. Therefore, questions which better incite the students to look for answers on their own should encourage the students to creatively interpret and engage with the text.

Let me apply this claim to my concrete example – the short story *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid (1987). After reading the text, I first ask the students some broader questions such as: "How does the text make you feel?", "What scenes or moments caught your attention?", "Where, in your personal opinion, does this story take place?", "What is happening in the text?". After engaging their imagination, I ease them into more specific questions such as: "Who is the speaker?", "Who are they speaking to and why?", "What is the main theme of the text?", "What is the tone of the text?", "Do you notice anything specific about its style?"

In this way the students can build on their personal interpretations and add a more detailed interpretation under the teacher's guidance, which teaches them how to work with literary texts. At the same time not insisting on "right and wrong answers" provides the students with self-confidence to critically approach other literary texts in the future and helps them become active and engaged readers.

### **Acquiring vocabulary through literature**

Through working with literary texts, the students acquire new and rich vocabulary used in an authentic context. Vocabulary-connected tasks based on authentic literary texts are certainly challenging, since the text itself might include plenty of references, allusions and hidden meaning, but at the same time also rewarding for the students as they use the text itself, alongside with dictionaries, and also their knowledge of the world to define the words and determine the meanings they allude to.

Literary texts not only offer rich topic-related vocabulary and an authentic context in which it is used, but many of the words can also be surprising or refer to other fields, which, again, importantly broadens the students' knowledge. As literature is not written with students in mind, but generally for a wider reading audience, it is especially full of idioms, complex collocations and colligations, and thus offers a more unique and authentic learning experience than simply providing the students with a limited selection of topic related vocabulary.

For example, in the story *Girl* we can find the following words and expressions: heap, clothesline, bare-head, to hold up, to soak, to turn somebody's stomach, to be bent on something, warf-rat, to hem, crease, harbor, spit, to fall on, to make ends meet. As we can see, the vocabulary found in the text is by all means rich and often belongs to higher English language levels – according to the Cambridge Text Inspector (see the References) the expressions such as *bare*, *bent*, *soak*, etc. are B2-level words, while *bully* is considered C1, and *heap* and *spit* even C2. This means that as students work with the chosen text, they

are faced with a wide array of vocabulary items, including idiomatic phrases, and acquire rich vocabulary, which is supported by vivid and memorable examples from the text itself and that they will therefore be able to use in other contexts as well.

### **The role of literature in sparking discussion**

The use of literature in a classroom has, for me personally, opened up new approaches into topic discussions. Instead of giving the students discussion questions that they sometimes find uninteresting, matter of fact or too rigid, and therefore fail to stimulate the discussion, I have started using short works of literature to guide topic discussions. Giving the students the opportunity to personally engage with the text and share their feelings and opinions has proven to be a good way to get them more involved in the topic. What is more, working with a specific text opens up new and much more specific questions.

For example, as a warm up activity students are often given general questions to discuss. If we take the topic of “family”, these questions often revolve around very general topics, such as: “What types of families do you know?”, “Who are your closest family members?”, “Is marriage important?”, “How has the relationship between parents and children changed through history?”. From my personal experience I have found that such questions do not present enough of a challenge and fail to mentally stimulate the students and, subsequently, to incite a fulfilling discussion.

Changing the aforementioned questions to more specific ones about the text in question has shown to motivate the students. In connection to the text *Girl* some of the questions that I ask students are as follows: “Describe the girl’s upbringing, and what you think of it”, “Discuss the mother’s relationship towards her daughter”, “Does the mother show any affection? If yes, how?”, “Are there any empowering moments in the text?”, “Discuss the roles of men and women in regard to the text”, “Discuss the cultural norms of the culture in question”. Many of these questions touch upon other topics as well, and this intertwining deepens the students’ understanding of all the concerned topics and, most importantly, includes the students’ general knowledge of the world. Because they are able to cross the borders and discuss the topic at hand in a broader way, the students actively participate in the discussion, while also discovering new topics or details in the discussed text.

### **An opportunity to be creative**

In learning, creativity has an important role as it raises the students’ interest, aids the processes of memorization and encourages curiosity. However, it is often a challenge to successfully motivate students into creative work. If the students fail to show interest in the topic itself, if they are too preoccupied with factual data and concentrated on the so-called correctness of their school work, sparking creativity within the class is not easily achieved. Literature, however, by itself inspires, engages the reader and tries to achieve certain aesthetic goals. Even if some of our students are not keen on literature in general or the topic at hand, having them work with a text so different to what they are used to and especially changing the expectations we have towards them opens up space for them to explore and create. In

such tasks it is mainly important to give the students free rein and to let go of the idea of “right and wrong” answers.

One possible task I suggest is to ask the students to write a poem influenced by Zamora’s (2017) *To Abuelita Neli*. The students are asked to imagine that they have to leave their home country and move abroad in search of a better life. Now they should write a letter or poem to their grandparents or any member of their family or close friends that they have left behind. The students are asked to consider the experience such a relocation would produce and the parts of their home culture they would miss. The products of such a task are usually more or less creative – some students write heartfelt poems, others lean towards criticism of politics, they touch upon racism or even attempt to write a humorous text. Whatever the result, the students are given the opportunity to express themselves and, by applying this experience to their personal lives, mostly to deal with the topic on an intimate, deeper and more comprehensive level. In other words, evoking an emotional response through literature nicely adds to the more rational cognitive processes and makes the students’ understanding of the topic more wholesome and profound.

## Conclusion

Based on my personal experience, I can conclude that working with mainly contemporary literature has been well-accepted among the students and has resulted in successful and rewarding lessons. In working with literature, the processes of acquiring new vocabulary, practicing methods of close reading in order to deal with the text and develop a critical approach to literature, and topic discussion naturally intertwine. What is more, because students apply their own personal experience and broader knowledge and also have the opportunity to participate in creative tasks, their engagement and activity in class considerably increase. Literature provides authentic incentive and inspiration, therefore the students become more attentive, they get a deeper understanding of the topic and their relationship to it. Dealing with literary texts also broadens their horizons and gives them a chance to practice empathy, while also engaging introspection.

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# WHERE WERE YOU ON 9/11?

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## **Abstract**

Two decades after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which have affected everyone who can remember where they were on that dreadful day, we teachers can demonstrate our students how to recover from traumas. We should not avoid discussing life-changing global events in class, but show our students how to deal with devastating emotions and persevere. Sharing personal stories might also help us deal with our own residual unconscious trauma of the events, even if experienced only via the media. Examples of diverse in-class activities on the topic of 9/11 are included, from viewing comprehensions to picture prompt discussions.

**Keywords:** 9/11, trauma, media, listening comprehension, picture prompts

## Introduction

I was 18 years old. I had just finished my secondary school with honours, looking forward to studying English at the University of Maribor, enjoying my first school-free September since I could remember. I was on top of the world, with no worries and excited about what the future held for me, therefore, I didn't need much persuasion to get my driving licence that my mum offered to pay for, even though I was quite nervous about sitting behind the wheel of a moving car. It was a beautiful clear Tuesday afternoon just before three o'clock, and I was getting ready to go to the driving school to attend a traffic regulations lesson in the nearby town. I was just tying my blue-white Donnay shoes when I heard an announcement on the radio that a small private plane had hit a skyscraper in New York City. I remember wondering how an accident like that could have happened – had the pilot suddenly become ill? When I got to the driving school, I was waiting for the lesson to begin when a latecomer burst in saying another airliner had hit the WTC. It wasn't just a small private jet. It wasn't an accident.

## Why share the story of 9/11 in class?

9/11 was a terrible tragedy, and even though more than 20 years have passed since then, the memories of images broadcast live round the world still haunt me. When I see a plane descending to the nearby airport on a clear blue morning on my way to work, instead of feeling elated by past and possible future journeys, I feel a prick at my heart; or at a film premiere, being turned off by a scene of people free-falling down the side of a building. Yet, I have learned that the best way to deal with stress and grief is to share it, not to keep your feelings bottled up inside. There is a healing power of telling a story (Gillihan, 2019). Revisiting the memory instead of pushing it away, recounting what actually happened, making sense of a senseless event has helped me overcome my fears: describing 9/11 to my students no longer makes me feel like cringing.

The live media coverage of 9/11 has been burnt into my mind, therefore, I feel it is important to share the story of 9/11 with my students, not just in order to express my feelings, but also to educate the new generations about a tragic event that has shaped the world we live in and to show them how to deal with traumas, personal or universal. When I started teaching English at my secondary school, my 4<sup>th</sup> year students were old enough to remember what happened on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001. Mostly they remembered how shocked their parents had been, who smartly didn't allow them to watch the news on TV. With each new generation of students, their memories were dimmer until I am now faced with classes of students born in this millennium who don't know much about the day that touched me so deeply.

Although the following 9/11 lessons that I have prepared through the years reflect how I was personally coping with my trauma, they also demonstrate a shift in the media coverage, showing that the world was healing too. I try to focus on the terrorist attack itself, how it has affected the individuals, and for this reason, sidestepping its political aftermath.

## Viewing and listening comprehensions

I was encouraged to prepare my first lesson on 9/11 while covering the topic of lying in class, and thus the topic of conspiracy theories arose. The students showed a strong interest in exploring the number one conspiracy theory in the world at that time, which was also attracting a great deal of media attention. After the 9/11 Commission Report, published in 2004, many questions remained unanswered, and I was keen to find out more about what transpired together with my students. They were given a handout with a short summary of the so-called 9/11 myth taken from the video *Part II All the World's a Stage*, an extract from the film *Zeitgeist: The Movie* (Joseph, 2007). While watching the video, they had to underline words in the summary related to the proof countering the myth, which we afterwards discussed in more detail. The lively discussion that followed gave the students a chance to create their own point of view on what had happened, evaluating the evidence presented in the video and trying to make sense of the attack.

On a student's recommendation and after a viewer discretion warning, we also watch the film *World Trade Center* (released in 2006, directed by Oliver Stone, starring Nicolas Cage and Michael Peña). The viewing was followed by an open discussion of their reactions to the film and its portrayal of the attack, in which I realised that I had had a much harder time watching the film than my students.

Around the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and after the killing of Osama bin Laden, I redirected my lesson towards the effects of the terrorist attack, focusing on the direct and indirect victims. In an effort to develop students' viewing comprehension skills, I created different tasks – from identifying information (True/False, Short Answer Questions) to describing a graph – based on news reports that I could find on the internet at that time, which focused on the safety in New York City, the health issues of the first responders, and the change of Americans' habits after 9/11. I moved on from trying to figure out the truth behind the attack to addressing its legacy, especially the effects it had on individuals and how to recover from them.

After years of browsing the Internet for fresh materials and trying out different activities, I have finally settled on a listening comprehension task that I use as a starter. At my American foreign teacher's suggestion, Rebecca Svetina, we have used the lyrics of a country song titled *Have You Forgotten?* by Darryl Worley (2009) to create a gap-fill exercise, removing keywords such as 'towers', 'bin Laden' and 'Pentagon'. The task not only checks the students' prior knowledge of the attack, but also makes them think about how it affected Americans as well as the rest of the world. We usually follow this task up with watching a 5-minute video by History (2011), which shows the historical timeline of the events, giving students enough background information for the next activity.

## Picture prompt discussion

There are numerous reasons why I like using picture prompts in class. Not only do authentic pictures provide a powerful stimulus for speaking or writing, but they also develop visual literacy. Doing a bit of detective work and paying careful attention to detail can give students a chance to see the bigger picture and deepen their understanding of the topic. Students often use their personal knowledge of the world to figure out what is happening in a picture, especially if they pass comment without being led towards any right answer.

I find giving students three different photographs to choose from and letting them discuss the chosen photograph first in pairs, instead of speaking in front of the whole class, is the most efficient method of using picture prompts in class. Since I also want students to focus on developing their visual literacy, the photographs aren't captioned; otherwise, students' responses focus too much on the written words instead of on the image itself.

I encourage students to first carry out a detailed observation of the photograph (What is going on? What details do you see that make you say that?). They might try to guess what happened just before the photograph was taken or what might be happening just outside its frame. Then they try to make a personal connection to the photograph (How does it make you feel? Have you ever seen/experienced anything similar?). Finally, they write down questions that the photograph brings to mind (What's the story behind it?), which initiates further discussion when individuals are prompted to respond to a specific photograph. I provide background information as I see fit since I don't want to overwhelm students with too many details.

I intentionally haven't included any visuals in this article since the iconic photographs of 9/11 tend to be quite graphic. In addition, I want to give teachers a choice to decide on their own which photographs to use, depending on which aspects of 9/11 they want to present, and most importantly what they feel comfortable discussing in class. Nevertheless, I would like to point out a couple of striking photographs of 9/11:

- *The Daily Telegraph's "War on America" front page* (available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/coneee/3166155525>)
- *The Dust Lady* (photo by Stan Honda, available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/macy-borders-9-11s-iconic-dust-lady-dies-after-cancer-n416121>)
- *The Falling Man* (photo by Richard Drew, available at <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/>)
- *Firefighter Mike Kehoe rushing up the stairs of the North Tower* (photo by John Labriola, available at <https://why.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/evacuation911-768x512.jpg>)
- *Fire fighters draping a flag over the west wall of the Pentagon* (photo by John McDonnell, available at <https://media.gettyimages.com/photos/fire-fighters-along-with-a-few-military-personnel-drape-a-large-flag-picture-id603119192?s=2048x2048>)



## Conclusion

I believe the most effective lessons are the ones when teachers establish rapport with their students by sharing their own personal experience, instantly connecting to the topic of the lesson. Hence, I decided early on to only give the 9/11 lesson to students in their final year of secondary school, not only because they are mature enough to handle the sensitive material, but also because they can relate to my personal experience, being just a year younger than I was when 9/11 happened. With all the traumatic events that we have been faced with so far in this millennium, from vicious terrorist attacks and devastating natural disasters to a sweeping pandemic and threats of impending wars, what gives me hope are my first-year students, their eyes sparkling when talking about traveling round the world, especially wanting to visit New York City, which shows me that the city has once again become a place of dreams and inspiration.

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# ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR LESSONS

Lucija Kuntner

## **Abstract**

Throughout the learning process, encouraging critical thinking skills among grammar school students is of paramount importance. Engaging students in higher order thinking, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, allows them to pose questions, to reflect and to examine their own set beliefs and knowledge. Thus students can learn to differentiate between the critical assessment of certain issues and criticism. In addition to that, they also learn the difference between (acquiring) information, gaining knowledge and wisdom. Discussions and debates are two of the creative activities which do not only enhance students' cognitive abilities, but also stimulate them to learn about the importance of accepting and respecting different standpoints, and thus tolerance. Last but not least, in order to increase students' comprehension level of the world around us, teachers are also inspired to reconsider their own frame of reference.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, discussion, debate, creativity, tolerance

## Introduction

It is crucial to acknowledge that to think critically is not to criticize but rather to think deeply and to question ourselves. Critical thinking can be defined as an individual thought process that begins with the intent to solve a problem or to answer a question, by examining different options and choosing the most suitable and logical one (Alsaleh, 2020).

When encouraging critical thinking among students, Judith S. Nappi (2017) states the importance of questioning in the teaching/learning process and highlights the use of the Socratic approach – not necessarily to look for a specific, correct answer, but to inspire students to reflect on their thinking, rather than memorizing and recalling facts), and thus broadening their horizons and stimulating them to look beyond their set beliefs. By doing so, students can become more independent thinkers.

The revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001), which is represented as a pyramid with higher order thinking (cognition) at the top, provides an important framework for teachers (Nappi, 2017) to underscore verbs such as *differentiate, relate, compare, contrast, examine, question, argue, value, weigh*, etc. (Armstrong, 2010) in order to enhance metacognitive skills when setting class objectives.

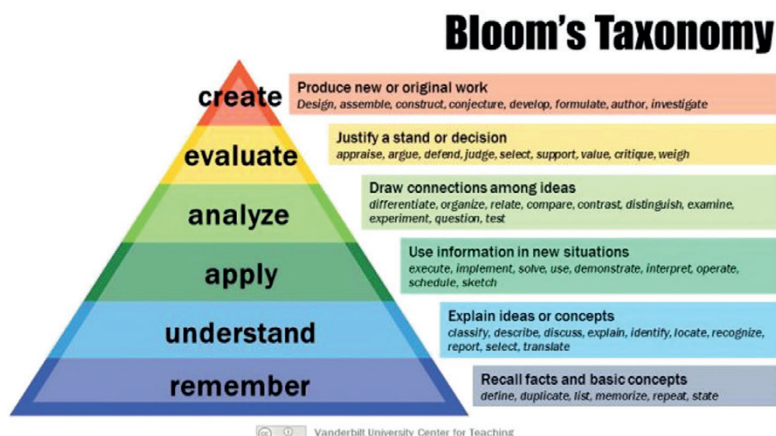


Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy (Armstrong, 2010)

## Characteristics of a critical thinker

It is known that a critical thinker uses his/her imagination when analysing certain issues, in other words, one is able to think outside the box. In his book, *The Art of Thinking: A Guide to Critical and Creative Thought*, Vincent Ryan Ruggiero (2012) introduces characteristics of critical thinkers. He claims that critical thinkers can acknowledge personal limitations, see problems as exiting challenges, have understanding as a goal, use evidence to make judgements, are interested in others' ideas, are sceptical of extreme views, think before acting, avoid emotionalism, keep an open mind and engage in active listening.

Equally important is to consider the characteristics of non-critical thinkers. Ruggiero (ibid.) suggests that non-critical thinkers see a limited number of perspectives (sometimes just one), take the first approach that occurs to them, judge quickly – maybe too quickly and not critically, fail to listen actively, think their ideas are the best – all others are less so, resist change, think in stereotypes, and deceive themselves often. Both of the points are to be clarified to students lest to be misunderstood.

### **Encouraging critical thinking at extra-curricular lessons**

One of the options to enhance both listening and speaking skills, and engage students in critical thinking is English extra-curricular lessons, in which the third-year students at Prva gimnazija Maribor can take part in. As these classes are much smaller than regular ones, and although the number of lessons is limited, students can participate more intensely.

#### **- Discussion and debate**

Students are involved in a variety of activities, however the main focus is on discussion and debate. Prior to that, a cross-curricular lesson is carried out with our Philosophy teacher, who introduces the difference between a discussion and debate, presents some valuable Socratic questions, such as, “What do you mean when you say X? Can you provide an example? Is there a different point of view? How could someone else respond, and why? Can we validate that evidence? How would this affect someone?” Furthermore, students also learn to distinguish between an argument and explanation, and are given useful strategies how to form good, logic-based arguments, and how to analyse them.

At this point, students choose some thought-provoking claims from the *idebate.com* site they would like to discuss and/or debate (e.g., Science is a threat to humanity; Religion does more harm than good; A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united, etc.), or are given rather challenging articles/book extracts (e.g., by Umberto Galimberti, Elif Shafak) to be read beforehand.

When discussing, students form circular, so called mindful groups of 4-5 participants. Each group is then given a ‘talking stick’, and only the student holding it, is allowed to speak. The talking stick is passed around to each group until everyone has expressed their point of view. One of the benefits of the talking stick is that students not only practise attentive listening without interrupting each other, but also acknowledge different perspectives. The next step is open discussion within each group; thus, students are encouraged to provide justification for their potentially different viewpoints, and they offer solutions. Finally, they summarize what has been discussed and a student from each group reports their conclusion.

Prior to debating, students are first given a relatively simple debate format to introduce the importance of preparation in order to support their arguments with evidence (facts, statistics, authorities). It is also imperative to remind them to search for accurate

information and reliable sources, so as to avoid misinformation. Afterwards, students again decide on a thought-provoking statement and are put into a proposition and an opposition team. They are given enough time to prepare themselves and decide on the speakers. The proposition team argue in favour of the motion, while the opposition team argue against it. The judging is done either by the teacher or students.

In post-discussion and post-debate evaluation, students reflect on their performance and acknowledge the fact that debate is primarily focused on rebutting the opponents' arguments and thus winning, whereas discussion focuses on accepting and respecting different ideas and thoughts.

#### - **Mini activities**

In her book *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division*, Elif Shafak (2020, p. 5) wrote that in 2020 board signs appeared randomly in public parks across London. The signs asked, "When all this is over, how do you want the world to be different?" What *all this* meant was not explicit in the question), and can thus be perceived in different ways. In another mini activity, using this very question via the Mentimeter app or an old-fashioned A1 size poster, students are asked to submit/write their answer. After reading each other's thoughts, students are then invited to compare and comment their ideas.

Last but not least, a mental challenge can also be an activity, in which students, while sitting in mindful groups of 4-5, are each given a blank piece of paper. Then they choose one of the given abstract nouns they would like to ponder on (e.g., freedom, empathy, friendship, love etc.). On one side of the paper, they draw how they perceive the noun, for example, freedom is, and on the other side, they draw what they believe freedom, for example, is not. When done, students then share and explain their own drawings to each other. By doing so, they can gain new perspectives on themselves and each other.

### **Conclusion**

In our fast-paced and complex world, where we are bombarded with (mis)information and are faced with many dilemmas, encouraging and guiding students to establish more sophisticated frame of reference, is a vital part of an educators' responsibility. In order to allow students to think outside the box, they should first be taught *how* to think rather than *what* to think. It is a challenge for teachers to set up a classroom atmosphere in which students are given opportunities for communication and dialogue, to express themselves ably and eloquently, and to be(come) – in Einstein's words – 'passionately curious' about each other's perspectives. Two of the numerous approaches to cultivate students' perception of the world around us, and to enhance their creativity, include debate- and discussion-based activities. The latter being currently and evermore significant in fostering students' sensitivity and empathy, as we ought to prioritize collaboration rather than competition,

empathy rather than indifference, and the diversity of opinions rather than uniformity – both in classroom and beyond.

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# LEARNING NUMBERS WITH THE HELP OF 5-MINUTE ACTIVITIES

Nataša Kuselj

## Abstract

In my article I will introduce and describe different 5 to 10-minute activities that I use to teach numbers to young learners. The students are active participants the whole time, which is why they learn numbers faster and easier. In my class I try to consider all types of learners, therefore I always include different types of activities when teaching numbers (games, songs, movement and other fun activities). I try to mix different types of activities in a way that is interesting and appealing to the students. If the students are motivated, they cooperate actively and remember numbers better. With my students we count and exercise at the same time, we learn numbers outside in the school playground, we sing and dance while counting, we make calculations in English, we also use a hundredth square. The main goal is achieved when students have fun and learn numbers at the same time.

**Keywords:** teaching numbers in English, first triad, games, songs, movement

## Introduction

Mathematics in itself is very interesting. The children who meet with it on a daily basis do not regard it as something complex or difficult. Already in the daily routine, they encounter mathematical concepts, such as counting classmates, crayons, etc. Suitable activities for the development of early number comprehension are counting, singing and playing different didactical games. We as teachers in the first triad have the key role because with the right approach we can take students into the world of mathematics in an interesting, communicative and patient way (Meier, 2017).

## Practical games, songs and activities for learning numbers in English

I will describe and introduce different practical games, songs and activities for learning numbers in English that I use in my teaching in the first triad.

### PLAYING DOMINOES

I invite students to the circle. I offer two students to throw the dice at the same time. They tell the others how many points they have got, and the third student then tells them how many points they have together. We repeat this several times. Pupils sit down in their seats and prepare a checkered notebook and a pen. I place a cardboard domino on the board and demonstrate how we can write the calculations. I dedicate special attention to the interpretation of the calculations. We repeat the exercise several times, the selected students write the calculations on the blackboard. They read the calculations aloud.

### (TPR) SONGS

We learn numbers in grades 1, 2 and 3 also with the help of songs. Most of them are TPR songs; that means we sing, dance and move at the same time. Here are some of the most popular songs I use in my teaching:

*Lets count to 10:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85M1yxIcHpw>

*How many fingers:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNw1SSz18Gg>

*Lets count to 20:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VLxWIHRD4E>

*Lets count to 100:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TgLtF3PMOc>

*Hickory dickory dock:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGgskIW-mtg>

*Five little monkeys:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sffwo7iQsDw>

*10 in the bed:* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdDypyS\\_5zE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdDypyS_5zE)

*Five little ducks:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZw9veQ76fo>

### DIDACTICAL GAMES

Supported by pictures and flash cards, I teach students numbers from 0 to 5 and then numbers up to 10 and 20. Together with the students, we count to five / ten / twenty. We play the game “show number” or game “What is missing?” I hide one number, students guess which one is missing. Together we count bears or other objects, roll the dice and count the dots. We also use link cubes and line them up, count them, take some away, and count again...



## RAFFLE OR BINGO

Pupils have different numbers up to 10 or up to 20 written on the cards, and then I call the numbers. The first to cover all 6 numbers correctly and then also name them in English is the winner. We can also play the game by telling students the sums of addition / subtraction / multiplication / division, and they have to cover the correct result. Whoever covers the first of all 6 results is the winner.

## COMPILATION OF ACCOUNTS USING "UNO" GAME CARDS

I bring the students "Uno" card game that everyone knows. Students then write signs for arithmetic operations (+, -, : , x) on small cards. We then compile different accounts together, e.g.,  $9 + 5 = 14$ . The accounts must also be told in English (f. e.  $5 \times 2 = 10$ ; 5 multiplied by 2 equals 10).

## WRITING NUMBERS ON A CLASSMATE'S BACK

Pupils write different numbers on the partner's back in pairs. The partner guesses which number is written and has to name it in English. They then switch the roles.

## LEARNING NUMBERS THROUGH MOVEMENT

We often exercise and move with students when learning numbers. For example, students have to do 3 frog jumps, 5 rabbit hops, 8 duck steps, etc.

Movement game "atoms": students form atoms of one, two, three etc. Pupils move freely in the rhythm of the tambourine. With a loud bang, they stop and listen to the teacher to tell them how to form atoms: f. e. "Make groups of three." - Three children hold hands. In the end we always check all atoms and correct them if necessary.

## HOP SCOTCH

Pupils draw a hop scotch outside in the playground and then count in English while jumping. They can also invent calculations and tell them in English.

## FIND A CERTAIN NUMBER OF ITEMS / OBJECTS OUTSIDE

We play the game "Find three leaves, five stones etc." with the students. They have to bring the objects back to the circle. We then count them together in English.

## Conclusion

Early foreign language teaching allows children to be exposed for longer periods of time to the foreign language and thus ensures the continuity and verticality of foreign language learning. In the early period, the choice of appropriate teaching methods is very important. Also teaching math content in English in the 1<sup>st</sup> triad should be based on a concrete experiential level and should include a lot of didactic material, games and movements, as the students are still in concrete operation level of thinking. Using concrete illustrations, we introduce students to learning numbers as a challenge, thus making them meaningful. This also has a positive effect on their motivation. Students have to gain new insights

through their own mental activity and self-discovery. Knowledge acquired in such a way is more durable and of better quality.

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# A MAGICAL CULINARY TOUR OF SLOVENIA DURING ENGLISH LESSONS

**Jana Kusterle**

## **Abstract**

Teaching a foreign language is wonderfully connected to learning about foreign cultures, yet an effective comparison of cultures is possible only with a good knowledge of one's own. Bearing this in mind, I prepared a set of lessons on the diversity of Slovene cuisine, linking magical food experiences with geographical features, and lifestyles in different Slovene regions.

**Keywords:** national identity, traditional dishes, vocabulary

## Introduction

Language and culture are both crucial components of any society. They are closely related and interactive. They both determine how we perceive the world around us and help people pass the inherited traditions onto the next generations. Thus, teaching a foreign language is wonderfully connected to learning about foreign cultures.

Food has been an integral part of any nation's culture since the early ages. As early as 1825 the French lawyer and gastronome said "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are." One can learn so much about a particular culture by exploring its food. In fact, it may be difficult to fully define a culture without a nod to their cuisine (Ravi, 2022). Vidhya Ravi lists five reasons why exploring the food of a country is a great way to better understand its culture:

1. Food is a universal necessity. People have to eat.
2. Techniques of preserving food are unique to climates and lifestyle of a culture.
3. The dishes of a local cuisine illustrate historical eating patterns.
4. Ingredients of popular dishes can tell a lot about the way of life in a certain country.
5. Food tourism has been gaining popularity not only in terms of tasting the food but also learning about the preparation techniques that offer an insight into a specific culture.

It is thus only logical that the topic of "food" is included in the majority of textbooks for foreign language learning. However, a lot of the textbooks used in ESL teaching are usually written for international markets and they mostly focus on typical dishes of English-speaking countries. Pupils get a valuable insight into a variety of foreign cuisines, but when I ask them to suggest some typical Slovene dishes they would offer to foreign tourists visiting Slovenia, they fairly quickly run out of suggestions. It also often turns out that they do not feel Slovene food (and culture) is something they should be proud of. In fact, in the recent years I have noticed a sharp decline in students' awareness of what makes Slovenia truly unique and so magical not only for foreign visitors but also for us, its native inhabitants.

Bearing this in mind, I prepared a set of lessons on the diversity of Slovene cuisine, linking magical food experiences with geographical features and lifestyles in different Slovene regions. The tastes of Slovenia are different in the Alps than on the Adriatic coast, the Karst region dishes differ from the ones on the Pannonian Plain, yet they all have one thing in common. They are made from locally produced ingredients. Slovenia has no less than 170 typical dishes (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2022). I offer the students a brief insight into some of them.

## Lesson plan 1

<b>Lesson title</b>	<b>A Culinary Tour of Slovenia</b>
<b>Lesson aims</b>	Students will learn about Slovene national dishes, build some food-connected vocabulary and work on their co-operating skills
<b>Skills</b>	reading, writing, speaking
<b>Level</b>	A2
<b>Time</b>	3-4 lessons
<b>Materials</b>	computer, overhead projector, worksheets, colour A4 cardboard, felt-tips, some cookbooks with recipes for traditional Slovenian dishes

## Procedure

### Warm-up

Students are told they will watch a video where American diplomats taste traditional Slovenian dishes. Before watching, the students try to guess which dishes the diplomats will taste. Video link: [https://youtu.be/29H\\_mCYFHNE](https://youtu.be/29H_mCYFHNE). After watching the video, the students compare their ideas with the actual dishes offered to the diplomats.

### Development

#### LESSON 1

1. Students are given *Worksheet 1* and as a group read the advertisement for the culinary tour of Slovenia. While reading, they fill in the missing words. The students also need to share what aspect of the tour they would be most interested in, supporting their individual choices with one or two reasons.
2. Together as a class, we read the itinerary for the first four days, finding the appropriate photos of each dish in the set of photos the students are given in an envelope. Students write the names of the dishes onto the map of Slovenia, which is printed on *Worksheet 1*. They also group the dishes according to the tastes (sweet / savoury / both).
3. Homework: "*The highlights of the first part of the culinary tour*"  
Students write a personal response from the first part of their holiday – e.g., a postcard to granny / a text message a day to mum / an Instagram post a day / a blog post or diary entry

## LESSON 2

1. Students share their homework writings from Lesson 1.
2. Together as a class, we read the itinerary for the second part of the culinary tour, again matching the descriptions of the dishes with the appropriate photos.
3. Each group then chooses one dish, they list the ingredients and write the recipe for the chosen dish. The groups later read the ingredients for their dish and the other groups try to guess the dish. All the recipes are put on display and the students vote for the TOP 3 dishes.
4. Homework: Students choose ONE of the options given below:
  - Search the internet for an article about "Odprta kuhna" or any other food festival in Slovenia – briefly present it (10 sentences).
  - Search the internet for an article about Michelin Star Restaurants Chefs Ana Roš / Tomaž Kavčič / Uroš Štefelin / Gregor Vračko – summarize in 10 sentences what you find most interesting.

## LESSONS 3-4

1. Students briefly present their homework findings.
2. In groups, students are asked to imagine they are the proud owners of a tourist agency specializing in culinary tours of Slovenia. They need to:
  - think of a catchy name of their tourist agency,
  - come up with 3 extraordinary culinary experiences during their tour,
  - design a T-shirt each tourist joining their culinary tour would be given (students use colour cardboard to cut out the shape of a T-shirt).
3. In conclusion, groups present their works and TOP 3 agencies are chosen.

The worksheets are available here: [Culinary\\_Tour\\_Of\\_Slovenia\\_Worksheets\\_A2](#)

## Lesson plan 2

<b>Lesson title</b>	<b>My grandma cooks yummy Slovenian food!</b>
<b>Lesson aims</b>	Students will learn about Slovene national dishes, build some food-connected vocabulary, and work on their co-operating skills
<b>Skills</b>	reading, writing, speaking
<b>Level</b>	A1
<b>Time</b>	4 lessons
<b>Materials</b>	computer, overhead projector, worksheets, coloured A4 cardboard, felt-tips

## Procedure

### Warm-up

Students are told they will watch a video where American diplomats taste traditional Slovenian dishes. Before watching, the students try to guess which dishes the diplomats will taste. Video link: [https://youtu.be/29H\\_mCYFHNE](https://youtu.be/29H_mCYFHNE). After watching the video, the students compare their ideas with the actual dishes offered to the diplomats.

### Development

#### LESSON 1

1. Students are put into groups and each group is given a set of photos with various traditional Slovene dishes. They try to name the dishes and group them according to the tastes (sweet / savoury / both).
2. Students are given *Worksheet 1* and embark on a culinary tour of Slovenia with the help of imaginary teenagers describing holidays at their grandparents' in different Slovene regions. As the students read the text, they also fill in the missing words, translate the names of the dishes into Slovene and find the appropriate photo of each dish in their given set of photos. Students write the names of the dishes onto the map of Slovenia, which is also printed on *Worksheet 1*.
3. As homework, students need to ask their grandmas / mum for their favourite traditional Slovene dish and write down the ingredients.

#### LESSON 2

1. Students are given *Worksheet 2*. First, they answer some comprehension questions on the text read the previous lesson. In task 2, the students read lists of ingredients for some traditional dishes and they try to name the dishes. They also share the ingredients for their grandparents' traditional dishes.
2. Students form groups. They are asked to imagine they are proud owners of a restaurant that offers traditional Slovene food. They need to come up with the name of their restaurant and design the menu which includes starters, main courses, desserts and drinks. They have to add the prices, too.

### LESSONS 3

1. Using a model dialogue from the textbook (ordering food in a restaurant), students work in the same groups as in the previous lesson and write their own dialogues – imagining a dialogue between a waiter and customers who order food in the restaurant the students invented the previous lesson.
2. Groups practice acting out the dialogue, using prompts available in the classroom to make their presentation more appealing.

### LESSON 4

Groups act out their dialogues. The menus of the restaurants are displayed on the classroom walls. Finally, students choose the TOP 3 restaurants.

The worksheets are available here: Culinary\_Tour\_Of\_Slovenia\_Worksheets\_A1

### Conclusion

All in all, the lessons on Slovene food have so far turned out to be enjoyable for both the students and the teacher. There was a feeling of pride after completing all the tasks and a stronger awareness of what a rich resource of pleasurable experiences our country is. I firmly believe that an effective comparison of cultures is possible only with a good knowledge of one's own, so during my English lessons I will continue supporting students with developing a better understanding of their own culture.

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# SETTING UP A VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

**Nikola Lehotska**, *Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra Slovakia*

## **Abstract**

As technology surrounds us and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) offers many benefits for students' language proficiency, in-service language teachers have long attempted to implement technology into their classrooms. One such approach is through the use of virtual exchanges (VE's). Moreover, VE's have demonstrated various benefits for students and their development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The current article describes the development and implementation of two virtual exchange programs between two groups of elementary and secondary students in Michigan and Slovakia with the use of O'Dowd and Waire's (2009) three-task model. Along with the project highlights and challenges, the article illustrates the steps how the VE's were developed and implemented. In order to help the readers to set up their own VE programs, the article contains links to useful resources and adaptable lesson plans.

**Keywords:** computer-assisted language learning, virtual exchange, primary students, secondary students, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

## Introduction

In the world of constant change, digitalization, and global interconnectedness, our students are expected to master skills and competencies including communication, creativity, critical thinking, self-direction, digital literacy, etc. As teachers we want to contribute to our students' readiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and thus experiment with ways to help them thrive in today's world. With the hit of COVID-19 pandemic, the use of technology and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been on the rise. One pedagogical approach accommodating important 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in the English language classroom has been through the use of virtual exchanges (VE's). VE's engage two groups of students of different cultural or geographical background in an online communication and collaboration. Along with the development of language skills, intercultural communicative competence, and digital literacy, they also emphasize the encouragement of independent learning (O'Dowd & Waire, 2009). In order to achieve the improvement of above-mentioned skills and competencies, VE's have to be composed of the right activities. In their review of 40 virtual exchanges, O'Dowd and Waire (2009) arranged tasks into three main categories:

1. information exchange tasks;
2. comparison and analysis tasks;
3. collaborative tasks.

The first category of tasks serves to establish rapport between participants and make them feel like they are members of the international learning community. This could be achieved by creating videos for the other group of students or by organizing a synchronous meeting where everyone meets. The second category of tasks serves to activate higher-order thinking skills. For example, the previously mentioned groups of students would engage in analyzing the videos. They could be looking for similarities and differences in their daily lives, schools, etc. The final category of tasks engages students in working together on a common product. For example, our two groups of students would collaborate together on an e-magazine.

With the intention of helping more teachers experiment with this practice, the current article describes the development and implementation of two VE's between two groups of elementary and secondary students in Michigan and Slovakia with the use of O'Dowd and Waire's (2009) three-task model. In order to prepare the readers to set up their own VE program, the article includes links to lesson plans and lesson plan breakdowns.

## Virtual Exchange 1: Changemakers

In this VE, both groups of students, the U.S.-based and Slovak students of English, were guided to act as 'changemakers' in their communities. Each group of students created their own project—the U.S.-based students decided to create an awareness campaign about pet welfare and collect financial and material donations for a local Humane Society (an American nonprofit organization dealing with animal welfare); the Slovak students organized and developed a SWAP market (an event where students could exchange unwanted items). Students were pushed to see themselves as self-directed changemakers capable of

contributing positively to their communities. While pursuing their projects, the two groups of students shared their progress together and gave each other feedback (Tomaš et al., 2021).

The VE targeted 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in Slovakia and Michigan, U.S. The Slovak students' English proficiency as per Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) ranged from Pre-A1 to A1+. The Slovak learners participated in the exchange as part of their English classes. Although the learners had their English class three times per week, not every class was dedicated to the project. On the other hand, the U.S.-based learners from Michigan were multilinguals with their first languages being Spanish, French, Amharic, Albanian, Swahili, and Arabic. The learners tested at WIDA 1 to 3 (A1-A2 CEFR). These English learners attended an afterschool program once a week. The afterschool program was originally planned to last for eight weeks; however, the COVID-19 pandemic cut it short to four weeks.

The VE was enhanced with a special element—a Design for Change four-step framework. The FEEL, IMAGINE, DO, SHARE framework teaches students the needed 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. It leads students to understand the situation and empathize (feel) with the community, offer their own solutions (imagine), put the solutions into action (do), and distribute the successes with others (share; Design for Change, n.d.). Learners are supposed to find a local issue that they want to tackle. Afterwards they brainstorm the solutions, take concrete steps, and in the final stage they reflect and report on the whole process.

This VE followed O'Dowd and Waire's (2009) three-task model. As a first step, in the information-exchange stage, learners got to know each other by creating videos of themselves. The comparison and analysis tasks were at the heart of this VE—both groups of students, as they followed the Design for Change steps, shared their progress with each other. To update each other, the exchange used eTwinning's TwinSpace. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, learners only collaborated together in their local teams. If the schools were opened, both groups of students would collaborate together in international teams on a creation of a common product (e.g., a video) to disseminate their projects. In the Appendix A, the readers of the article can find a lesson plan breakdown of this VE. The Appendix B includes one sample lesson plan.

## **Virtual Exchange 2: Fact checkers**

In this VE, learners in both countries collaborated on a project that involved developing and administering a survey on media literacy beliefs and practices among high schoolers at their institutions and provided feedback on their international peers' survey designs and presentations of survey findings. Learners also worked to raise awareness about misinformation through a media literacy campaign implemented in their schools' social media networks (Lehotska et al., 2022).

The second example of VE took place among older, high school students. Eight Slovak students participated in an afterschool program. Their English language proficiency level

ranged from B2 to C1 according to CEFR. The 10 U.S.-based Michigan learners participated in the exchange as part of their curriculum. Their first languages included Bengali and Arabic. They tested at WIDA 2 - 3 (A2-B1 according to CEFR).

The special element of this VE was the focus on overarching goal of media literacy. Students were to develop their critical thinking in the area of media literacy while recognizing fake news and promoting media literacy in their local communities. At first, students were introduced the key vocabulary on fake news such as reliable information, misinformation, propaganda, clickbait, and sponsored content. The early sessions focused on identifying and verifying fake news by using lateral reading strategy. Afterwards each group of students created a survey for their peers at their school. Firstly, they learned what a survey looked like, then they practiced drafting various types of questions. Once they had the first draft of their surveys, both groups provided each other feedback. After the survey, they analyzed the results and prepared a presentation for the other group. In the end, both groups of students prepared a series of posts promoting media literacy for their school social media.

Regarding the three-task O'Dowd and Waire's (2009) framework, in the information exchange stage, students used Padlet. This platform helped create an international learning community without requiring learners to log in. In the initial stage, each learner introduced themselves. Afterwards, in another round of activities of this initial stage, students posted the questions they had about the others' cultures. Also, after posting their questions, they were encouraged to come back and answer questions from the other group. An additional synchronous meeting was organized for students to meet and ask each other questions.

In the comparison and analysis stage, students compared their daily routines and especially different approaches to foreign language learning. In this stage of the VE, students also compared the results of the survey. As far as collaboration, students worked in local teams throughout the whole exchange. As a team, they drafted the questions and created posts concerning the results of the surveys. If the project lasted longer, the students would work in mixed international teams (not local ones) to create the social media awareness campaigns. In Appendix C, the readers of the article can find a lesson plan breakdown of this VE. The Appendix D includes one sample lesson plan.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The article described two virtual exchanges among elementary and high school U.S.-based and Slovak learners. Both of the virtual exchanges were built around O'Dowd and Waire's three-task framework—information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration. Each of the virtual exchanges emphasized a different special element. In one of the exchanges, it was supporting students to become changemakers in their local communities. In the other one, learners were encouraged to develop their critical thinking in the area of media literacy.

As each virtual exchange has its own challenges, to improve the efficacy of such a pedagogy practice I recommend the following:

1. Provide enough opportunities for students to get to know each other;
2. Include synchronous meetings in the exchange to supplement other activities of the exchange;
3. Use internationally mixed-group activities so students can interact together;
4. Let students make decisions about either topic of the exchanges or activities;
5. Set explicit goals for language, content, and skills development;
6. Include regular reflection sessions in your exchange.

It is my hope that this article will help educators engage in virtual exchanges as part of their English classes.

## Appendices

Appendix A – Changemakers: Lesson Plan Breakdown

Appendix B – Changemakers: Sample Lesson Plan

Appendix C – Factcheckers: Lesson Plan Breakdown

Appendix D – Factcheckers: Sample Lesson Plan

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# CARROT OR STICK

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## **Abstract**

The paper offers an insight into the Slovene ELT classroom management, particularly into the trends of in-class and online perception of authority, strictness, factors of teacher-pressure and the burning issue of teachers' safety in class. The results discussed may offer some burning points for a broader systematic reaction and shed light on a worrying trend that translates into the general Slovene education as well.

**Keywords:** English classroom management, English teacher, discipline, online authority

## Introduction

Class management is a pedagogical concept as old as school itself but it is only in recent decades that its principles and methodologies are researched and subdued to radical changes. One of the main changes was that of the shift from a strictly teacher-paced and teacher-centred lesson to a student-centred one occurring in the 1990s. That caused for students' individuality to come forward which meant not only did the students start to voice their interests and needs but were also actively encouraged to co-create the class dynamics. In turn, student empowerment (seen also in the foundation of student councils and youth parliaments in late 1999s and early 2000s across EU) meant student activation and voicing of needs, whereas the teacher was no longer seen as the absolute authority but rather a mentor and a tutor guiding the student on his path to growing academically. The socio-pedagogical aspect became sided as it viewed the student as a being reaching for its full potential in a positive social, educational and economic environment.

Such a productive relationship, however, requires a ripe attitude on both sides, which can only be the result of a solid educational system nurturing values of respect and responsibility, healthy and stable (economically and otherwise) domestic upbringing, positive trends among the young, encouraging political and cultural backdrop on a local, regional, national levels and so forth. Not surprisingly, the dynamics are often disturbed either by problematic individuals or a wider population (e.g., schools in impoverished, unsafe, unstable areas). Any anomalies in behaviour call for disciplinary strategies, which may be preventative, suppressive and corrective, the choice and implementation being dependent on a plethora of reasons. Many studies did a cross-cultural comparison of discipline strategies teachers of different nationalities use (Rahimi & Karkami, 2015).

Moving past extremes and international difference and narrowing onto individual classes and subjects, classroom management dynamics are challenged on the level of individual subjects. Such differences may not be noticeable at first sight in light of other stronger variables, but are nonetheless relevant and will be the focus of this paper, particularly as felt by the teachers of English, more specifically English teachers of Slovenia.

The reason such specifics are only rarely discussed is that a teacher of one subject has hardly any insight into the dynamics of other fields. (For this reason, some countries in Germany and Scandinavia already encourage teachers to teach a variety of subjects and/or are encouraged to teach skills rather than topics.) The English language class as a second language learning subject is specific in its own right. Its classroom management particularly is one of the biggest challenges language teachers face while teach (Linse & Nunan, 2005). Many foreign studies report that the English language is more demanding speaking in terms of discipline.

The reasons often mentioned are the *openness* of the subject in itself as opposed to the strictly academic subjects such as Mathematics and Nature Sciences. This would mean that the lack of a rigid academic backbone will provide a variety of equally (un)important topics to

choose from to the teacher which may seem liberating, but can in fact prove a challenge as the reasoning behind the chosen topic (particularly when teaching lexis) is not the academic logic but a choice taking many (also subjective) variables into account (Applebee, 1994). Why would learning about mainstream topics such as crime and punishment be any more relevant than learning about sex and sexual health which rarely makes it as a secondary school student book module (even though it is much more student-tailored in all honesty)?

The second reason listed is the pressure of national examinations. English gets tested nationally and internationally in the majority of Western countries so apart from students' scores, teachers' success (and by this their "capability to teach" is measured and made publicly known). The stress is definitely not negligible.

### **English Teachers in Slovenia**

To my knowledge and research, not much research has been done in the field of classroom management specific to Slovene teachers of English. It is a topic I struggle with in my professional work to a great deal; having taught for more than a decade I seem to observe changes in my own attitude towards problematic unruly behaviour. Although I have learned to accept the clamour of group work chaos as a quintessential trait of such work, I find students laziness or inactivity even more unnerving than before. Paired with impertinent individuals and little means the teachers are provided, situations might verge on frustration that sees little to no resolution and is shared by English teaching secondary school colleagues.

For this reason, an online questionnaire was prepared for Slovene English teachers to answer asking about their perception of discipline, their experience and solving said situations. The Questionnaire can also be found attached at the end of this paper. Using quantitative methodology, some aspects have been analysed and discussed. Admittedly, the sample of the teachers is not the most extensive as there were some problems gathering data, yet I still believe the study is representative enough.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Participants**

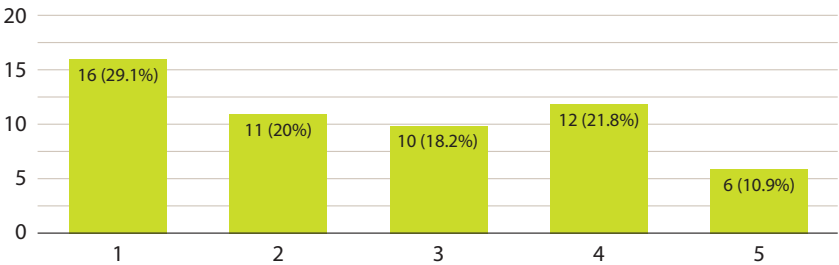
All in all, 55 teachers took part in answering the questionnaire (N=55), of which 74.5% were secondary school teachers in Slovenia, 16.4% primary school teachers, 7.3% were course teachers and one participant teaches abroad. The Numerus could have been better but there seemed to have been some issues with having the questionnaire distributed, also some teachers turned down cooperation due to it being about a sensitive topic.



**Questionnaire Analysis**

When asked whether they strongly agree (1) or strongly disagree (5) with whether English is harder to teach than other academic subjects, the results were as follows:

In my opinion, English's open nature of the subject makes teaching it more demanding compared to other subjects (exact sciences), such as Maths, Physics, Chemistry.  
55 responses



*Figure 1: Comparing class management to other classes*

Interestingly, almost half (49.1%) would agree with the statement strongly which shows the pressure they feel faced with the openness of the subject. In discussions they often added that it is the constant urge to keep up with the news and the current situation they feel they need to bring into the class as it represents the language they teach. I share the view I often have problems discerning between the language as such and the world it represents and struggle with deciding how much of this world belongs into a classroom.

**The impact of final examinations on teacher-self**

Similarly, the final-examination-pressure teachers from other countries report seems to play a very important role in Slovene ELT teaching as well. This time, 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. Totalled, it is exactly 60% of teachers who feel final examinations dictate their work and add to them feeling even more responsible for increased class productivity and effective class management, which is indivisibly related to strictness.

This finds affirmation also on a global scale. According to the Global Teacher Status Index, “there is a clear positive relationship between teacher status and PISA scores. Countries in which teacher status is high, such as China, Taiwan, and Singapore have better student outcomes, as measured by PISA than countries in which teacher status is low, such as Brazil and Israel.” (Dolton, 125)

English classes require greater authority and pressure from the teacher because of the final Examination. (Matura, NPZ...)

55 responses

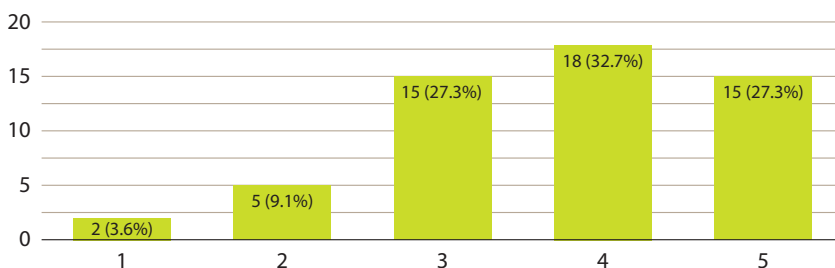


Figure 2: Examination pressure

The question of strictness on the backdrop of exam-driven education system is therefore natural. When asked how teachers see themselves, how they think their colleagues see them and how students see them, percentages overlapped much more closely with the students. This shows that they try to unify their image of teacher-self that derives from external pressures with how the students would have to see them so class management would be easier. Culturally speaking, a stricter stance also instils a greater sense of responsibility in a Slovene student as the solemnity of an event relates automatically to seriousness and relevance.

The following graphs (1 – very lenient, 10 – extremely strict) show a shift to more leniency-based teacher image with the colleagues. This discrepancy may suggest teachers like to keep appearances with their colleagues, creating a false identity or perhaps an attempt at a more modest image, while still scoring great results.

I see myself as a/an \_\_\_?\_\_\_ teacher.

55 responses

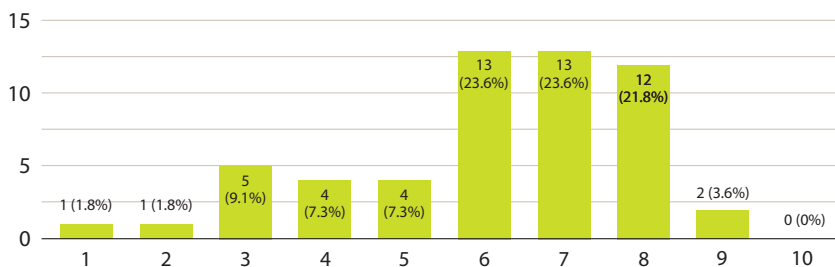


Figure 3: Strictness and teacher-self

My teacher colleagues see me as a/an \_\_\_?\_\_\_ teacher.

55 responses

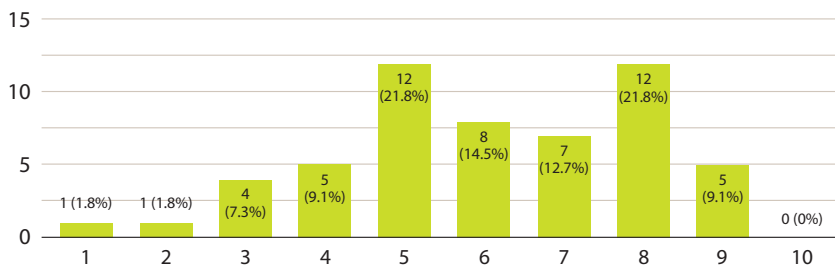


Figure 4: Teacher-self and colleagues

My students see me as a/an \_\_\_?\_\_\_ teacher.

55 responses

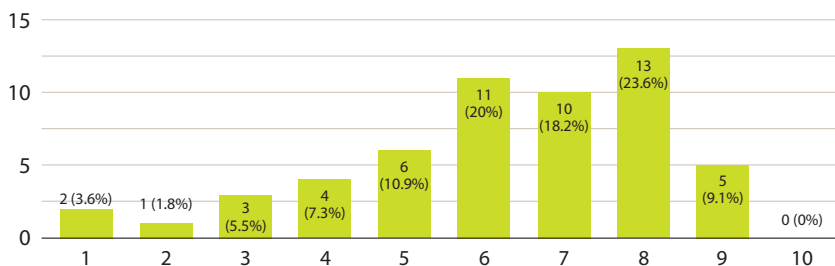


Figure 5: Teacher self and students

Socio-economic factors on macro and micro levels seem to be the strongest reason for school's individual character, particularly the level of respect students have towards teachers. This is, of course, school-specific, but stems in the public's viewing of the teachers and the school, more particularly, how likely is the school going to help a child succeed in life. Global Teacher Status Index states that "there is a correlation between the status accorded to teachers through the GTSI 2018 and student outcomes in their country. In other words, high teacher status is not just a 'nice to have' – increasing teacher status can directly improve the pupil performance of a country's students." (Dolton, 6) and that in turn solidifies the teacher's position. The following results in particular show that the trust in the public system (and by extension teachers) is failing as school at present is not seen a guarantee for a successful life of a pupil/student.

I believe I teach at a school where discipline is becoming an issue.

55 responses

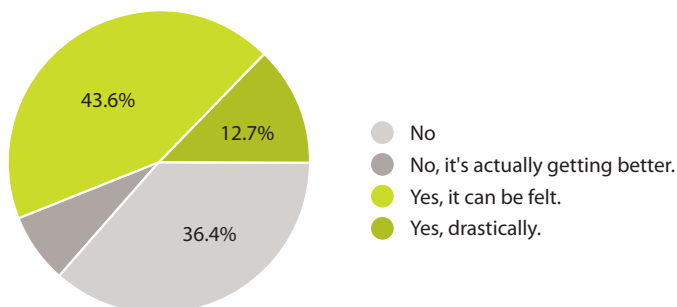


Figure 6: The issue of discipline

In my years of teaching (choose the one that describes you best).

55 responses



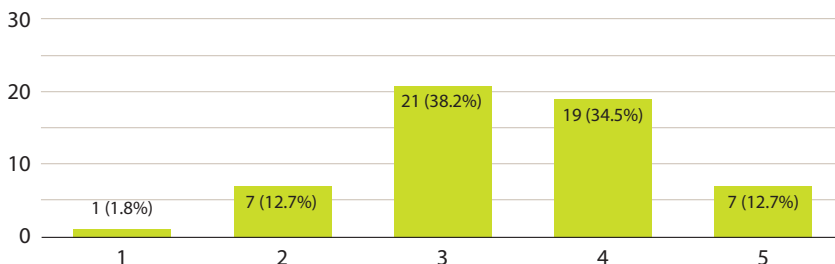
Figure 7: Teacher strictness and trends

Ironically, only 20% of the teachers actively work on their strictness in relation to class management as a response to the current situation. With this in mind, the discrepancy may soon result in alarming states in many Slovene English classrooms. While the trend of softening is natural to one's teacher career it may also express teacher's own doubt in the effectiveness of the tools the educational system offers as well as shows they do not get enough support or value from the state apparatus.

Bearing in mind English teachers face a more challenging subject per se, it is not surprising that many of them report problems. Subject-based state councils should apparently do more in terms of subject specific tools and methodologies to keep their classes under control, as the graph below (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree) suggests most are undecided on the matter or, as they commented, have never thought about specifics and potential tools that could make their work easier.

**As an ELT I feel I am sufficiently acquainted with the specifics of ELT classroom management.**

55 responses

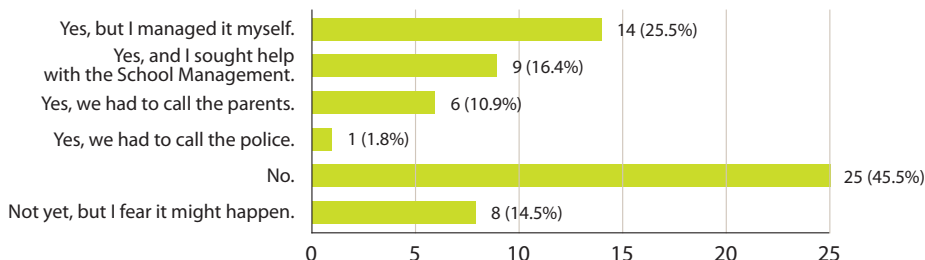


*Figure 8: ELT class management specifics*

Probably the most alarming graph and the trends it implies is the one regarding the teachers and their feeling of safety.

**I have already had a disciplinary case where I felt threatened and unsafe.**

55 responses



*Figure 9: ELT teachers and safety*

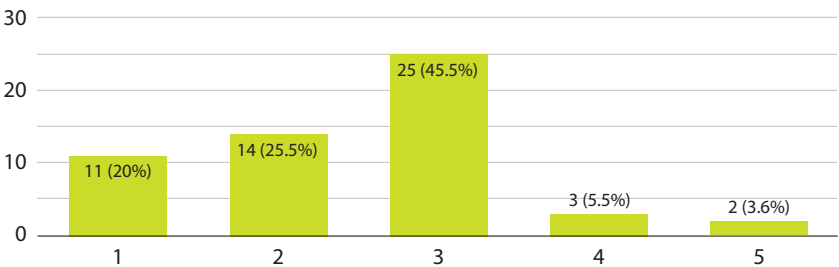
Seeing that 40% of teachers already experienced the feeling of insecurity is frightening (to say the least), with additional 14.5% of those who feel it would come eventually. The result may be age specific (N mostly consisting of secondary school teachers), yet it reveals a highly unpleasant trend that may result in huge teacher dropout in the future. Also, it is a huge factor deterring young potential teachers from entering the profession and should be addressed with maximum urgency.

## Online authority

Recent events have made teachers reinvent their authority techniques as their classed have been put online. Nonverbal elements of authority that teachers employ to maintain balance in life classes were all but gone, the privacy of individual rooms caused students to adjust their behaviour to what they considered semi or even informal environments.

Paired with technical issues, weak Internet connections and the lack of knowledge in mastering online platforms had a detrimental effect on many classes and Slovene ELT teachers report no different (1 – harmful, 5 – beneficial) effect. The graph shows only 9.1% reported to have seen improvements to their class managements, additionally explaining it was less chatter and the breaking of groups that would usually cause unrest, so classes that posed more disciplinary problems by default.

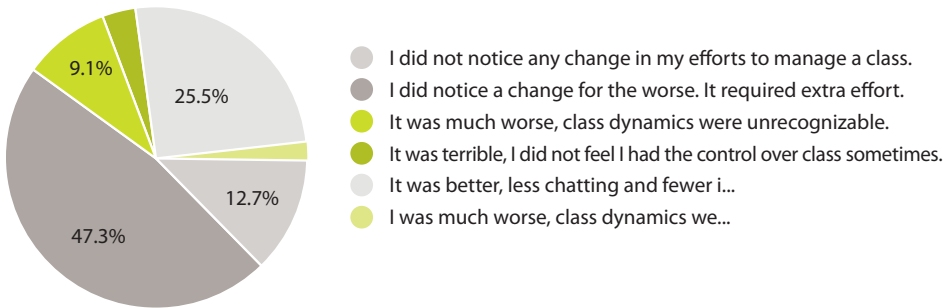
**I believe that online sessions have had a \_\_\_?\_\_\_ effect on English language teaching and class management (0=no effect)**  
55 responses



*Figure 10: Online classroom management at ELT*

Additionally, knowing already that English is more strictness and tight class-management dependent, teachers often reported they were at a loss of tools on how to maintain their classes. The graph bellow depicts the situation clearly:

**Choose the statement that best describes your "online authority",**  
55 responses



*Figure 11: Describing one's online authority*

With the exception of 25.5% which report less chatting and fewer interruptions, the remaining of the teachers report a worrying trend. The positive section of answers, however, is no less a matter of worry in itself; namely, it is the teachers who struggle with class management on a daily basis, who report to finally achieve some silence. While teachers would gladly have a “mute-all” button in class as well, it is their authority than can (or not) do exactly that. It is also important to distinguish between those who saw the whole situation as a problematic one and those who felt they were taken all the powers away and it was because of internal struggles that the classes did not turn out to be what they usually are.

Seeing these results, I decided to run them by my students for them to comment. While we do leave scientific reasoning at this point, it is perhaps a valid point the students made nonetheless. This is an anonymous quote from one of the students: “What else do teachers expect? In school, we have rules that apply to school and there we have to obey them. The internet and my room, that is our world, where we are free, we can curse, comment, be inappropriate.” The statement is valid to the extent that few students were ever told how to behave online. Most parents would certainly not see it as a parenting section, at least not yet. Additionally, pupils/students go through years of kindergarten, primary school and other classes and courses to establish the notion of “teachers”, “schools”, “silence”, “restrictions” and so forth, while an overnight shift meant establishing all those from start. Another quote that sums up the situation well was this one: “Teachers without authority in class stood no chance. It’s that simple.” Authority is a concept that relies on face-to-face contact and dynamics, nonverbal language and experience, so it may only last if already established.

What I find surprising is that schools were of little help with the situation in terms of helping teachers establish online authority. See below (1- NO, 2- YES)

**Our school equipped us with Online Code of Behaviour and made our job easier.**  
55 responses

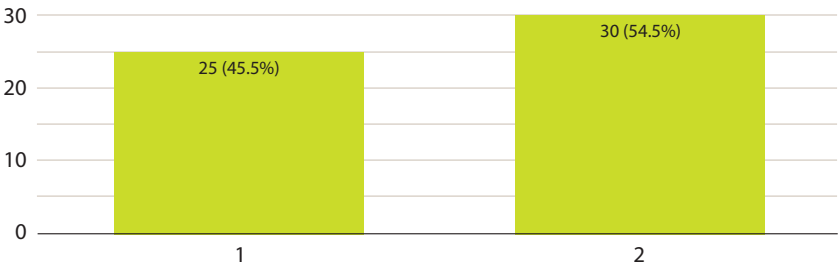


Figure 12: An Online Code of Behaviour

Almost half of the schools did not establish a set of online behaving rules that would help not only teachers but also students behave as expected. Another very important aspect of such a Code of Behaviour would also protect teachers from the presence of a third person and keep the much needed intimacy of the class dynamics.

## Conclusion

All in all, Slovene English teachers report that teaching ELT often means a harder task compared to other subjects since it lacks a strict academic backbone, particularly in terms of lexis and the choice of topics.

Additionally, teachers report of a worrying trend of students ignoring their authority that is deepened by tendency of teachers becoming more lenient as well as the current methodological trends of seeing the teacher as a guide, a tutor, a mentor. This has already shown in a great percentage of teachers feeling unsafe or even threatened, or at least worrying and expecting for it to happen in the near future. If nothing else, it sheds light on the question of teacher safety and the rights teachers have to work in a safe environment. As Tina Valenčič (2014), a mentee of Slovene lawyer Andraž Teršek, states in her paper, no law in Slovenia mentions or establishes the rights or duties of pedagogical staff, which is no little issue, since the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia reports more than 30 000 actively employed teachers at current.

Additionally, online teaching has exposed the vulnerability of the teacher-student dynamic, and how dependent it actually is on established motions of teachers, authority, behaviour and so forth. With potential combining of both in class and on-line teaching styles in the future, it is worth considering a more general, state-supported systematic approach to the problem. It is high time teachers' position was taken into consideration by the state and the general public and given more value, empowerment, respect and protection, since the opposite may result in schools being terribly understaffed (already the case in many schools) and the quality of schools and, by extension, our future, would be at stake.

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# LET'S GAMIFY OUR ENGLISH LESSONS

Urška Mejač

## **Abstract**

Games and other fun activities should be a vital part of teaching English as a foreign language as they have many benefits for students. They are an enjoyable and useful tool to help learn, memorise, and use the language effectively. They can spice up any part of the lesson. There are thousands of games that we can play with our students of all ages and learning levels. Many games are adaptable; often with only small modifications the same game can be used with different ages and learning levels. Knowing different games can help a teacher make their lessons interesting, effective and enjoyable. There are several English language learning games presented and explained in this article. They will provide you with a great source of ideas for your classes.

**Keywords:** ESL, EFL, playing games, fun activities

## Introduction

One of my greatest desires as a teacher of English has always been to make my students not only learn and use English well but also to like and enjoy it. This is why I believe games and other fun activities should be a vital part of teaching English as a foreign language.

Playing games in a foreign language classroom has many benefits for students. It is a fun way to help learn, memorise, and use the language, and to quicken the process of building various language skills. They are not only a useful tool for improving the students' English language ability, but they also help to increase motivation for learning, focus attention, and improve interaction among students. They help reduce fear of learning and using the language, and make shy or quiet students open up and use English in class. Even more, they liven up the lessons, and make students want to learn more.

Games and other fun activities can be used as an introduction to a new topic or at the end of it to revise the content. They can spice up a boring or tough content, and make it much more interesting and enjoyable to learn. Games are useful warm-up activities at the beginning of a lesson, and a useful tool to use to relax and re-energize the students in the middle of a lesson. They can also be used at the end of a lesson if it happens that you as a teacher have a few minutes left to kill or if you want to finish on a positive note and round off the lesson. Nevertheless, they can be used in any part of a lesson to simply make learning more interesting and enjoyable.

There are thousands of games that we can play with our students. Games can be used to introduce, revise, and test vocabulary and various grammar topics, to practise all four skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking), to learn about culture, reinforce a language point, to practise words and structures, etc. – the list is practically endless.

Games can be used with all age groups, children, teenagers, and adults, and with all learning levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). Moreover, many games are highly adaptable – with minor changes the same game can be used with different ages and learning levels.

The games and fun activities contained in this article will provide you with a great source of ideas for your classes. I have tried and tested them in class myself. I have adapted different games I have played with my friends, students, and scouts; I have played some in Slovenian and have now only “translated” and adapted them to suit my teaching context. Most of the games take very little preparation (or require a bit more preparation before the very lesson because you need to prepare the materials which, fortunately, you can then use over and over again), and are easy to set up and play.

## **Describe-and-draw**

Describe-and-draw is a pair activity in which one student describes what they have (see) on a picture card to another student who has to draw what they hear. (To make this game even funnier, you can ask students who are drawing to cover their eyes and draw blindly, or to use their left hand if they usually write with the right one, and vice versa.) Ask students to draw in as detailed as possible way.

The main goal of the game is to practise speaking and listening. However, with appropriate choice of pictures on the cards, you can also revise certain vocabulary. Students can also write their drawing instructions (picture description) down and thus practise writing too.

The length of the activity depends on the pictures the students have to describe and re-draw; the more complicated and detailed the picture, the longer the activity will take. (Nevertheless, I advise you to use the line-drawing type of pictures as they will be easier to copy and draw.) There is an unlimited number of possibilities on what the students can draw. You can choose to practise certain vocabulary or just pick funny images which correspond to current events, such as Christmas or summer holidays.

## **Storytelling**

Storytelling is a pair or small group activity. It is a narrating game in which students are arranging picture cards and cooperatively narrate a story. The game is appropriate for different learning levels, although it is most suitable for intermediate and advanced levels.

The aims of the game are to revise and practise tenses and vocabulary (which vocabulary that is, depends on the type of pictures on the cards, for example fairy tales), to practise speaking, and to build up a co-operative story. Students can also write their stories down and thus practise writing too.

For this game which takes approximately 15 minutes (depends on your instructions and number of cards for each pair or small group) you will need pre-made cards with pictures, and (optionally) later also pen and paper. There is no set number of cards per group; I usually use 20 cards per group if I want the activity last for about 15 minutes.

There are some rules for the game, but you can adapt them to suit your students and your teaching aims. First, you have to divide your students into pairs or groups of three or four, explain the rules of the game, and give each pair or group one set of cards. Make sure that the cards are dealt out equally to all the members of the group. Then ask students to build up a co-operative story. Students now have to look at their cards with pictures (for example, they can represent the events or characters in a fairy tale). The students mustn't show their cards to other students. The first player chooses a card (any card) from their hand and lays it down on the table as the first event of the story. The same student describes (in two or three sentences; the number of the sentences depends on the learning level, and the time you want to consecrate to the activity) what happened in the story. The second player has to

choose a suitable card to follow on as the next event in the story. He/she lays the card down on the table next to the first one, and narrates the next stage in the story. The object of the game is to build up a story together.

There are some possible activities after the game is finished, too. For example, when all groups have finished their stories, they can visit other groups, and re-tell their stories to each other. (Warning: to avoid chaos, it is probably best to form new groups consisting of one member from each group.) The activity can also lead to a writing activity: students can either get another copy of pictures (different from those that they had used in groups) or keep the same set of cards, and write down a story, either in class or for homework.

I got the idea for my version of the Storytelling game from *Story Cubes*, a dice family game. Each set/game consists of several dice which have symbols instead of numbers. By throwing dice, players tell a story together.

### **Words-words-words**

Words-words-words is a game in which each pair or group of students gets a pack of cards with letters. There is a single letter on each card. The goal of this competitive game is to find as many words or expressions as possible out of the letters on the cards. The students are allowed to use the same card to form a new word, but they cannot double the letters – they only have so many letters as they physically get on the cards.

The goal of the game is to practise vocabulary and spelling.

There are also other variations of the game possible. For example, the goal of the game can be to find the longest word possible, to form a sentence using all letters or as many letters as possible, to find as many words as possible connected with a certain topic (for example, food, animals, etc.), etc.

### **EFL Activity**

You probably already well know a famous board-game called *Activity* with the goal of guessing as many words as possible (under a time limit of one minute per word/expression) either by description, drawing, or mime. Why not playing a similar (simplified or as original as possible) game in class too?

EFL Activity is a group game in which students are guessing words and expressions which are either described, drawn, or mimed by a student of the same group as groups are competing with each other. It is a competitive game among groups of students – the goal is to guess as many words or expressions as possible. The original game can be quite complicated to prepare, but once you make your own game, you can use the cards and playing board(s) over and over again. You can also simplify the preparation and only make cards with words/expressions on them; instead of moving figures on a playing board, students can only write down the number of words or expressions they guessed in a certain time limit. However, do

not forget to mark which expressions should be orally described, which drawn, and which mimed.

The main goal of the game is to practise speaking and listening. However, with appropriate choice of words and expressions you put on the cards for students to describe, draw, or mime, you can also practise and revise specific vocabulary.

The game is appropriate for different learning levels, although it is most suitable for intermediate and advanced levels. It takes from 15 to 45 minutes, depending on the number of the words and expressions you want your students to guess (practise and revise).

## **Conclusion**

Games and other fun activities should be a vital part of teaching English as a foreign language as they have many benefits for students. They are an enjoyable and useful tool to help learn, memorise, and use the language effectively. Games can be used as an introduction to a new topic, and are also a great tool for revising the content. They can spice up any part of the lesson. There are thousands of games that we can play with our students of all ages and learning levels. Many games are adaptable; often with only small modifications the same game can be used with different ages and learning levels. Knowing different games can help a teacher make their lessons interesting, effective and enjoyable, run them smoothly, and in case things get out of control, they can get back the attention of the students in no time.

# POSITIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

**Sarah Mercer**

## **Abstract**

In this article, I outline the rationale for Positive Language Education (PLE) and explain how it can be integrated into teaching practice. It begins by explaining the role of life skills in education more broadly and language teaching specifically. It then defines PLE and outlines its two main aims which are individual and collective wellbeing. The next section presents an introduction to diverse approaches to teaching PLE, and the article concludes with a call for more teachers and researchers to explore the potential of PLE in practice and help further its reach.

**Keywords:** Positive Language Education (PLE), Life Skills, Hidden Curriculum, Wellbeing, Criticality

## **Introduction**

English language teaching is in a position of flux. In several contexts globally, the level of learners' English as they move through secondary education is extremely high. In some settings, it has already been seen how this can lead to learners becoming disengaged and failing to see the purpose of and need for formalised English lessons (Haukås et al., 2021). However, I would argue that English lessons are rarely, if ever, solely about teaching the language in isolation. We cannot teach language without content. One particular form of content that should be integrated into the teaching of all subjects are life skills. It has been argued that education systems globally need to be reconfigured to better equip learners with the skills they need to meet contemporary societal and global challenges. To do this, many international educational organisations have proposed various frameworks of competences, often referred to as life skills, to be taught across the curriculum in all subjects. In this brief article, I suggest it is time to become conscious of and explicit about what we are teaching alongside the language in ELT, not only as part of our need to remain relevant for learners but as a moral imperative to meet the purposes of contemporary education and the upsurge of interest in the teaching of transversal life skills.

## **Introducing life skills**

Education more broadly has also been forced to rethink its profile and purpose to meet the needs of contemporary learners. Initially, this change came in the form of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which were incorporated in curricular as a way of ensuring that academic subjects maintained relevance by explicitly teaching the types of skills learners needed in their lives beyond school. However, increasingly, there was recognition that these skills focused almost exclusively on the competences needed for the workplace, with little consideration of how to prepare learners for life more broadly. Recent years have thus seen a shift in the kinds of transversal skills being taught driven also by a powerful impetus from organisations such as the UN and OECD. They have now been expanded from the traditional four Cs (Creativity, Critical Thinking Skills, Collaboration, and Communication) plus digital literacy to also incorporate life skills. Life skills are competences that can help an individual to flourish in their lives as active members of their local and global communities. Sometimes these competences are also referred to as global skills (e.g., Mercer et al., 2019). They typically cover areas such as global citizenship, wellbeing and emotional self-regulation, and ecoliteracy among others.

## **Teaching life skills**

A model that can be used for teaching life skills in an integrated way alongside language skills is 'Positive Language Education' (PLE). PLE is a way of teaching which seeks to integrate "non-linguistic and linguistic aims in sustainable ways which do not compromise the development of either skill set, or overburden educators" (Mercer et al., 2018, p. 11). The non-linguistic aims of PLE are individual and collective wellbeing. The focus to date has been on promoting competences which help individuals to manage their emotions, develop character strengths, and reflect on how to strengthen their relationships to others and their communities. More recent transformative perspectives have added a social

critical perspective which stems from the core concern that an individual cannot be thought of as flourishing in a community where others are being repressed, treated unfairly, or suffering low wellbeing (cf. Mercer & Gregersen, under review; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). This implies that life skills must include the teaching of critical thinking for learners to reflect on and interrogate the role of social structures and how they affect individual and collective wellbeing. The aim of PLE is not to just support individual wellbeing but also in line with global citizenship goals, it aims to promote collective and social wellbeing. This means learners should develop the skills to promote their own wellbeing but also to empower them to take a stand in advocating for and supporting the wellbeing of others as well as the wellbeing of the planet including animal and plant life.

Inspired by the dual-strand approach of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), PLE seeks to find ways to address the two goals of linguistic and life skills objectives simultaneously in teaching. To do this, there are a continuum of possible approaches stretching from single activities to larger projects to a holistic way of being in every single class. This latter form means that rather than teaching individual tasks or sets of activities with a life skills focus, PLE can serve as a lens on how we approach teaching generally. It refers to a way of being in class and way of thinking about every activity and aspect of the lesson. Such an integration of PLE seeks to be sustainable. Rather than teachers feeling they have yet another add-on to address, it simply becomes a way of expanding the scope of regular teaching to explicitly cover life skills.

When we teach, we cover both an explicit curriculum set by local policy makers or institutions but how we teach also imparts a hidden curriculum. Students learn not only from what we say and deliberately teach but also from what we do, how we behave, and the materials we use and present to learners. As such, it is important to reflect consciously on the hidden curriculum that we and our institutions are communicating to our learners. What life skills are we fostering and how are we empowering learners for individual and collective wellbeing in the topics we address, the thinking we engender, and tasks we set? In what ways do our materials represent all social groups equitably and in what ways do they challenge stereotypes?

## **Conclusion**

English language teaching needs to maintain its relevance as English becomes ubiquitous and learners commence learning increasingly early. Education more broadly also needs to be teaching life skills to help learners meet contemporary individual, societal and global challenges. One of the perceived advantages of language teaching is the autonomy and scope that teachers have within language classes to cover diverse content including life skills. All language classes address some form of content and in PLE this content covers life skills which aim to promote individual and collective wellbeing. Empowering learners with such skills can support them not only in the present but also for their future lives as individuals and as members of local and global communities. When learners develop their emotional literacy, compassion for others, critical thinking about social inequalities, and



ecoliteracy, they are equipped to contribute positively to the local and global communities they are part of and also blossom as individuals. I hope that reading this may inspire you to join in developing further the potential of PLE in ELT.

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# LET'S TRAVEL ONLINE – CULTURE SHARING PROJECT

**Nataša Merkaš**

## **Abstract**

Amid the pandemic, two English teachers, Nataša Merkaš from Slovenia and Marija Dzonova from North Macedonia, began a project called Culture Sharing Project. It all started from a simple wish to offer the students of their language schools something more in those unprecedented times. Afterward, more teachers joined and when travelling was not possible, the online joint lessons within the project enabled students to meet with peers from different countries and share their experiences, talk about their lives and countries' cultures. The article introduces the Culture Sharing project (CSP) in detail.

**Keywords:** joint lessons, culture, sharing, English students

## Introduction

Culture Sharing Project was born in the year 2020 when the pandemic started. Two teachers, Marija from North Macedonia and Nataša, from Slovenia, carried out a joint lesson with their private language school students to offer them something new and to add value to lessons in the time of a lockdown and online schooling. The added value of students meeting online and discussing their countries, everyday lives, and the hardship they were facing at the start of the pandemic, brought about the idea to expand joint lessons to more countries and the Culture Project was born.



## The beginnings

Feeling really overwhelmed and enthusiastic after our students participated in a joint lesson *Touring Slovenia and Macedonia*, we decided to try to expand the net of teachers to be able to connect the students with their peers from other foreign countries. Some teachers from previous professional encounters were invited to cooperate and these were the beginnings of the project. All the necessary information was put on the website [www.nana.si/projekti](http://www.nana.si/projekti), documentation to support the course of the project was prepared and it was time to start the travelling.

## The purpose

The purpose and the very essence of the joint lessons between English students from different countries within the Culture Sharing project are encompassed in the following words:

*The intention of the project is to give the young students of English as a foreign language from different countries around the world a chance to get familiarized with the culture of foreign countries and to learn more about the life of their peers in these countries first-hand.*

## How does it work?

The website of the project offers a list of the participating countries and it is continuously updated. The interested teachers who want to join the project contact either Marija or Nataša and schedule a trial joint lesson. They receive a draft lesson plan with guidelines on what to include in the joint lesson. The draft lesson outlines the basic topics and various activities used to present the country and to offer students an opportunity for communication in the prepared activities. The topics are general facts about the country and hometown; landmarks and tourist places; teenagers' free time; typical food. These are only guidelines and it is up to the two teachers, who meet prior to the lesson, to decide what activities to include and how to carry out the lesson. However, it is important for teachers to keep in mind these lessons are designed with the intention that young students learn more about the foreign country, therefore the basic presentation of the country, its culture, habits, and lifestyle should be included. After the trial lesson, the teacher/school decides if they want to participate in the project further and they are then added to the list of the participating countries on the project's website.

The teachers joining the Culture Sharing Project are supported with a pack of documents: a cover letter, a draft lesson plan, Netiquette rules, a social promo document, a certificate (to be used for the participating students by choice), agreement for school/parents.

The project is based solely on a voluntary basis and the willingness of the teachers to work toward including their students in the project in order to connect them with their peers around the world. By joining the project, the participating teachers agree to comply with the project requirements:

- to provide a paragraph giving a short description of their school to be posted on the project's website;
- to send some material after the lesson, e.g., activities/work from the lesson, some pictures/screenshots of the lesson;
- to provide a short paragraph of feedback about the experience of the joint lesson, which is posted on the website to offer a deeper insight into the project and also to serve as an encouragement for more teachers to join the project.

As well as getting to know the culture of the country, another intention of the joint lessons is also for the students to meet peers and share information and experience of a teenage life first hand. Therefore, students are encouraged to share their contacts with their peers, of course, if they wish to, to have an opportunity to stay in touch and continue communicating.

### **Feedback from participants**

Joint lessons so far connected students from Slovenia, Macedonia, Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Albania. The feedback and experience of students and teachers alike reflect enthusiasm, positivism, and satisfaction with new encounters.

English teacher Manjola from Albania appreciated the opportunity for her students to try something different as the joint lesson offered them to practice English outside the classroom. They were able to share opinions and use English to communicate their ideas and suggestions. Students met new peers and were able to learn about as well as embrace and respect cultural diversity.

Andžela, a high school English teacher from Lithuania, describes the joint lesson within the Culture Sharing project as a lesson out of the ordinary. She believes her students had the opportunity to use English in a real situation but also expanded their understanding of the world outside. She hopes that the young students who participated in the lesson maintain their connections and perhaps meet one day.

A high school teacher from Bulgaria, Alexandra sees this project as a successful learning experience as students interact with each other and communicate their feelings, ideas, and knowledge. The online lesson took place in a stress-free environment, in a relaxed atmosphere. She points out the international community within the project, where we can all improve our skills and learn from each other.

## **Conclusion**

The experience gained in the joint lessons carried out within the Culture Sharing Project so far has shown the project to serve a highly positive and connective note. Therefore, with the project we wish to continue connecting English learners globally, offer them the opportunity to learn about different cultures, communicate internationally and exchange ideas as well as initiate socializing and collaboration.

# WE ARE HIRING!

**Jana Mlakar**

## **Abstract**

The article discusses a communicative and action-based approach to the topic of work and acquiring a job. The focus was on students discussing real-life situations and performing tasks that they will face in their lives. We looked at the entire process, from vocabulary to writing a job ad, cover letter and CV. The students looked at similarities and differences between Slovene cultural space and that of English-speaking countries, prepared a Europass profile which they will simply update when they need it, did a job interview role play and learned more about their classmates. As a teacher, I found this process rewarding and felt motivated to prepare more similar activities in the future.

**Keywords:** work, real-life, action-based, communicative, plurilingual

## Introduction

The decision which course of studies to choose is anything but simple and many students have difficulties despite different options of support. The first step in this direction happens towards the end of the third year of their secondary education when they have to choose elective subjects for the *matura* exam. We use the coursebook *On Screen B2+* (Evans and Dooley, 2012). in which the topic of work is covered in Module 1, at the beginning of year three. The course materials cover the following aspects of the topic: different professions with their pros and cons, a job interview, writing a cover letter and a CV. The approach is, in my opinion, traditional and not as communicative or action based as I would like it to be. Being the class teacher of one of the two third year classes I teach prompted me to take a different approach to the topic this year and expand it substantially, to make it communicative and personalised in the hope of helping them with their career decision, as well as acquiring all the necessary knowledge regarding English classes and their *matura* exam. I tried to include activities that develop as many competences as possible.

## National Curriculum and CEFR

The curriculum for English language in upper secondary education states that the focus of our teaching is on students, encouraging their abilities, personal growth and self-actualization. In English classes, our goal is for them to acquire and develop skills and competences that go beyond the English language itself. We work on key competences for lifelong learning, such as development of critical thinking and cultural awareness, that will enhance their abilities to integrate into the society and improve their employment prospects.

Another important document in language teaching that is closely linked to the State Curriculum is *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), implemented in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2020). Its descriptors have been updated and extended, the result of which was the publication of the CEFR Companion volume in 2020, which I used as a guide in preparing my materials. Its approach is action-oriented, focused on real-world communicative needs and real-life tasks.

## Working with the coursebook

To introduce the topic, we covered general vocabulary and materials in the student's book and workbook. The coursebook was first published in 2012 and, despite the recent updates, is somewhat outdated. It looks at two jobs that students cannot identify with since they are not very common. Vocabulary work encompasses work, character descriptions and the topic of money and is not very challenging, therefore I used additional materials from different sources at a higher level. The writing section discusses an application letter and we can read about how teenagers see their future and about student jobs. The section on curriculum and culture looks at writing a CV.

## Student work, real-life situations

We expanded this topic by discussing student work and its specifics in Slovenia. Students shared their experiences with having a summer job and how they might use the skills they

acquired in their school work and choice of university course. Since most of them found their jobs through their parents and had never had to search for a post, we looked at the procedure of finding a permanent job in Slovenia. There are many options for doing that, however, I chose the most traditional one, the Employment Service of Slovenia. Students chose a profile and we tried to find a job in our region. This was an excellent opportunity to revise the vocabulary they had acquired earlier and develop strategies how to obtain appropriate new vocabulary beyond the use of online translators and dictionaries that are often found lacking in this area. With some research, students realized that a lot of information on Slovenia is already obtainable in English, be it on the pages of European Commission, OECD reports, or other websites. We also, not for the first time, discussed the importance of using reliable sources. Students searched for job ads in English speaking countries, discussing the differences, for instance, that salaries can be stated on yearly and not monthly basis. This was an excellent opportunity to develop students' plurilingual and intercultural competences that see the learner as a social agent and states that languages and cultures are not kept in separated mental compartments, and that all knowledge and experience of languages contribute to building up communicative competence. (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 123)

### **Preparing a job ad**

The next step had always been to work on a cover letter by simply discussing its form and then students wrote one themselves. This year I decided to use a different approach. Students had to prepare a job ad for their own company or to choose a Slovenian company they know, in order to make the task manageable for students with less confidence in English. Before writing we discussed what information they would be interested in when looking for a job and then looked at a text on this issue, which encourages companies to include videos and pictures in the presentation of one's company and not simply write a text. One student, for example, chose work on a cruise ship and took pictures of herself in different roles, which I found endearing. Another prepared a three-minute-long video, looking for a sign language interpreter. Most students used Microsoft Word, but some made use of Microsoft Publisher and other software. Job listings ranged from a swimming instructor to an airline pilot and microbiologist. I could see that they mostly leaned towards professions they would like to have one day.

Some students took the easy path and wrote a simple text, based on templates that can be found on the Internet. Others took this opportunity to present their creativity in different manners, and those were not students who have the highest grades in English. This was an excellent opportunity for them to stand out. I learned how well they can design pages, direct and produce videos and, to some extent, what their career hopes are. I was impressed by their efforts, felt and still feel motivated to try to incorporate more of such activities in my classes.

### **Cover letter**

I posted all advertisements in our team on Microsoft Teams, students had to choose one and write a cover letter. I find the materials in *On Screen B2+* a bit too simplistic and chose



to supplement them with ones in *Student's Book of Pioneer C1/C1+, Unit 1* (Mitchell and Malkogiani, 2018). It expands on personal characteristics and also discusses the appropriate tone, not only style.

After students handed in their work we analysed all their letters together in class. Prospective employers then decided if any of their candidates would be invited to attend an interview. Cover letter was also part of their second test and I was very pleased with the results. There were no completely unsuitable pieces of writing, most acquired fifteen points or more out of twenty, which is a higher number compared to previous years.

### **Europass profile and CV**

Suitably motivated, we moved on to the characteristics of application letters and soon realized that a CV is an integral part of the job application process. One of the most common CV formats in Europe, Europass seemed a logical choice. Students created a profile and then compiled a CV, which they downloaded and handed in. The process was not at all intimidating, as there is plenty of guidance provided. I focused on the part of language skills, this was an excellent opportunity to discuss the *CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)*, the international standard for describing language ability. This was not the first time students heard about it, I present it at the beginning of year one when we talk about materials students can find on the Internet. However, it was the first time that students became aware that they can have different levels in different skills, such as spoken production and spoken interaction. They were very interested in the descriptors for different levels, not only for English but their second language as well. After completing the CV, which they will be able to adapt and use later in life, students chose one of their classmate's job ads to apply for a job.

### **Job interview**

The final step in this process of getting a job was the job interview. Students shared their opinions on what they need to be attentive to, most agreed that, for example, bringing your mother to the interview was not the best idea. We watched a parody *A Millennial Job Interview* by Dream Reach Media to expand on the topic of suitable behaviour at a job interview. Students put together job interview do's and don'ts. In pairs, they later prepared a job interview role play, which they presented before the class. Some intentionally chose unsuitable questions and answers, which made the process entertaining. In the end, we analysed their performances, discussing whether the questions and answers were appropriate, how they could improve body language and similar.

### **Conclusion**

The process took about eight to ten lessons, students' feedback was extremely positive and they expressed the desire to have more such activities in the future. They learned about the entire process of acquiring a job and what qualifications they would need for a job they are interested in doing in the future. Hopefully, this will help them in deciding which elective subjects to choose in year four and perhaps even a university course. I

found it immensely rewarding and I feel I got to know them quite a bit better, especially the ones who typically stay silent during class discussions. My goal for next year is to expand the topic by discussing soft skills as well.

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# ADHD, ASD, SEN. BUT WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

**Dr Claudia Molnár**, *University of Pannonia, Hungary*

## **Abstract**

Inclusive classrooms have now become the norm, and all learners have their own individual needs, special or otherwise. However, not all children are diagnosed, either due to the stigma attached or through a refusal for acceptance from the parents. However, even if learners are diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty, teachers are not always informed of the various needs of all of them. Many times, it is teachers who raise the alarms when difficulties arise. What does this mean for the classroom? How can teachers identify what the issues may be if they aren't qualified? This paper presents results from a small-scale study, which offers some insights to possible answers to these questions and some of the considerations needed to be made when planning, preparing, managing and assessing learners. All students offer a spectrum of diversity, which breeds tolerance and acceptance, and ultimately compassion and empowerment.

**Keywords:** individual needs, identification, disclosure

## Introduction

“Principles of inclusive education are based on the premise that people differ in the ways they learn, but everyone should have equal access to high-quality education and a supportive learning environment, including the context of learning additional languages” (Kormos, and Nijakowska, 2017). When we consider the main specific educational needs (SEN) present in many mainstream classrooms today, the focus points, essentially to Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Dyslexia. This is not to say that SENS are limited to these three, however, for the purpose of the research, this paper pertains predominantly to these three areas. Notwithstanding, emotional difficulties are as important as a recognised learning difficulty.

When considering the identification of SENs, in situations where learners either have not been diagnosed, or learners’ needs’ have not been disclosed to the teacher, it is of paramount importance that teachers are informed about and able to recognise certain characteristics of these needs, in order to implement the required support. One key consideration is that, in many cases, learners will have more than one SEN and the emotional side effects of the learning difficulties, feed into the management of their learning.

## How prepared are teachers of English?

Teachers often do not get adequate preparation for teaching children with special educational needs and consequently lack knowledge and skills regarding their impairments and disorders. Teachers need training regarding teaching strategies that are applicable to helping children with their academic and non-academic development. Additionally, teachers are often left to their own devices in terms of integrating and managing learners with SENs, in mainstream education. A recent study found that teachers across different countries infrequently adapt their instruction to meet student characteristics (Schleicher, 2016). In order to explore teachers’ training and knowledge in this area, a small scale, international study asking teachers, from 15 countries, about the amount of training, for teaching learners with SENs, they had received, and their awareness and knowledge within this area, yielded the following results:

- Only 10% are sure that they have no SEN learners in their classes.
- 71.8% knowingly have SEN learners.
- Only 42% of schools have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator.
- 43.6% have some basic training.
- 38.5% have had no training.
- 40% are aware of the individual features of their learners with SENs.
- 33.8% are not aware of the procedures for reporting concerns.

Figure 1 shows where these teachers received their training:

Where did you receive your training?

78 responses

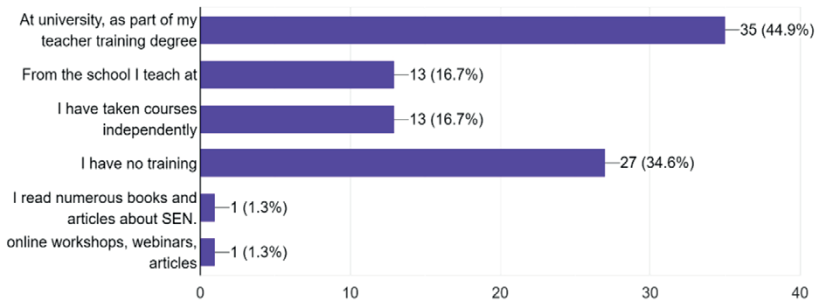


Figure 1: Where did you receive your training?

### Identifying SEN learners

When we consider the implications of the above data, it is necessary to educate teachers in the individual features of the most prominent learning difficulties in mainstream foreign language classrooms. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is more and more salient among current groups of students, as is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Dyslexia. When we consider the range of symptoms these barriers to learning present, we see clear overlaps in the areas of attention, short term memory, intense emotional reactions, delayed speech, confusions about directions, sleep disorders, depression, high levels of anxiety, reduced or increased energy levels and frustration. For a full list: <https://adhd-institute.com/assessment-diagnosis/symptoms-of-adhd/> and <https://www.autismspeaks>.

Within these specific educational needs, lie strengths in language learning, which, when focussed on and developed, may lead to a reduction in the aforementioned symptoms. These include:

Students with ADHD liking rules, which allows them to enjoy grammar and their 'role' within differentiated and group tasks could include error correction, which, in turn would help them focus. They are also generally good communicators. In addition to these, learners with ASD are generally very passionate about what interests them, making them diligent when encouraging them to work within these lexical and communicative areas. Dyslexic learners are generally very creative and often see the bigger picture and view activities more holistically, making them very visual thinkers with increased spatial knowledge. When focussing on these strengths, learners' wellbeing and self-esteem are increased.

### Conclusion

Teachers need more adequate and regularly refreshed training in the areas of not only being aware of learners who may have SENs, but also in the implementation of methodology to not only meet these needs, but to also integrate these learners into the entire group.

This is best done through differentiation techniques, mindful planning including the pre-teaching of vocabulary and supported planning in written and spoken production tasks. Schneider (1999), states that the differences between poor language development and foreign language learners pertains to the degree of complication and primarily manifests in spelling and performance during foreign language aptitude tests (Nijakowska, 2010). The results of this small- scale study act as a foundation for further and a broader exploration of teachers' awareness and training within this foreign language learning domain.

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### Sites:

- Symptoms of ADHD. <https://adhd-institute.com/assessment-diagnosis/symptoms-of-adhd/>
- Autism speaks. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

# MATERIALS WRITING 101: TIPS TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM CONTENT CREATOR

**László Németh**, *University of Pannonia // IATEFL-Hungary*

## **Abstract**

The changing needs of present-day learners, coupled with ongoing global issues and processes, have acted as a catalyst for change in (language) education. Digital literacy has become a key skill and online resources and teaching materials have come to the forefront of language teaching. In fact, this trend has implications for lesson planning and materials writing which, on a surface level, may seem as a dull and daunting process; however, with a few carefully selected creative and relevant materials (e.g., taken from social media), classrooms can be spiced up in ways that motivate and engage learners. The article begins by introducing a more universal, conceptual framework for designing classes (or learning experiences), capitalising on a few points to make lesson planning simpler and more feasible. Then, a few words are devoted to understanding 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners, which information may further support the planning process. In the final section, two example activities inspired by social media and drawing on the presented framework, as well as the accompanying learner characterisations, are detailed to put a practical twist on the discourse.

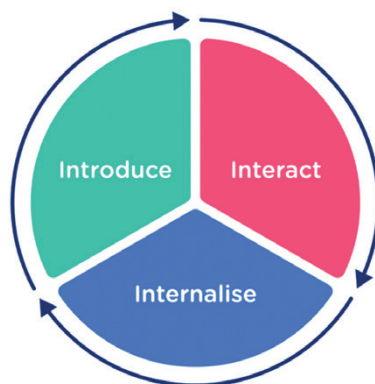
**Keywords:** lesson planning, materials writing, online content, social media

## Introduction

Language teaching has recently undergone profound changes. Technological advancement and the changing face and demands of learners have created a need for the implementation of novel approaches to bring language education into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, teachers are now being urged to find ways to cater for their students' changing needs, e.g., by tapping into students' inner motivation for increased engagement and learner autonomy in the classroom.

The article starts by explaining the 'ArT' of lesson planning, a universal conceptual framework for designing learning experiences for students, then expounds the benefits of social media and social-media-inspired activities in the classroom. Lastly, two example activities incorporating the presented theory are detailed to illustrate how to capitalise on the potential teaching resources we may encounter online.

## The ArT of lesson planning



*Figure 1: The three I's of lesson planning (Németh, 2022)*

Even though lesson planning may seem intricate, baffling, and even soul-drenching at times, it becomes a simple process once teachers develop their own voice and teaching style. Before delving deeper into the topic, regardless of language, subject, or type of lesson, a few universals may be maintained for planning future classes:

1. *There is no 'by-the-book' lesson.* Whether your lesson is a success will largely depend on the current mood of your learners.
2. *Allow room for diverging from the plan.* A challenging science test may easily overthrow even the most meticulously planned lesson, as students will just simply resist anything they would be expected to do. Keeping lessons flexible is highly encouraged.
3. *Set realistic goals and expectations.* Your teaching context and available resources will greatly influence how you structure a class. Do not aim for the unattainable as it can easily cause you stress, which will also affect your learners.



As teachers develop a fuller understanding of their work environment (i.e., teaching context), they start formulating a distinct teacher identity as well. Consequently, to really enjoy preparing lessons, it becomes crucial to get acquainted with the kind of teacher we are. Thus, needs analysis becomes a crucial part of teaching, supported by frequent reflections on the success of the learning process.

Concerning lesson planning, from a methodological point of view, classes can be broken down into three key stages. In the *Introduction* phase, you capitalise on your students' previous knowledge about the problem or question (i.e., a topic, a grammatical structure, vocabulary sets, etc.) – in other words, you activate schemata (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). The next two steps are more practically orientated. The *Interaction* part incorporates focused practice, whereby students directly target the new material through drill-like activities. It is imperative that your learners not only interact with the language through various exercises but also with each other so that learning becomes a social activity. As language is a social construct, ideally, it acts as a driving force to facilitate communication and spark engagement with peers. Finally, *Internalisation* involves freer practice to allow students to immerse in a contextualised (CLIL<sup>1</sup>) experience to deepen what they have learnt. Therefore, their brains will be more likely to create synapses for a quicker and more effective retention of the new information (Magrath, 2021). To illustrate the above concept with an example, here is how the *past form of modal verbs* could be taught within this framework in an English class:

1. **Introduce:** give students a problem-based task in order to elicit the use of modal verbs (e.g., giving advice, suggesting, or making rules). Write some of their ideas on the board. Hold a plenary discussion on the form and use of modal verbs. Then, transform the examples to model the use of past modals and elicit the form (have + past participle of the main verb) from the students.
2. **Interact:** hand out some more focused speaking questions that prompt the use of modal verbs in different contexts, both in present and past.
3. **Internalise:** contextualise this new grammar by playing *Agony Aunt* (inspired by the famous newspaper column), which involves students receiving a problem (or letters to the columnist) to which they must find a solution by offering suggestions or explaining what they could/would have done differently, had they been/if they were the reader.

Contextualising learning is inevitable for your students to see language 'in action'. CLIL is an approach that, besides helping learners acquire life skills, e.g., 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, leadership, problem-solving, and process thinking, can easily yield meaningful, lifelike communication in the classroom. The *Introduce-Interact-Internalise* framework remains flexible enough to accommodate and satisfy all sorts of (language-)learning needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Content and Language Integrated Learning

## Social media in the classroom

The 'ArT' in lesson planning denotes *authentically resourced teaching*, which highlights the importance of using materials and resources (e.g., social-media posts, tweets, comments, audio, or video) both teachers and learners are likely to encounter in order to create an exciting and engaging, let alone lifelike, learning environment.

Social media can be utilised in various creative ways in the classroom. It may offer a creative space for you to interact and collaborate with your learners in an asynchronous fashion. In fact, several EdTech companies (cf. ClassDojo, <https://www.classdojo.com>) are now trying to develop software, the user interface of which incorporate features of social-networking sites (e.g., newsfeed, posting and pinning functions, commenting, cross-platform integration, analytics, etc.). In fact, class Facebook / Instagram / TikTok profile, or even WordPress blog, may mean the solution to get your learners to hone their language skills as they create authentic online content relevant to their interests.

Moreover, there are some common traits 21<sup>st</sup>-century students may share. Touching upon these in the classroom (through the materials and activities you design) can further engagement not only with the subject matter but also with peers. It is worth mentioning that the below features are merely broad characterisations and may not apply to all learners.

The typical 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner (1) lives in the social-media bubble, (2) sets and follows trends, (3) goes out regularly, and (4) is concerned with aesthetics (of their own and that of others). In a practical sense, besides the aforementioned tips for collaboration and class management, social media may as well become a treasure chest of authentic language resource to get inspired before writing or collating materials for students. Having mentioned the word 'trend', consider creating your own challenges to gamify your class, exploit TV shows, viral videos, or even trending memes. As per 'going out', music will always be a loyal companion if you wish to spice up your lessons. Regarding 'appearance', tasks that involve design or photography are likely to excite most students to create something and share with their fellows.

The next section of the article elaborates on two social-media-inspired tasks that can easily be implemented in class.

## Example tasks

### *Tell My Story*

The first activity was inspired by a YouTube video by *Soul Pancake*. (For the original video, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAxCfJ21N3E>.) As for the formerly introduced 3-I's framework, it fits into the *Introduction* part of a lesson and can be used as an icebreaker when someone teaches a (new group of) student(s) for the first time.

Your name is \_\_\_\_\_, and this is your story:  
 You were born in \_\_\_\_\_, so you're \_\_\_\_\_ years old. You are from \_\_\_\_\_.  
 You have a \_\_\_\_\_ family and you have \_\_\_\_\_ siblings. You \_\_\_\_\_ have a pet.  
 You really \_\_\_\_\_ teaching and you speak \_\_\_\_\_ foreign languages. In your free time, you usually \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Your favourite film genre is \_\_\_\_\_ and you love listening to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ music.  
 If you were a superhero, your superpower would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ would play you in the film about your life.

Figure 2: Tell My Story activity card

Begin the activity by handing out copies of the above card. Model the task by asking students to form pairs or small groups and complete the gaps based on their first impressions of you. Give them a few minutes to discuss and write down their ideas, then hold a plenary discussion so that they can present their descriptions. Once everyone has had their turn, reflect on the ideas and share accurate information about yourself. Finally, tell them to pair up and take 2-3 minutes to complete another card about the other person and provide another 5 minutes to discuss what they have written.

To extend the scope of the activity, give your students some further questions to discuss as follows:

- How big is your family?
- If you have a pet, what is its name?
- If you do not have a pet, would you like to one? Why (not)?
- How long have you been learning languages? Why these?
- What is your favourite film of all time? Why?
- What singers/bands do you like? Why?
- What superpower do you think you have?

The activity remains flexible to suit all language levels and types of learners. You can easily differentiate by increasing or decreasing the complexity of questions and language used on the card.

### *A visit at Nonseum*

The second sequence was designed for *Internalisation* and targets writing skills. Due to the various levels, it is suitable for mixed-ability classes. In order to run the activity, contextualise learning by telling your students that they are taking a walk at *Nonseum* (<https://nonseum.at>). As they roam around the classroom individually or in pairs, they should look at the exhibits and produce different forms of writing as detailed below:

- **Level 1:** invent witty hashtags and leave them by the photos on the classroom walls.
- **Level 2:** tweet about the exhibits (in maximum 280 characters) and use the hashtags from Level 1.
- **Level 3:** extend the tweets and turn them into longer Facebook posts.
- **Level 4:** write a blog post about your class trip at *Nonseum*, using the language elicited at Levels 1-3.

Just like the previous activity, *A visit at Nonseum* can satisfy different needs and may be further supported by scaffolding (e.g., with the use of cue cards containing hashtags for students to match with the photos). Running it will most likely take up a whole 45-minute class and your students will appreciate your creativity to get their bodies and brains equally engaged.

## Conclusion

In sum, the power and potential of social media is immense. Online content released by YouTubers, Instagrammers, and TikTokkers can provide a fertile soil for teachers to amp up their students' motivation and spark exciting conversations in the classroom. Creativity, flexibility, and an innovator's mindset are bound to bring joy to teachers and students alike.

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# DIGITAL BRIDGES

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## **Abstract**

This paper tries to highlight the potentials of ICT application and the use of CLIL and CBL approach as powerful tools for English language teaching and regional cooperation and exchange in Erasmus+ programme.

**Keywords:** Digital bridges, Erasmus+, ICT, CLIL

## Introduction

One of the main objectives of modern education is to prepare students for life, learning, cooperation, and doing business in the world of modern technology<sup>1</sup>. As Strasser (2012) states our students are already in this virtual world, on social networks, gaming platforms, and communication tools, as users, rarely as creators of digital content. However, they rarely use digital tools for education. On the other hand, many educators use smart phones, mobile apps, and web tools for educational purpose for presenting and teaching, creating, and sharing learning material, collaboration and communication, and partly for assessment. A number of educators use this way of work less confidently, mainly because they lack the competence for to work in a virtual environment.

## Digital bridges Erasmus+ Project

Through this project partner schools from Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Northern Macedonia will share examples of successful use of modern technology for enhancing digital competences of all teachers thus improving the competences of all students through exchange of experiences. It is expected that through the project more teachers will use modern technology for teaching and learning.

Digital bridges Erasmus project aims to incorporate the use of ICT and CLIL/ CBL approach and international cooperation so that the teachers and students benefit and develop the competencies Dale and Tanner (2012).

The main objectives of the project are:

### FOR SCHOOLS

- improving capacity of organizations for international cooperation through exchange of good practice promoting use of modern technology and digital content
- greater use of existing equipment
- improving the respectability of institutions

### FOR EDUCATORS

- improving digital competences of teachers and school associates in relation to the European framework of digital competences for educators
- motivation for greater use of modern technology for educative purpose in all fields of education: digital content, communication and collaboration, assessment and individualized support, professional development, and international connection
- motivation of educators, school associates and students for greater participation in international projects within Erasmus+ programme, eTwinning and other programmes
- greater cooperation between employees in and outside the organization
- greater motivation for professional development and improvement of competences

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<sup>1</sup> Savremene tendencija u nastavi jezika i književnosti, Zbornik radova, Filološki fakultet (2007).

- professional development of participant and greater self-confidence for participating in future projects
- exchange of successful examples of activities realized with the use of ICT through educational online base of innovative activities in education
- breaking the picture of digital technology as something “difficult” and “distant”
- improving organizational skills and skills for project work

## FOR STUDENTS

- connection and cooperation of students on international level, strengthening the capacities for international cooperation
- empowering students for using digital technology critically, creatively and productively respecting author's right and stating sources
- learning how to use digital tools for learning
- developing the idea of benefits of using technology in the right way
- developing competences for life-long learning
- cultural exchange through international cooperation

During the project there will be four three-day joint staff training events and short-term exchanges of groups of pupils. Training events and exchanges of students will take place at the same time in one partner country so that in every event there will be three teachers and five students from each school, except for the host school. Through mutual trainings teachers will exchange examples of successful use of digital tools, web tools and mobile apps in different stages of teaching and assessment. Students will participate in workshops which stimulate cooperation, communication, collaboration, and creative use of digital tools for creating and sharing content. They will learn the basics of computer programming and work with modern equipment. Through internal trainings and presentations new skills and competences will be exchanged between teachers in one school.

A product of project activities will be an online base of practical ideas which will be created by teachers from all schools, for different subjects, and which will be available to all teachers to exploit it in order to use digital content more confidently.

## **Traffic – lesson layout**

We will try to present the project using a CLIL lesson in which students learn about traffic regulations via the English language. The lesson will be presented to the teachers and students of the schools participating in the project. As Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) state CLIL approach enables the students to acquire the English language in the setting related to everyday subjects and topics they learn about at school and in everyday life. We used eliciting and different types of activities in order to boost students' motivation (Scrivener (2005).

### *Lead-in part (10 minutes)*

The participants answer the question "How do you understand the term Digital bridges in Education setting?" by typing their name in a web tool Answergarden. We discuss the answers.

### *Main part 1 (10 minutes)*

Traffic – ICT and CLIL

The presenters elicit the topic name – Traffic, and discuss their experience in the traffic and differences in traffic regulations in various countries.

Traffic vocabulary is taught and revised via Quizlet app-<https://quizlet.com/674588435/traffic-flash-cards/?x=1qqt>

The other presenter demonstrates the activity where English and Technology are taught together. The participants are involved in the task.

They discuss the activity and give feedback.

### *Main part 2 (10 minutes)*

Traffic signs

One example of cooperation and cultural exchange among the teachers and students is analyzed and some of the web tools used, such as Wordwall and Canva, are explored. The participants explore Wordwall options by doing some of the quizzes on Traffic signs: <https://wordwall.net/sh/resource/29419033>

<https://wordwall.net/sh/resource/29418842>

<https://wordwall.net/sh/resource/29419020>

<https://learningapps.org/view14383201>

### *Main part 3 (10 minutes)*

Traffic situations

The participants in groups discuss the traffic situations depicted by Canva posters.

All activities and the participants' evaluation are posted on Padlet virtual board.

### *Close up (5 minutes)*

Question and answers.

The participant fill in the self-evaluation check box.

## **Conclusion**

The participants said that these types of activities boost motivation and engagement as well as language skills. Lessons delivered using of ICT and the CLIL/CBL approach, and the opportunity to cooperate with peers from the region, may improve the competences to all project participants. Such lessons, created and shared by teachers from all schools, for different subjects, can lead to students adapting to the requirements of modern life.



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# TASK ACHIEVEMENT AT THE MATURA: A TOUGH ROW TO HOE?

**Anže Perne,** *Gimnazija Vič*

## **Abstract**

The talk/workshop was intended for novice English teachers or teachers who are not external examiners at the General Matura. After an initial introduction of the criteria and the additional instructions that examiners receive every year, the participants were asked to apply the criteria to the actual students' compositions provided by the National Examinations Centre (Ric). The participants were asked to assess each composition and then share their Task Achievement (Slov. *sporočilnost*) score and provide arguments for it. For each of the compositions we looked at the "subcriteria" for assessing Task Achievement: *kdo je / komu piše, namen, tema, oblika*. There was a discussion after each composition. The workshop was a short mock standardisation session.

**Keywords:** Matura, task achievement, assessing writing

## Introduction

There are four marking criteria for Task 1 (Short Composition) of Exam Paper 3 (Writing): Content, Task Achievement, Vocabulary, and Grammatical Accuracy. The talk/workshop investigated Task Achievement, which refers to the student's ability to answer the question properly. In order to do this, they have to do all the things the prompt asks them to do and write a clear, well-developed answer. (Please note that some exams use different terminology for such a criterion, e.g. Task Response or Communicative Achievement.) In the context of the General Matura English exam, the student is required to know how to write the following compositions: a formal letter, a formal e-mail, a report, and an article. It is much easier for the teacher to prepare their students for this part of the exam if they know how the compositions are assessed. This is why being an external examiner creates an added value for the examiner's students. As not all English teachers are external examiners and novice English teachers have to first meet certain requirements to be able to apply to become an external examiner, this talk/workshop was intended for such teachers only.

## The "Subcriteria"

The Task Achievement descriptors are available in the guide for the General Matura English exam at [www.ric.si](http://www.ric.si). To ease the assessment process, the subject testing committee prepared a set of "subcriteria" that all examiners must follow (Ilc et al., 2016). They are as follows: the author knows who they are and who they are writing to (Slov. *kdo je / komu piše*) – 1 point, the purpose (Slov. *namen*) – 1 point, the topic (Slov. *tema*) – 1 point, the layout (Slov. *oblika*) – 2 points. The student does not have to express directly who it is they are writing to or who they are – both can be expressed indirectly (e.g. by means of using pronouns). If the student makes one error in layout, they lose 1 point only. If the student makes two or more errors in layout, they lose both points, even if some of the elements are correct.

## The Tasks

Ric kindly provided three compositions that had been written at the General Matura English Exam in the spring term 2021. The standard level students had to write a formal e-mail based on the following prompt (*spomladanski rok 2021, osnovna raven*):

You are spending a semester abroad at Centennial High School in Urbana, Illinois, USA. To prevent cheating on exams and interruptions during classes, the school management has decided to introduce a complete ban on smart phones on the school's premises. As a representative of the Student Council, write an e-mail of 120–150 words to the school's headmaster, in which you

- explain why students oppose such a ban and
- suggest alternative ways in which the school can prevent cheating and classroom interruptions.

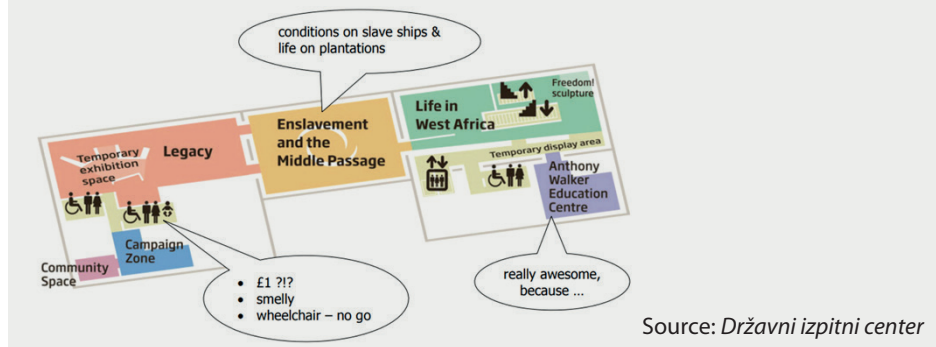
Your name is Dominik(a) Novak.

Source: *Državni izpitni center*

The higher level students, however, had to write a report (*spomladanski rok 2021, višja raven*):

You have just returned from your school trip to England. During the trip, you visited the *International Slavery Museum* in Liverpool, which focuses on the history and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. In their attempt to improve their services, the museum has asked its visitors to write a report. Use the museum floor plan and your notes to write a report in 150–180 words in which you

- describe the two sections of the Museum that you found most memorable and explain why
- describe the section that needs improvements.



Source: Državni izpitni center

### Assessing Students' Compositions

The participants were given three compositions and were asked to read through each of them and assess Task Achievement only. (The students' grammatical errors were not corrected.)

#### Composition #1 (standard level)

Dear Sir,

I am writting to you on a behalf of the Student Council. The school administration of Centennial High School decided to prohibit smart phones and to write down this to it basic rules.

Our students are not eager on this fact and they contradict school management intention. Students are convinced this is breaking and violation of civic rights. They are offended. They believe you do not trust them enough. Smart phones are needed on daily basis.

We suggest a collaboration. For not to ban phones totally, place new locker to a school main hall. Before we have lessons, we put smart phones in closet.

In this was, phones will not ring during the class. If the phones are going to be in a locker, we will prevent cheating and stealing.

This would be an elegant solution for both sides.

Yours faithfully,

Dominik Novak

Source: Državni izpitni center

The Task Achievement score: 4 out of 5

The author of the e-mail knows who they are, indirectly it is clear who they are writing to (1 point); the purpose is clear (1 point); the topic is suitable (1 point); one element of the layout is not suitable – the polite conclusion, the other elements of the layout are appropriate (1 point out of 2).

*Composition #2 (standard level)*

Dear Sir,

I am writing to inform you, because I do not think, that the best idea is to ban cellphones on school property. In my opinion the students are going to be angry and not happy with that condition. I am sure that you know that students and kids nowadays are really depended on their cellphone. Of course it is not good, but we are not going to be able to change that. Also I am sure that every student needs his/her phone for a different reason. Phones can be very interruptive during class and you can also cheat with them on tests, but I have some alternative ideas to prevent cheating and classroom interruptions.

First one is that maybe we do not ban cellphones completely but we restrict the use of them during class and of course during tests. To do that, we can buy a basket for every classroom and we make the students leave their phone there. They can get the phones back when the class or the test is over. Another way is if we let them keep the phones. We would warn them to put the sound down or turn the phones off during class. Whoever would not obey the orders, would get his/her phone taken away for a day or two. If it would be up to me, I would choose the first option. I really hope that you are in agreement with me and wish you a very nice rest of the day.

Sincerely yours,  
Dominik Novak

Source: *Državni izpitni center*

The Task Achievement score: 2 out of 5

Indirectly, it is clear who the student is writing to, but it is not clear (not even indirectly) who the student is (0 point); the purpose is clear (1 point); the topic is suitable (1 point); the introduction is part of the first body paragraph or vice-versa, the conclusion is part of the second body paragraph or vice-versa – two elements of the layout are incorrect (0 point out of 2).

### *Composition #3 (higher level)*

#### My time at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool

##### Introduction:

I have been asked to write a report about my experiences at the museum and help you improve your services. In this report I will write about section of the museum that I found most memorable and a section of the museum that could use a few improvements.

##### Memorability of the museum:

Firstly, the sections of the museum that I found the most interesting are The life in West Africa section, because of its many interactive and attention grabbing exhibits, and the Legacy section, because it enables the visitors to connect with the victims better and it has an estetically pleasing design.

##### Improvements:

Secondly, the section, which in my opinion needs the most improvement is the Anthony Walker Education Centre section. It is not memorable at all and the layout of the exhibits makes no sense.

##### Conclusion:

In conclusion I think that some sections of the museum like The Life in West Africa and the Legacy sections are very well done and quite memorable, while a certain section, the Anthony Walker Education Centre section, needs some improvements. Other than that I found my time at the museum quite memorable and educational. I look forward to hearing your response.

[the student's real name]

Source: *Državni izpitni center*

The Task Achievement score: 4 → 3 out of 5

We can assume the student knows who they are writing to as this does not have to be expressed directly in a report. It is indirectly clear who the student is (a student who visited the museum as part of a school trip – the student did not need to mention the school trip). Hence, we mark this “subcriterion” with *1 point*. The purpose (to report on the museum visit) is clear – *1 point*, and so is the topic (the museum visit) – *1 point*. When it comes to the layout, the student included the obligatory headings, the composition is logically structured. One element of the layout, however, is missing – “Report” or “Report on” in the heading. Hence, we mark the layout with *1 point out of 2*. The student was not awarded 4 points out of 5, because the content is problematic. As the suitable score for the content is 1, as per Task 1 descriptors, the score of the other criteria is then converted (5, 4 → 3; 3 → 2; 2 → 1).

### **Conclusion**

Is Task Achievement a tough row to hoe? If we consider the Matura guide, it can be difficult to assess it as the descriptors are rather vague. However, the “subcriteria” ease the assessment process to a great extent. Teachers still need proper training, which Ric provides every year if the teacher is an external examiner.

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# ENGAGING STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF INTERACTIVE WORK MODES

**Uwe Pohl**

## **Abstract**

This article puts interactive work modes at the centre of getting students involved in the communicative language classroom. It provides a rationale for considering such modes in the context of student engagement, offers a visualisation of the different work formats and describes why this approach to planning and implementing EFL classes is beneficial.

**Keywords:** interaction, engagement, lesson planning



## Introduction

In the language classroom, *engagement* is a key condition for learning to happen. How to get and keep our learners engaged – with the teacher or each other – is also a real challenge. Among other things, it requires conscious classroom management (Scrivener, 2012), i.e., a mode of working which captures students' attention, thinking and feeling. In my own teaching and training I regularly use a few work mode 'blueprints' for successful classroom management. I have found them effective because they provide a framework for thinking about student engagement and for creating conditions that make it possible.

In this article I will first outline what engagement is and how engaging students might be conceptualised in a practice-oriented way. I will then present a visual representation of the interactive work modes I use frequently and highlight some key benefits of applying such modes in the classroom.

## The process of engagement

In an excellent conference presentation on the foundations of engagement, Sarah Mercer (2019) defines engagement succinctly as *participation and involvement*. She also draws our attention to what she calls three levels of challenge in order for students to get truly involved in the classroom. This differentiation also implies that student engagement is not a state but a *process* and I shall briefly describe each of the challenges below.

### **Creating willingness to engage**

This is the foundation of getting students involved, a kind of *pre-engagement* phase in the process. When students enter our classrooms they literally come from a different 'world', with concerns, wishes or worries of their own. In other words, just because the bell rings, their willingness or readiness to work cannot be taken for granted. Students can, of course, *fake* engagement but this just means doing what they are told without being really touched or drawn in by the methodology or materials we use.

Teachers who are sensitive to this fact will take the time to *read* their students at the beginning of class to gauge how present they really are and how ready to engage in the work they are meant to do. For example, whenever I notice a lack of such readiness in a student or the whole group, I may change my plans and start the class with a quick *random response* activity, e.g.

### **Stand up and look around if ...**

- *You have something troubling on your mind*
- *You haven't slept well last night*
- *Your birthday is this week/month*
- *You worry about the next test*

Alternatively, I ask the group what is going on. I may find that a test is looming in another class or, more recently, that concerns about Covid or the war in Ukraine are uppermost on students' minds. Allowing them a few minutes of *buzzing* in pairs or small groups in their

mother-tongue usually can take care of their need to communicate the concerns and feelings to someone.

### Triggering engagement

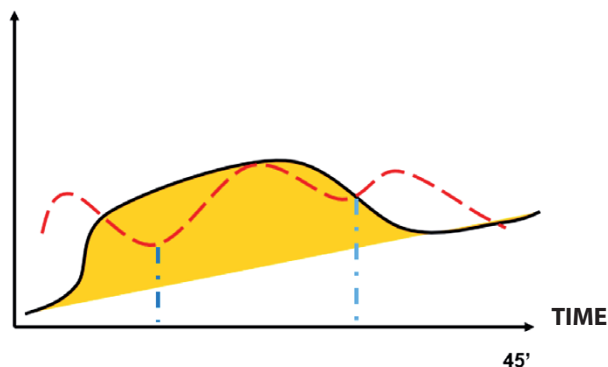
Sarah Mercer (2019) refers to this engagement stage as 'stealing the students' attention' or getting them 'hooked'. I have done this by choosing an attention-grabbing visual (photo, drawing or other image) or startling statistic (*One-third of adults still sleep with a comfort object*), for example, as lead-in for a listening/reading task on sleep problems of teenagers. Similarly, a polarising statement (*Women make better leaders*) tends to surface strong opinions and increase student motivation to discuss an issue. The spectrum of opinions can also be physically illustrated by asking students to do a line-up from *I agree* to *I disagree*. Among other things, this allows me to form small discussion groups quickly, and with a good mix of different views.

There are a number of verbal and non-verbal signs that show us that a trigger has been successful and our students are engaged. For example, we may notice how they make eye-contact with us or each other, respond to comments with a smile or real question. Sometimes intense classroom talk creates a certain low-level buzz or noise, even to the point that a group does not hear a teacher's question or instruction! And we know we have taught a truly engaging class when students linger and go on talking with each other even as the lesson has ended.

### Keeping students (dis)engaged

It is, of course, important to keep the initial engagement up during a particular task, mode of working or within the boundaries of a lesson phase. This can be achieved by task and time reminders, the teacher participating in an activity for a while or by requiring students to produce a specific outcome. But as the image below illustrates, any such cognitive, emotional or physical engagement can only be temporary. A very intense and long engagement phase (the yellow 'hump'), requires continuous effort, which is likely to tire students out and may lead to unintended disengagement.

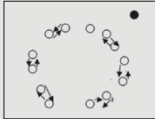
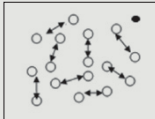
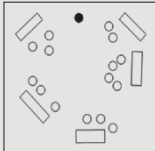
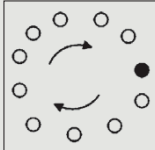
#### ENGAGEMENT


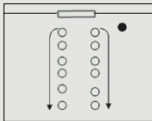
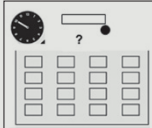
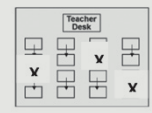
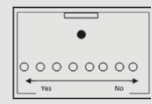
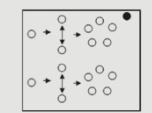


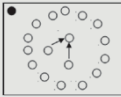


Instead, I usually aim for shorter engagement phases (represented by the red broken line) and so allow students to disengage briefly a several points in one class (blue broken line). Such prompted disengagement can take the form of a stretch-break, the move from group-based to a short whole-class activity or alternating the involvement of productive and receptive language skills.

**An overview of interactive modes**

The chart below is a visual illustration of the interaction patterns that characterize a particular way of working in the language classroom (Pohl & Szesztay, 2020). Each mode includes a brief description and aims that can be achieved by using it. As you go through the chart, you might want to think of a specific task or activity that could be done in this arrangement.

Interactive work modes		
	Name:	Notes:
	Buzz pairs	<p>Short, 1-2 minute oral task that pairs of students perform simultaneously. Open-ended, brainstorming tasks with no single correct answer are especially suitable.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Wake up minds, create energy, a good way to warm up students before a whole class activity.</p>
	Mingle	<p>A market-place type of activity during which students keep changing partners. They carry out a mini-task in pairs, then move on, form new pairs and carry out the mini-task once again.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Move around; gather ideas; initiate a conversation; communicate with other students they don't usually talk to.</p>
	Gallery walk	<p>The teacher turns the classroom into a 'gallery' by displaying a set of pictures, quotes, puzzles, questions etc. on the walls. The students then walk around in pairs, discuss the questions, place post-it comments on the pictures etc.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Introduce a new topic; create a relaxed atmosphere; build learner autonomy.</p>
	Round	<p>Students one by one respond to the same talking point – a question or a sentence stem to complete. For example: 'What's the best place for you to study?' The response needs to be short and the activity needs to move at a brisk pace.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Brainstorm ideas; give everyone a voice; get into group mode.</p>

	<b>Opinion Line</b>	<p>The teacher calls out a controversial statement and the students have to find their position on an imaginary Opinion line with ‘fully agree’ at one end and ‘strongly disagree’ at the other. Option A: the students indicate where they stand by physically moving to that place. Option B: the teacher walks along the line and the students stand up when she gets to their position. The teacher asks the students to justify their position. This is suitable for large classes.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Appreciate the richness of perspectives; justify your views; listen to one another; develop critical thinking.</p>
	<b>Team competition</b>	<p>The teacher divides the class into two teams, which then compete to do a given set of tasks. E.g. the two teams line up facing the board and the two students up front have to run to the board on a given signal and complete a task. Then they go to the end of the queue and the activity continues with the students who are now up front.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Collaborate; build team spirit; create energy.</p>
	<b>Group challenge</b>	<p>The whole class acts as a group to carry out a task in a given amount of time – to beat the clock or a given result with individual members contributing.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Boost whole-class energies; group building.</p>
	<b>Random Response</b>	<p>Students respond by standing up/sitting down/looking around at random or make a short contribution.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Allow attention to move around; create energy and flow in the classroom.</p>
	<b>Line-up</b>	<p>Students are given a task to think about and then find their place in the queue based on their responses, e.g. <i>Line up based on your height</i>. Alternative: The teacher calls out a controversial statement and students have to position themselves on an imaginary <i>Opinion Line</i> with ‘fully agree’ at one end, and ‘strongly disagree’ at the other.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Create energy; move out of sitting-passively mode; form groups by counting off students in the line.</p>
	<b>Think, pair, share</b>	<p>A three-staged activity set that ensures that diverse views, ideas are brought into a whole-class discussion.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students think individually about a question.</li> <li>2. They discuss their ideas in pairs.</li> <li>3. Pairs report back to the whole class.</li> </ol> <p><b>Aims:</b> Maximise involvement during whole-class discussions; bring in diverse viewpoints.</p>

	Fishbowl	<p>The inner group of students discuss a topic while the outer group observes. Students can swap inner/outer places on a signal (e.g. tap on the shoulder).</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> active listening, getting everybody involved.</p>
	Groupwork with roles	<p>The teacher divides the class into groups of 4-5 and gives each member a different role. E.g. <i>note-taker, discussion leader, time-keeper, summarizer, encourager</i>.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> Maximise participation; practise groupwork skills.</p>
	Cross-over groups	<p>First, each student in a small group is given a different number/ letter (e.g. A – D). The group then does a task. The students then form new groups of identical numbers/ letters, to share and discuss what emerged in the first group.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> learner autonomy and collaboration.</p>

### The benefits of using interactive work modes

In the context of student engagement, I see several key benefits to giving interactive work modes a prominent place in our methodological tool-box. As will be shown, they help to plan engaging lessons, tap into the communicative potential of a group, align individual energies and serve my broader educational aims.

### Visualising the lesson shape

The process of engagement has now become central to my lesson planning. For example, I start out by asking myself questions like the following: *How do I anticipate the process of engagement to unfold in this class? Which interactive work modes do I need to support this process?* In other words, I visualise the lesson shape alongside considering main aims, language focus, variety or timing, etc.

This allows me to see connections I might otherwise miss. For example, modes like *Group Work with Roles* and *Jigsaw Groupwork* are called for if I want students to tackle a more complex task independently. This, in turn, triggers questions about group size and composition, how to ensure clear steps, instructions and time limits as well as tangible outcomes for each working group. In addition, thinking in terms of a finite set of work modes has led to greater clarity about how best to harness a multitude of potential classroom *activities*. Visualising vital connections within a lesson shape in this way follows a holistic, rather than linear, approach to conceiving lessons and lesson plans and allows more flexibility in sequencing activities and a clearer focus on communicative aims (Foord, 2014:4).

### Students learn to communicate by communicating

This is no news to communicative language teachers for whom *buzz pair, mingle* or *think-pair-share* type activities are already classroom staples. The extent to which some of the

other work formats can be applied may also depend on the classroom layout and whether students are used to more conventional ways of working. In other words, it is up to a teacher to decide which work modes to choose or adapt and when. But in my experience, it is exciting and rewarding to sometimes use less familiar work modes because it pushes me (and my students) beyond our comfort zone of tried-and-tested work patterns. For example, a class discussion in the format of a *Fishbowl* or *Cross-over groups* will initially surprise my students. But once they are familiar with such an arrangement, they tend to enjoy and appreciate the different dynamics of communication that are generated.

### ***Tapping into the potential of group energy***

Experienced language teachers also know that they need to engage their learners holistically, i.e. as social beings who think, feel and have physical needs. At the same time interaction in the language classroom is a *social* encounter, to which the participants – the students and the teacher – bring their personal energies and perspectives. All of this gives rise to a dynamic tension which builds up and gets released in a way that is often described in terms of rhythm or *group energy*. Trevor Bentley describes this force as the “fluctuating balance of mental, emotional and physical intensity and vitality that can be felt like a positive or negative electrical charge in the air as if the group is switched on or off” (Bentley, 1994:23).

Whether that combined energy can become a positive force depends on a number of things. In any case, the individual energies need to be managed, that is harmonised and given direction (Senge, 1990). One way to do this is to use different interactive modes to prompt the flow of energy, to focus and channel it purposefully. Think, for example, of the familiar first-lesson scenario with sleepy, unfocused students. This might call for the teacher choosing a *Partial Physical Response* activity, *Team Competition* or a *Group Challenge*. Involving the whole class in a simple show-and-tell activity, doing a short *review buzz* in pairs involving physical movement or solving a short brain teaser exercise will likely raise the energy level and send a signal that class has started before moving on to, say, a coursebook-based listening or reading task.

### ***Sowing the seeds of cooperation and agency***

It is often said that the English language classroom is a prime site for developing skill sets that go beyond language competence, such as life skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills or global citizen skills. In their book *The Triple focus*, Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge (2014) single out three areas that teachers can help to develop in their students: self-awareness (*inner focus*), social intelligence (*other focus*), and an understanding of the complex, interconnected, globalised world we all inhabit (*outer focus*).

In my view, extending the range of engaging classroom interaction patterns is instrumental in raising such awareness, intelligence and understanding. For example, initiating a conversation, learning to take turns in groups, asking open-ended questions, staying focussed during a discussion and finding our public voice as speakers within the classroom group all require such a shift of focus - and practice!

Anne Bogart, a theatre director, reminds us that this cannot be taken for granted. She writes that in many of our cultures “collective action is suspect. We have been discouraged to think that innovation can be a *collaborative* act. There has to be a star. Group effort is a sign of weakness. We revere the cowboy riding out alone across the prairie...” (Bogart 2001:29).

By contrast, when students routinely share stories, ask each other questions, listen to different viewpoints and learn to work together in different formations, they can see themselves as active and collective shapers of a classroom community. Once such seeds of cooperation and a sense of agency have been sown, students may take their cooperative abilities beyond the language classroom and into the wider communities they belong to. When that happens *being engaged* almost takes on the meaning of the German word *engagiert*, which denotes the quality or state of being both (socially) *aware* and ready to *act* on that awareness.

### **A final word of encouragement**

I have found that making work modes rather than activities central to my thinking about engagement has made the issue of classroom management easier, not harder. In addition, it has prompted a different take on the question of *differentiation*, i.e. how to respond to the manifold differences in our classrooms in terms of learner abilities, needs, styles and preferences in an inclusive rather than exclusive way (Tennant 2017:6). Each work mode changes the atmosphere somewhat and enables different forms of interaction and conversation between teachers and students and among students. Over time, new habits of relating are formed, individual differences are appreciated and a more cooperative and ultimately richer classroom culture can emerge.

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# LET'S PLAY ENGLISH

**Julija Preac**

## **Abstract**

How to make my students more motivated and active in learning English? Using games and other fun activities livens up my English lessons and ensures that my students leave the classroom wanting more. I use games to warm up the class at the beginning of the lesson, during the lesson to give students a break, or at the end of the lesson when I want to revise the topic we have just learned about. There are many different games that I play with my students. Some are used to test vocabulary, others practise communication or the use of tenses, etc. They also encourage cooperation, develop creativity and strengthen students' confidence. By using games, I am able to pull back the attention of my students in no time. They help me to recognize weak and strong areas of my students easily, and create a positive class environment where every student can progress according to their abilities.

**Keywords:** games, motivation, cooperation



## Introduction

I have been an English teacher for 23 years now and I still find myself wondering what else I could do to motivate my students, create a better learning environment and make them active participants of my lessons. Using games is one of the things that always works no matter how old the students are. In my presentation I talked about games and other fun activities that I use in my English classroom.

## Why games?

Games provide a safe environment for students to use the target language, they create a sense of fun and enjoyment, removing the stresses and pressures of 'formal education'. Games also allow the students to learn in a relaxed and light-hearted manner.

What are the benefits of using games in the classroom?

1. Games are a source of relaxation and stimulation and make the brain work less.
2. They include better mutual group dynamics and encourage whole class participation.
3. They encourage active speaking/listening.
4. They are a fun way of practice and recalling vocabulary and phrases.
5. They add variety and energise.
6. They are a method of self-assessment.

(Albano, 2022)

## Warmers/ice breakers

These fun games can be used to warm up the class at the beginning of the lesson, during the lesson to give students a break, or at the end of the lesson when you have a few minutes left to kill. They encourage concentration, cooperation and above all they foster movement.

### *Hotspot*

Students walk around the classroom without touching. The teacher calls out the number. Students must form groups of that number of people as fast as possible. When they have achieved that, they sit down. Students stand up again, walk around the classroom, and the teacher calls out a different number. This game encourages physical skills and it works well to form groups for the following group work activity.

### *Up, down, freeze*

Students walk around the classroom without touching. A teacher calls out commands and students have to respond, as following:

- Up – stand still with arms raised above your head
- Down – crouch down on the ground
- Freeze – stand perfectly still and silent
- One leg – stand on one leg
- Head – put hands on your head
- Shoulders – put hands on your shoulders
- Turn – turn and face in the opposite direction
- Go – continue walking

Students who respond late, or incorrectly, are out of the game and must sit down. This game encourages concentration and physical skills.

### *People to people*

Students walk around the classroom in pairs. A teacher calls out action commands, for example, *nose-to-nose*, *back-to-back*, *head-to-knee*, *elbow-to-eye*, *shoulder-to-toe*... Students must connect these body parts together. When the teacher calls out *people-to-people*, all students must change partners. You can run this game as many times as possible, to get as many students working together in pairs. This game is a great ice breaker, it fosters movement and it works well to form pairs for the following pair work activity.

### *In the manner of the word*

One student is selected to leave the classroom. In the meantime, other students choose an adverb, for example, *noisily*, *sadly*, *slowly*, *angrily*... The selected student returns and suggests a simple mime, for example, getting dressed, eating spaghetti, cleaning teeth... Other students must all perform this mime in the manner of the chosen adverb. From the style of their actions, the selected student must try to guess the adverb. The guesser has three turns at guessing the adverb. When the adverb is revealed, a new student is selected to leave the classroom and the game is repeated. The game is good for practising grammar parts (adverbs and present continuous), it encourages cooperation. (Chaplin, 2016)

## **Team games**

I like to incorporate team games in my English lessons because they encourage cooperation where every student can cooperate according to their abilities. Since many students are very competitive, team games encourage healthy measure of competitiveness among the students. Here are some of the team games that I like to use in my English lessons.

### *Details*

In this descriptions game, students describe things they see in a short video clip (chosen by the teacher). To begin with, divide the students into teams of three or four. The teams watch a short video clip and write down as many descriptions as they can from what they see in the video. For each suitable adjective-noun collocation the students write down, they score one point, e.g., *sports car*. For each complete sentence describing part of the video, students score five points, e.g., *'The man in the red sports car is driving fast'*. At the end of the video, go through each team's answers. The team with the most points wins the game. This game is good for practising verbs, prepositions, etc.

### *Grammar races*

This grammar revision game is ideal for reviewing grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary. It also helps you to spot problem areas or common mistakes your students are making. Divide the students into four teams. Choose one student in each team to be the 'runner' and one to be the 'writer'. Assign each team with a number and prepare a space on the board for each team to write on. Have the writers stand next to their space by the

board. Give each team a different keyword. The keywords should be vocabulary you wish the students to revise. Each team must then come up with sentences using their keyword. When a team thinks of a sentence, they tell the runner. The runner then goes to the board and tells the sentence to the writer who writes it on the board. After a few minutes, stop the round and evaluate the sentences from each team. Award one to three points for each sentence, depending on the grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary usage. Play a few rounds using different keywords each time. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

### *Charades*

This amusing ESL miming game can be played by students of all ages and levels. Divide the students into two teams. One player from each team comes to the front of the class and sits facing their team with their back to the board. Write a word you want the students to practice on the board or you can write it on a piece of paper and show it to the two teams. The aim of the game is for the students in the teams to use actions to describe the word. Teams are not allowed to speak or spell the word in the air. The two players watch their teammates and try to guess the word. The first player to guess the word scores a point for their team. That player then changes places with someone in their team. The other team has to keep the same player in the seat until they are first to answer correctly. The next word is then written on the board and so on. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. You can upgrade this game by using short sentences instead of words.

### *Word grab*

Here is a lively ESL music game to play with students. Prepare a popular song that your students would like. Choose 10 to 15 words from the song that you want to practise. Write the words down on pieces of paper and stick them to the board in a random order. You can also make the game more difficult by writing words that sound similar on the board. Next, divide the class into two teams. Have each team stand in a line in front of the board. Play the song. When a word comes up in the song, stop the music straight after. The two students at the front of each line then race to grab the word from the board. Each student gets one chance. The first student to grab the correct word wins and keeps the word. The students at the front then go to the back of the line and it is the next two students turn to play. Repeat the song as necessary until all the words have been grabbed. The team with the most words at the end of the game wins.

### *Blankety blank*

In this fun ESL TV game show, students try to complete sentences in the same way as the chosen student. Divide the students into two equal teams. Have one student from each team come and sit at the front of the class. Read a sentence to the class using the word 'blank' for the missing part of the sentence, e.g., My sister likes to 'blank' before going to school. The aim of the game is for the team members to complete the sentence in the same way as their teammate at the front of the class. Everyone secretly writes down their missing word, without talking. When everyone has written an answer, the team members take

it in turns to say or show their word or phrase. The student at the front then reveals their answer. For every matching answer, teams score a point. Two new students then come up to the front and so on. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

### *Mastermind*

This ESL word game is based on the TV game show 'Mastermind'. Begin the game by choosing a secret word you want the students to revise, e.g., children. The length of the word depends on the knowledge level of your students. With higher-level students you can use longer words. Draw one line on the board for each letter in the word, e.g., eight lines. Divide the students into two teams. One team goes first and tries to guess the word by choosing a word that has the same amount of letters, e.g., elephant. If a letter from their word is in the secret word but in the wrong place, put a cross under the letter. If a letter from their word is in the secret word and in the right place, put a tick under the letter. The other team then uses the information to make another guess. The first team to guess the secret word scores a point. Repeat the process with a new secret word and so on. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. (see Teach this)

### **Conclusion**

Many people say that being a teacher is not a job but a mission. I can easily sign under this statement. Before I enter my classroom I always think about the students that are sitting there, waiting to learn something new and exciting. Each student is different, they have different abilities, different prior knowledge, different learning styles, different backgrounds. It is impossible to satisfy the needs of each and every student even if you try hard, but we can do our best to prepare a wide range of different activities. Using games in the English classroom is surely one way to suit different types of students. In my future teaching career, I will continue to look for new teaching materials, activities, games... that will make my lessons more interesting for students and more effective for their learning.

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# THE MAGIC OF MINDFULNESS IN CLASSROOM

**Tanja Primožič**

## **Abstract**

Most teacher training focuses primarily on content and pedagogy. Learning and cultivating skills of mindfulness—the ability to stay focused on one’s present experience—can help us to promote the calm, relaxed, but enlivened classroom environment that students need to learn. Mindfulness can also help us to become more effective at reducing stress and conflict and developing more positive ways of relating in the classroom, which can help us feel more job satisfaction. The practice of mindfulness trains our minds consciously to become more aware of our inner and outer experience, and teaches us how to manage our emotions.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, awareness, focus, attention, conscious

## **What is mindfulness?**

The term mindfulness refers to a state of awareness. This arises through paying conscious attention to the present moment, on purpose, non-judgementally, with curiosity and compassion. Mindfulness is not a relaxing technique, even though a relaxed state can be one of the results. Meditating and focusing on the breath are just two of the ways we can consciously pay attention and become more aware of ourselves and the present moment. Mindfulness is a lifestyle practice. (Kabat-Zinn, 2012).

## **Why is mindfulness important?**

Have you ever been driving somewhere in the car and noticed that you have arrived at your destination without really noticing the journey at all? Or have you ever got to the bottom of the page in your favourite book and then realized you have no idea what you just read? This is due to being in a semi-conscious mental state called the autopilot mode. In the autopilot mode we are only partially aware of what we are doing and responding to in the present moment. If left to its own devices, it can end up masking all our thought patterns, emotions and interactions with those around us. Humans are habitual creatures, building functional “speed-dials” to allow us to survive in the present moment whilst the mind is elsewhere planning for the future or ruminating the thoughts.

The challenge in the autopilot mode is that we are responding to the present moment based solely on habits learned from the previous experience, rather than making conscious choices based on the nuances of the moment itself. Luckily, mindfulness can help. Paying attention on purpose is the skill needed to move out of the autopilot mode. As such, the practice of mindfulness starts with learning how to pay attention. The more we focus, the more the brain builds strength in the areas involved in this type of concentration and the easier it becomes to do it automatically. In other words, it becomes a habit to be present.

## **Mindfulness in schools**

In the early years of primary school, a child’s brain is developing more quickly than it ever will again. Young minds are in the process of forming their very first habits and so learning to pay attention on purpose will have a long-lasting impact on their capacity to learn and succeed in school.

For teenagers, it is even more important. During adolescence, our brain undergoes a unique period of neural development in which the brain rapidly streamlines our neural connections to make the brain function as efficiently as possible in adulthood. Like a tree shedding branches, it will get rid of any pathways that are not being used, and strengthen up the areas which are being used: use it or lose it. If teenagers are not actively using their ability to pay conscious attention and spending too much time in the autopilot mode, through screen use and in periods of high exam stress, the brain won’t just not strengthen their capacity to focus, it may actually make it harder for them to access the ability to pay attention in future.

## **Benefits of mindfulness**

Mindfulness practice can positively affect our body, minds and psychological well-being (Siegel, 2007). Different studies have concluded that regular practice can improve our mood, reduce distractions, increase positive emotions, decrease anxiety and help people reduce stress. Mindfulness has also been successfully used in the treatment of substance abuse and eating disorders. The practice of mindfulness in school can lead to greater attention and focus, better memory, and an ability to concentrate and plan successfully, as it reduces daydreaming and stretches the mental muscle. The biggest impact of mindfulness is also grounded in the regulation of one's emotions, which has a positive impact in reducing test-related anxiety.

It also encourages better behaviour in the classroom and resilience to cope with stress and negative emotions. It facilitates a calming experience and helps students become more aware of their reactions. Wellbeing, coming from the practice, can promote empathy, better social skills and collaboration.

## **Mindfulness for teachers**

Teachers and school staff can be trained by mindfulness trainers and can propose formal and informal practices to their students. Teachers can also use mindfulness to prevent job stress and burnout. The formal way of practising is through meditation. Sitting in a comfortable and upright posture, paying attention to the breath, noticing sensations in the body and observing thoughts and emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The goal of this meditation is not to leave the mind blank. This is impossible. The goal is to observe reactions, let them go and then take the attention gently back to the breath. The informal way is about bringing awareness to everyday activities, such as eating or brushing your teeth. There are different attitudes that are related to mindfulness in everyday activities, such as non-judgmental and allowing for self-compassion and the so-called beginner's mind.

Mindfulness can help teachers understand their emotions better, which in turn can help them manage students and situations they might find difficult. Example: think about a student you find challenging. Recall the last time she or he did something that made teaching difficult. What emotions does it elicit? Do you feel annoyed? Frustrated? How does your body feel? Are your shoulders tense or your stomach tight? Acknowledge your feelings. Do not try to change them. Just accept them and listen to the thoughts that arise from these feelings. This will help you learn how your emotions function and gain some control over them. It may help you to record your reactions in a journal (Jennings, 2015).

## **Mindful activities with students**

Mindful snacking is a great activity to practice with students at break or lunch times. We eat so habitually that we rarely notice the huge range of sensory stimulation going on under the surface of this process. Example: hold the snack in your hand and notice 3 things you can see about it. Close your eyes and notice 3 things about the way it feels in your

hand or to touch. Keep the eyes closed and notice 3 things you can smell about the snack. Bring the snack slowly to your mouth and taste it. Notice 3 different subtle tastes. Generally, students report that from this mindful activity they found the food extremely tasty, and that they discovered a lot of details in the shape and the action of eating that they never noticed previously. Moreover, the activity is usually relaxing and the mind can calm down a lot, since the attention is focused on the exploration of food.

Counting the breath is another activity that can be done with students. Example: close your eyes or take a soft gaze in front of you. Focus your attention on the breath going in and out at the nostrils. Notice the temperature of the breath on the way into the nose compared to its temperature on the way out. Count 10 breaths to yourself. In 1, out 1, in 2, out 2, and so on. If the mind wanders, gently guide it back to the breath. When you get to 10, you can either stop there or go back to 1 and start again. In time, it will become easier to stay focused for the full 10 breaths and for even longer.

In addition, mindful use of screen and technology is another activity that can be practised in schools during lessons or you can even ask your students to practise this at home. Screen use is a major culprit of setting the brain into autopilot mode. Example: close your eyes and notice how you feel before you have started. Consciously decide on one task you need to do on the device. Consciously think about the steps you need to do to achieve that task and visualise yourself doing them. Then turn on the device and actually complete the task. When you have finished, put the device down and walk away or do something different. Notice if you wanted to carry on using the device (this does not mean we need to).

## Conclusion

We have seen what mindfulness is and is not and how you can bring it in your classroom. Most teachers start off as teachers who use mindfulness, moving to become a mindful teacher by being aware of what is happening in the moment. It takes time and practice with multiple techniques. While we may never be able to stop that student from making an offensive remark, we can control our reaction, which in the end may make the student think twice about doing it again.

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# A PORTFOLIO OF TECHNICAL ARTICLES

**Tina Rajhman,** *Šolski center Kranj*

## **Abstract**

A portfolio of technical articles can be used as a means of grading students in various educational programmes. The article first explains the theoretical background of portfolios and their advantages. Next, the grading criteria is presented, along with some examples of portfolios made by students of vocational and technical upper secondary programmes. Finally, I decide whether we should keep or stop using portfolios of technical articles as an assessment tool.

**Keywords:** secondary school, portfolio, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), assessment

## **A portfolio – theoretical background**

A portfolio is an alternative form of formative assessment. According to Genesee and Upshur (1996), it is “a purposeful collection of students’ works that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievement in given areas.” Language portfolios have been used since the mid-1990s, and nowadays they are often part of learner course books. They usually consist of one or more of the following parts: the passport, the language biography and the dossier. The passport contains information about the learner’s language learning experiences and their certificates. The language biography can also include the person’s language learning history, as well as self-assessment materials and a checklist of future learning aims. The dossier is a collection of the learner’s course work and project work. (Iturain, 2007) Considering these definitions, a portfolio of technical articles is a dossier.

## **A portfolio in EFL classes**

English in vocational or technical upper secondary programmes includes general English and English for specific purposes (ESP). Whereas English teachers are well-equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach general English, they cannot be expected to fully master ESP. Usually they do cover a certain amount of topic-specific vocabulary in class, but it often turns out that the students have various interests in a certain field, which is difficult to cover in a limited number of lessons. For this reason, a portfolio of technical articles is a good way of giving the students the opportunity to pick the topic(s) they are interested in.

## **Advantages of portfolios**

As stated by Iturain (2007), portfolios have many advantages for both learners and teachers. I am going to focus on those that motivated me to use portfolios in my classes. I decided to assign portfolios to students in order to enhance their motivation by giving them a chance to choose topics which they consider interesting. I also wanted to give them a chance to organize their own work and time, which can be especially useful during the period(s) of online schooling. Not only do portfolios lead to greater learner autonomy, they also give the learners more responsibility and control, which helps them grow as students and individuals.

## **Portfolios as formative assessment tools for EFL**

Many of my colleagues started assigning portfolios of technical articles during the Covid-19 pandemic and home-schooling. Since the students got used to this task, most of us still use it to obtain one of the grades. The instructions and criteria can vary because they need to be adjusted to the programmes and the classes.

The students are expected to present and analyse five to ten articles, depending on their educational programme. The length of the articles also varies accordingly. The topics have to include topics such as computer science, electronics, mechatronics, ecology, medicine and work safety. All of these topics include EFL and are part of the oral part of the vocational

matura exam. The articles that the students choose may not be old – they had to be published in 2021 or later, which stops the students from handing in their assignments from the previous school year. Each article should then be analysed in a certain way. The students are expected to focus on expert vocabulary and mark five to ten words, phrases or expressions that belong to ESP. They are then expected to explain this vocabulary in English and translate it into Slovene as well. The final part of the portfolio is a summary of the article. The portfolio can be handed in on paper or sent via Microsoft Teams, so that the due date would stay the same even if the class or a certain student is quarantined.

Finally, the students discuss two of the articles with the teacher – one article they choose themselves, and the other the teacher. In this discussion, I focus on the content of the article and some subject-specific vocabulary.

### **Examples of portfolios of technical articles**

The 2021/2022 school year was the first school year in which I assessed portfolios, and for that reason, I did not know what kind of results to expect. As it turns out, they vary greatly, and mainly depend on the students' educational programme and/or their success in English lessons.

The least successful were the students in a three-year vocational programme. Even though they were supposed to analyse only five articles, only four out of twenty-nine students handed in their portfolios on time. The rest of the students is still handing in their work, which often has to be corrected a few times. As an interesting fact, I would like to add that one of the portfolios was handed in on time, but included articles written in Slovene instead of English.

The results of the students in the senior year of technical upper secondary programmes were better. Twenty-two out of forty-eight students turned in their portfolios on time. The best portfolios were made by the students in the third-year of technical upper secondary programmes. In this class, only five out of twenty-six students missed the deadline, whereas most of the other students did a good job with their work.

In general, the students mainly forgot to mark the expert vocabulary or forgot to explain it in English. It also turns out that struggle with recognizing ESP vocabulary, so they just pick words that seem demanding to them but do not belong to expert vocabulary.

### **Conclusion**

I think that a portfolio of technical articles is an interesting approach to getting familiar with ESP. The students get used to reading texts with expert vocabulary, which will hopefully help them in their oral matura exam. Last but not least, teachers can assign portfolios regardless of whether classes are held at schools or online.

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# GETTING LEARNERS AWAY FROM THE COURSE-BOOK

**Lee Shutler**, *Hilderstone College, Broadstairs*

## **Abstract**

The article explores limitations of course-books and the problems of photocopying from other books. Finally, it examines possible activities and approaches that can best help the teacher exploit the world outside the course-book.

**Keywords:** Course Book, EFL activities

## Introduction

Course-books are good. Modern course-books, especially, have developed into very user-friendly instruments of learning. They have been written, re-written and piloted to make them useable. They provide us with direction, and the students with progression, and they allow us not to have to re-invent the wheel every lesson. That having been said, there are times when we need to move away from the book – to vary the pace and the interaction patterns of the course and to provide extra practice where necessary.

There are several useful books of photocopiable materials which help provide variety in the classroom. However, as we have all found out to our cost, the length of time spent in preparation with scissors, glue, and maybe a laminator, is often greater than the length of time the activity takes in the classroom.

For this reason, I will always urge teachers to laminate these types of materials. It means that preparation is minimal the next time you decide to use the activity.

Teachers will also photocopy from other course-books. However, we do need to be aware of the limitations placed upon us by copyright law. In the UK, this means a full unit of a course book or 5% of the whole of the book, whichever is greater.

Then again, publishers have become wise and now it is common to see that key information in a course-book has been coloured so that when photocopied, it will not be visible. We should also remember that, by law, workbooks should not be photocopied.

An internal staff CPD session at Hilderstone College identified the following things, amongst others, that make copying course-books an unsatisfactory classroom experience:

- Grey edges.
- Poorly copied photographs.
- A page that refers to other pages of the coursebook.
- Irrelevance of some of the information of the page.
- A dirty screen on the photocopier.
- Unreadable words and information.
- The danger that the students might have used that page elsewhere.

Therefore, teachers need to look elsewhere for practice activities. There are a lot of free materials and exercises online that can help – ranging from the main publishers to organisations like the British Council. However, teachers need to check that all the exercises are suitable for their students and that the grammar exercises are both accurate and use a vocabulary range that reflects the capabilities and knowledge of their students. A lot of the material you find online has not been through the same editing and piloting processes that a course-book has been through.

In many circumstances, the most appropriate source of practice will be the students themselves – their lives, their experiences, their imagination and their opinions. Using these valuable resources, students will be able to create language and practise grammar in a way that is personal for them. It will be more memorable, more precious and, more importantly, more interesting. This work can be done at sentence level, it can be through conversation and discussion, and it can be competitive or collaborative. This can happen even at low levels. A student's family tree will probably be more interesting than that of a fictitious character in a course-book. The same student describing their room (furniture and preposition practice) will be more fun and produce better language than the same course-book characters.

Course-books will often take a PARSNIP approach to topics that should be avoided (Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, "isms" and Pork) (Thornbury 2010). The teacher has a much stronger understanding of their class and may feel that there is a fruitful discussion to be had – perhaps based on a recent news event in their country. The teacher will just need to make sure that comments do not become personal or offensive and that the discussion stays on an academic level.

My workshop explored various activities and ideas we can exploit in the classroom that allow us to get away from the course-book and build on what it has already provided.

This includes ideas from dogme (Meddings and Thornbury, 2009), dictation and dictogloss (Rinvolucri and Davis, 1989), community language learning, task-based learning, as well as some covid-friendly activities that involve minimal preparation and materials. These activities and approaches can be used to spice up lessons (or a series of lessons) rather than be the course approach in itself. They can be interspersed through the lesson, be warmers or "enders", or an entire lesson in themselves. Sometimes, the fun of an activity away from the course-book is to see where it leads us as a group.

### **Activity summary**

Example activities. Amongst others, these were discussed during the workshop:

#### **1. Coin Game**

Teachers divides up recently learned vocabulary onto the board. One half will be grouped as heads and the other as tails. In pairs, a student spins the coin and makes a sentence or a question using one of the words on the board. Encourage students to develop a short conversation before the other student takes their turn.

Note: 1) if you have English coins, this will add to the experience.

2) you may want to show the students how to spin a coin safely.

This activity I first saw at a workshop in Japan in the late 1990s.

## **2. Pronunciation or Vocabulary Tennis**

Divide the class into 2 teams. I get them to stand in a line opposite each other (at a socially safe distance). The teacher provides a sound (e.g. /3:/). Each team, in turn, has to produce a word with that sound: bird, word, thirteen, shirt, worthiness etc. The round ends when a student says the wrong word, hesitates or repeats. Award a point to the winning team and produce a new sound or topic. (Rinvoluceri, 1984, pp. 38-39)

Rinvoluceri's version is slightly different as he describes an activity with two people in front of the class. Either way, it is a fun, lightly competitive way to re-enforce some vocabulary.

## **3. Snakes and Ladders**

Using simple "Word" tools and a piece of A4 paper (landscape), create a table of 20 or 25 spaces.

Bottom left is "Start" and top right is "Finish". On the other 23 spaces, put some instructions for conversation topics and instructions for creating competition within the game. For example, if your game was on the topic of education, one conversation topic could be "talk about a subject you disliked and why", while other squares could have instructions like "you handed your homework in late, miss a turn".

Ideally have about 8 competitive instructions and 15 topics for conversation.

If your school does not have enough dice, students can use coins. A "head" is worth 3 places while a "tail" is worth 1.

## **4. Pronunciation activities**

A coursebook can only look at sounds in a very generic way. You know the problems your students have with pronunciation and can produce appropriate recognition and production activities and games. Staffroom discussion often centres around how a pronunciation activity as a warming activity can be the launchpad to energetic fluency lessons.

## **5. Silent Way activities**

Although a full course based on the Silent Way approach may not be to everyone's taste, there are many activities that can be adapted for the general language classroom. Rinvoluceri's Grammar Games is a good source (Rinvoluceri, 1984, pp. 56-96)

## **Conclusion**

After almost two years of restrictions, darkness and Zoom, we appear to be moving towards a period where we learn to live with Covid and try to manage the effects it can have. In the classroom, we teachers have to remember some of what we used to do in the happier pre-Covid days – classroom activities rather than computer activities; real communication rather than just learning stuff. In the meantime, we have picked up new skills. However, now is the time to remember how we used to teach, remember all the things we used to do, and start doing them again. We have to remember all our best activities. The current



generation of students have missed out on nearly two years of education and inclusivity. We owe it to them to produce the best lessons possible.

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It is worth reading the comment section of this blog-post.

A generic source of inspiration:

- Moskowitz, G. (1978). *Caring and Sharing in the Language Class*. Harlow. Longman

# PROJECTS WITH RELATIONS AT HEART

**Daniel Starski**

## **Abstract**

The following text is a summary of the experiences of using projects in teaching at a secondary school with students' entry language level at B1 (according to CEFR). The text outlines the theoretical concept as well as shows some basic applications of it.

**Keywords:** projects, high school, creativity

## Introduction

Learning requires respect. That one sentence repeated more times than there are stars in our galaxy (or even beyond) could summarize my entire presentation. I do not think there was a case of a professional development conference for teachers without a speech on the subject. I cannot believe that there is a single course for our profession that does not cover the issue. Yet, somehow we come across teachers and situations that should never happen. In a twisted version of fairness, many of us strive to count every 0.001 of a point, make tests as hard as they get, and be foolproof of fools that would somehow lower our fame in town by their mediocre final exams scores. We keep telling our students those grades are just a marker, yet many of us treat tests and numbers in the register as something holy. We forget how we were when we were young, and even if we do remember, we still forget how humiliating it was to be stripped of our individuality and how much unnecessary stress we had from people who should not be allowed anywhere near a school.

The presentation I delivered in Moravske Toplice at the IATEFL Slovenia conference was mostly on implementing projects in teaching. That is what I have been doing for a while at the high school I work. I do not use the projects as a means to simple vocabulary or grammar acquisition. I also do not deduct points for every mistake a student makes in them, even though they are essentially projects for ESL courses. I see their use in a broader context. But most importantly, I do my best to keep the human factor in grading by giving my kids a chance to succeed and, for once, feel good about themselves.

The paper allows me to share a bit more than I could if I only spoke in the 45-minute slot at noon on Friday. Apart from some of the ideas of projects (in subsequent chapters), I have a unique opportunity, to begin with, the basis of what I believe education should be.

## The theorem behind the projects

In 1954, Carl R. Rogers, one of the founding fathers of humanistic psychology, focused his attention on creativity. Living in the times of bloodshed and the emerging use of the atom, he claimed that the promotion of conformity, which was at the core of teaching, was adverse to our very existence. He stressed the need to focus more on creativity and provided a set of tools to achieve the goal.

According to Rogers (1954), the issue at hand is NOT limited to arts, moral judgment, or the scope of changes it sparks. There is no observable difference between being a painter in downtown Ljubljana and an engineer in MIT working on a revolutionary fuel to limit the use of fossil ones. It is more a natural effect of an innate drive of humanity to progress that requires acceptance of ambiguity of surroundings, internal valuation of the product (the creator has to feel it is theirs), and the possibility to play freely with elements. To limit the adverse effects of fear that follows the creative process, Rogers (*ibid.*) suggests avoiding judgment and offering acceptance (that results in a climate of psychological safety and freedom).

Think at this point, how often does your teaching allow for creativity according to this definition? I am not trying to accuse anyone, as even some of the ideas I present in my speech limit the creative process students are allowed, but it seems to be a good moment to think about it.

Fifty-five years later, a group of American scholars asked volunteers from two high schools in the Pacific Northwest to share their thoughts on their lives in the form of responsive essays to one of the given subjects. Four hundred and sixty volunteers were involved in this project by Mark Girod, Michael Pardales, Shane Cavanaugh, and Pam Wadsworth (2005). Out of those one-third name school and teaching methods as the leading source of boredom in their lives, while one-fifth also write about fear and stress even though they were not on the list of available prompts. It seems that teaching has not gone far from what Rogers was trying to warn us about.

Another set of researchers in 2013 addressed the issue of student engagement in class. After careful examination of the available data, Michael J. Corso, Matthew J. Bundick, Russell J. Quaglia, and Dawn E. Haywood proposed a framework they had called SEC to foster this crucial process. As it turns out, the relation of T and L is essential to getting our students engaged. Apart from the usual practices attributed to a good teacher (staying after hours to explain complex issues, being fair), asking questions about daily lives to learn more about a student creates a unique bond that has empirically proven effects on content intake. This matches well with Rogers' view on building a genuine relationship between the therapist (or a teacher), and the patient (or a student).

With all this in mind, I cannot overlook criticism from various scholars. In his paper, Stanley D. Ivie (1991) mentioned several shortcomings in Rogerian attitude to education. In short, he maintains that what works in a therapy session does not translate well to a learning setting. In his paper, he mentions, among many, that students should not be burdened by adult decisions (Rogers' attitude towards freedom of choice as to what the learner should learn) and the adult world (Rogers stresses the realness of the educator). He also brings up the issue of Rogers' view on prizing (unconditional acceptance) is improper since children always know when they are liked.

However, the problem nowadays is not whether to introduce Rogerian ideas in schooling in full swing, but rather can some of the elements of his thought be applied to teacher training and will introducing those elements solve some of the problems we encounter. While I agree with Ivie (1991) that teachers should never attempt to toy with the role of a junior psychologist (and sometimes fail at not doing that), there is a sentence I cannot overlook. In his paper, Ivie (ibid.) states that "Children do not wish to know all (underlined by Daniel Starski) the human frailties of their parents and teachers". No matter what various theories or experts claim, no teacher would enter a class and treat their students as mates sitting over a beer and talking about ALL the issues! However, the ability to say "I was wrong, I am sorry" is the exact thing a young person needs to hear from adults. If they

emulate our behaviors, what role model do we promote without this? Also, Ivie's (ibid.) claim that students know if they are liked by a teacher, is plain wrong. The key issues schools need to deal with daily are misunderstandings originating from the generation gap and lack of communication. Since relationships are a two-way street, claiming that children instinctively know things about our attitudes towards them, makes teachers look either ignorant or narcissistic when they fail to reciprocate and misunderstand their cues.

Finally, looking even at a paper by Elaine Meyers and Virginia Walter (2011) inspired by Kaiser Family Foundation's January 2010 report on teenage screen time, it seems that the Rogerian view is more positive than not. In their insightful work, they summarize their findings of what teenagers needed from libraries. In the middle of their discourse, they mention Mark Bauerlein's fear of the current youth's focus on technology and loss of vertical modeling (as a direct consequence of hours spent on communication within their generations). As it turns out, what teenagers enjoy and need from librarians is a genuine relationship with a genuinely interested adult.

### **The core principles of projects**

With all the above in mind, with Rogerian principles at hand, projects with relations at heart need to meet specific criteria.

First off, the utmost respect of every student is paramount. The projects I ask my students to perform, in most cases, are impossible to produce without long preparations, extensive research, and (sometimes) teamwork. With that in mind, no work conducted by my student is ignored or ridiculed. If a teacher cannot genuinely praise a student for the work they had spent their week on, one should not even start using this method.

Another thing is that projects are a means to an end, not the goal itself. Apart from fostering the growth of a student in a certain area, their role is to build relationships and students' outlook on how to create and maintain them. If a student decides to plagiarize their work (the worst crime in the book in my classes), it should not lead to a severe punishment that leaves smoke and ashes. The very fact that I talk with a perpetrator and do not grade such work is emotionally difficult. However, I believe it to be a teaching moment as well. Among many things, students will fail several times in their lives. How they do it largely depends on what they experience in their formative years. If we hit their moments of weakness with a force of a hurricane, they will emulate our response in their future relations. Then, if one day your graduate's child is your student and in some moment of honesty tells you that their parent is a tyrant with elevated expectations, think twice about who to blame.

I also do my best to include my learner's opinions as much as possible. Every year I conduct an extensive survey where I ask for some comments regarding the year that passed. Then in September, I outline the changes I made to my projects after going through their answers.

The next thing to consider is how much to ask of them. I usually have one mandatory project per semester (and I give two options to choose from) and one voluntary to let them get an extra grade. Asking more from a student that spends 35 hours a week at school, and has two subjects on an extended level would be inhumane.

Finally, I do not take their rejection personally. Involuntary projects juniors usually have high attendance, around 60-70%. In sophomore and senior years, it drops to 10-15%. When that happens, I never feel disappointed. On the contrary, I praise the work I receive and show them appreciation.

### **Sample projects**

When it comes to mandatory projects, I have two to offer: geography and poetry. I present each of them to the students, asking them to make a group decision on which to go with. Last year, based on the surveys I had received, I allowed for individual picks, and now I am thinking of keeping it more individualized than not in higher grades.

To briefly describe one of the mandatory projects, the one on poetry is, in essence, choosing a poet out of five given, choosing a poem at least 16 lines long, learning it by heart. Then in a set week (one lesson is impossible), every student presents their poem alongside the author's short bio and analyses (professional alongside their own, they are both of equal value when the graded). The project, apart from the obvious memorization, forces the students to do extensive research, read a lot in English, understand the vocabulary and the thought behind the poem, and then present it in public. In this project, one of the most crucial elements is praise, support, and respect. I see how much effort my students pour into their work, and I never let that go unnoticed. There were many cases when students who were far from perfect with pronunciation received A+s and praise. I noticed how much energy this gave them for further work. Some of them I am lucky to call my friends now.

When it comes to voluntary projects, I usually offer one of the following per semester: breadcrumbs or #challenge. They are of lower weight than the mandatory ones but still address valid issues of our reality.

Breadcrumbs is essentially a picture with a clue from my town that the students need to find (by deciphering the hints in the rhymed text). I usually ask them to either walk around and find specific things in the area (e.g., all the embassies, monuments, etc.) or author a story/poem somehow inspired by the place. The project is quite popular, as I suggest group work (finding and walking around). Even though it requires less work on their side, the outcomes never fail to marvel me. In recent years about 80% of my students took part in them, and usually, when the weather gets better, ask repeatedly for a new breadcrumbs project.

#challenges draw fewer students, as around 10-15% of them decide to take them on. In essence, I think about what they might miss. To name a few of my challenges from recent years, they were about: sleep, time outdoors, time without electronics, time without sugar.

Then I inform the classes I teach that I challenge them to two weeks of doing/not doing something. Their task is to do whatever the challenge is about, write a ten-sentence blog entry/journal each day, and write an essay on two things they enjoyed and two they did not (submitted on the last day of the challenge). The crucial element here is flexibility (allowing them to fail once/twice and still get a grade), grading their work (not accuracy, always A+), personalized feedback (that shows them I read through their journals), and no criticism as to how they did their challenge. This particular project is introspective, usually stirs a lot of emotions (not necessarily positive). Besides, while attending a training session in creative writing, I learned one simple truth: to teach a student writing, they need to write. In this project, they write fifteen genuine pieces of writing.

## Conclusion

In post-COVID school, projects foster rekindling friendships, curiosity, and joy of learning a language. Of course, they are not universal, and some students will rebel or ignore our efforts. Still, if you introduce them with relations at heart, the results are always heartwarming. For that one reason, I hope that since you read this article, you will give those projects a chance at least once. If you need any help, write me at [danielstarski@protonmail.com](mailto:danielstarski@protonmail.com).

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# INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS – YES OR NO?

**Lidija Strmšek Pisanec**

## **Abstract**

As teachers and coordinators of international and other projects we often find ourselves in a dilemma and we face many challenges along the way. How and where to start? This talk and workshop should give some basic insights and possibilities. Teachers can choose and start an eTwinning project or Erasmus+ project. The first one is easier whereas the second is more complicated since you get European funds for the project. To start and familiarize oneself with international cooperation and experiences I would recommend eTwinning which can also grow and develop into an Erasmus+ project in the future. It is all about getting to know and appreciating teachers and our work across Europe and involving our students to be active participants in the process.

**Keywords:** international projects, eTwinning, cooperation



## **Introduction**

Although starting and executing an international project with and for the students sounds motivating and as something that could be done in a heartbeat, that is not really the case. As teachers and coordinators of such projects we often find ourselves in a dilemma and we face many challenges along the way. How and where to start?

## **What do I want?**

It is a real challenge if the answer to the above question is I don't know. That was the case with me. All I knew was that I wanted to give my students more opportunities to use English than I had when I was at school. So, I started looking for information and I attended numerous seminars where I got so much information that I did not really know what to do with it. It was all a bit too overwhelming for me. I learned that there are two different ways of getting the students involved in international cooperation and interaction with their peers from around Europe. The first one is Erasmus+ projects and the second eTwinning projects. It is important to understand both because that makes it so much easier to decide which one suits you best.

## **Erasmus+ vs. eTwinning projects**

Erasmus+ is the European Union's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe (see Erasmus+). There are two key actions to choose from, KA1 and KA2, and they are quite complex with numerous sub-possibilities and characteristics. It takes time to familiarize yourself with them and then see if this is something that you would like. KA1 learning mobility opportunities aim to encourage the mobility of students, staff, trainees, apprentices, youth workers and young people. The role of the organisations in this process is to organise these opportunities for individuals (see Erasmus+. Opportunities for organizations). The action includes individual mobilities of students and teachers from kindergarten to secondary schools as well as adult education. This roughly means that if you are a teacher and would like to take your students abroad and would also like to learn more about educational system in other countries you wish to visit, then this would be the action for you. KA2 focuses on the cooperation among organisations and institutions which is expected to result in the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels (see Erasmus+. Cooperation). Like in KA1 there are also numerous possibilities in KA2 but the one that is mostly used and helpful for teachers is called Small-Scale Partnerships. What all the above mentioned programmes have in common is the fact that you need to apply to the national agency, which in the case of Slovenia is CMEPIUS. Probably the most important fact is that you get the funds for all the expenses, all the mobilities and activities planned in your application, since Erasmus+ is funded by the European Union.

On the other hand, there are eTwinning projects. Unlike Erasmus+ you do not receive any sort of funding for eTwinning projects which has its advantages as well. eTwinning is the community for schools in Europe and it offers a platform for staff (teachers, head teachers, librarians, etc.), working in a school in one of the European countries involved, to communicate,

collaborate, develop projects, share and, in short, feel and be part of the most exciting learning community in Europe (see eTwinning).

Currently, there are over one million 37 thousand teachers and 230 thousand schools with more than 136 thousand active projects registered on the platform. It is easy and, more importantly, safe to use since everyone who wants to register goes through two steps of registration, which means that the national support organisation checks and makes sure that you are in fact who you say you are. The platform enables you to simply join an existing project which is recommended for teachers who are just beginning. You browse through the forum on eTwinning live platform and find an existing project which you would like to participate in. If you have an idea about your project and you want to start your own project, you need to find a partner first because you cannot start a project by yourself. There need to be two administrators and then other teachers can join your project. The most efficient way of finding partners is using the partner forums on eTwinning live, which you only have access to after you have registered and been accepted. The platform is similar to social media since it enables you to invite people into your contact list, follow other teachers and their work, create events, join groups, and participate in forums. Once your project is approved you get access to your own TwinSpace, which is an online classroom where your project really comes to life. You can start as many projects as you want and for each one you get its belonging TwinSpace, where you document everything related to the project. You can add your students, who then also have access to TwinSpace and can participate in different ways. Although you do not receive any funds for these projects, they are still very rewarding. And because you do not have any financial responsibilities you are not under any pressure regarding deadlines or reports or anything similar. Your hands and your mind are free to explore and do things and activities you have not thought of when you started the project, which is perfectly acceptable. Working with different dedicated teachers from across Europe is a valuable experience and they are just as happy to be working with you as you are to be working with them. For those reasons I have decided that eTwinning projects are what I need right now. I currently have three of my own projects and two projects which I joined. All my projects include the active roles of students. Some, naturally, are more active than others but they are more motivated to speak and use English and to do some research necessary for the project. I believe I can say without a doubt that this year the most precious and unforgettable part of all the projects was the exchange of small gifts with our partners from Portugal, Spain and Romania. The students were impressed and excited to try some traditional sweets and get some hand-made souvenirs.

## **Conclusion**

As a teacher I have always wanted to include my students in a project where they would be able to use English as a means of communication and in real context. Making such a decision is relatively simple. I am still a beginner when it comes to international experiences but at least I now have some basic knowledge of what my options are. At the beginning, I had more questions than answers and I believe that more teachers would decide to start a project if they simply had more information. For this reason, I have decided to share my

experience. There were many challenges when I first started an international project, and even though there were seminars on the topic, I soon realized that I had to learn most of the things on my own. I would like to share this with teachers who are thinking about diving into an international project but are not quite there yet. The workshop will get the participants involved so they will have a chance to learn, try and do things on their own.

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# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ... THE TOPICS WE FEAR TO DISCUSS

Jasna Šebez

## **Abstract**

Taboo topics have always had a complicated status among the topics that teachers of any subject include in their yearly lesson plans. Mostly there are two groups of teachers: those who avoid taboo topics completely, and those who try to tackle them in various ways, thus opening up serious, sensitive, but rewarding and eye-opening discussions. The aim of this article is to discuss the benefits and dangers of discussing taboo topics in English lessons as well as introduce different ways and possibilities of including them into lessons of English language learning. The article tries to demonstrate that taboo topics should be part of any subject curriculum, but should be included with a great deal of preparation, care, and sensitivity.

**Keywords:** taboo topics, language learning, sensitive language, cultural differences

## Introduction

Teachers of any subject have always had difficulties with including sensitive, complicated, even culture-specific topics into their lessons, whether due to the lack of knowledge, understanding, research, or simply lack of time for all of the aforementioned. However, dedicating time to research a specific topic which is either sensitive for a certain group of people, hard to discuss for another group or just really difficult to grasp and comprehend for many of the learners, does not only have positive effects and outcomes for learners, but offers a much deeper insight into different cultures, societies, and nations as a whole, thus widening our understanding of the world that surrounds us. This leads to a greater sense of understanding, empathy, open-mindedness, as well as appropriate articulation and opinion-making when immersing oneself into such discussions. These are the aims that all teachers should pursue and set as goals for themselves, not only teachers of English.

## Taboo topics – universal or culture-specific?

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, a taboo is »a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice, or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing; a practice that is prohibited or restricted by social or religious custom«. In other words, taboos are strongly intertwined with their social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This makes them a sensitive, if not a prohibited topic to discuss, share one's opinion on, comment on, etc.

The first question that arises when talking about taboo topics is whether they are culture-specific or universal. In most cultures, there is a common consensus that some topics are simply off-limits in any form of conversation, formal or informal, among friends, family members, acquaintances, colleagues, business partners, or travellers one meets in various parts of the world. These topics are: gender, race, politics, sex, religion. However, some taboo topics are bound to a specific culture, which means that one always needs to do research before either visiting a specific country, making personal or business connections with someone belonging to a specific culture, or when teaching about that culture. Culture-specific taboo topics vary from culture to culture; while some topics can be discussed easily in the USA, for example, they can be completely off-limits in Indonesia. Therefore, it is of key importance to do the work, do research, and know the limits and the boundaries – when a topic is off-limits, it should remain taboo. Breaking the rules can lead to unforeseen consequences, misunderstandings, embarrassment or just many awkward moments.

## Taboo topics in the classroom – yes or no?

(see Taboo in the classroom)

As teachers, we often set ourselves challenging goals and tasks. When it comes to discussing taboo topics in our English lessons, we first need to set our priorities straight:

- Is this topic going to contribute to the language learning, the culture learning, or learning in general?
- What are our students going to get out of such discussions and research on a specific taboo topic?

- Am I as the teacher competent, knowledgeable and informed enough on the topic to be able to foresee the outcome of a particular discussion or to stir the discussion in a meaningful and fruitful direction?
- Is there anyone in my group of students who is going to feel either embarrassed, humiliated, threatened in any way or, on the other side, being left out and ignored?

It is a fact that bringing taboo topics in the classroom presents both risks and benefits. The possible risks are that we may offend our students about their beliefs; we cannot (completely) control the outcome of the discussions held in the classroom (which can lead to a negative atmosphere, insults, inappropriate language, etc.); discussions on taboo topics can also trigger extreme emotional responses. On the other hand, there are several important benefits that such discussions bring. Logically, language learning is closely connected to culture learning as well, and when learning about culture, taboo topics are going to arise, so why not discuss them in a structured way? Another benefit is that discussing taboo topics gives students the opportunity to learn about appropriate topics and responses when they come into contact with other cultures, environments, or groups. Moreover, discussing taboo topics offers a great deal of language learning opportunities (e.g., euphemisms, slang, double meanings, symbols, gestures, PC expressions, etc.). Finally, by including taboo topics into English lessons, students have the chance to learn how to engage in a respectful debate, which enables them to be open-minded, respectful, emphatic, caring, and non-biased.

What to do when issues arise? Many teachers avoid talking about race, for example, because they worry about confrontation or other difficult situations. When such an issue arises in class, this is a good opportunity to explain to the students that this moment was an example of why we need to learn about such topics in the first place. For example, you can highlight that racist words and acts stem from stereotypical and biased beliefs about people of colour, different nationalities, etc. Drawing attention to this truth can be uncomfortable, but in order for students to unlearn racial biases, we have to shine a spotlight on these problematic beliefs.

During these conversations, ignorant comments and questions will most likely arise. It is crucial to remember that such questions come from a place of ignorance, and both children and adults have a lot to learn about discussing race, gender, and religion. We should question, rather than shame, students for their ignorance. The following questions can help discuss these issues:

- "I'm curious: Where did you hear that word, and do you know what it means?"
- "What was your intent by making that comment?"
- "How do you think it makes your classmates feel when you use that word?" (Kleinrok, 2019).

## Lesson planning

(Kleinrok, 2019)

1. Before planning your first lesson, ask yourself:

- Are you informed enough?
- Have you considered how these facets might affect the way you frame questions and respond to students?
- Are you reflecting on your own identity, biases, and dominant culture beliefs?

When you can answer all of these questions confidently and you are confident enough about your knowledge on a specific taboo topic and prepared for deviations – go for it.

2. To be able to take on the tough topics, you must create a classroom culture based on autonomy, trust, and mutual respect—not hierarchy. At the beginning of the school year, prioritise social-emotional lessons and community building over academic instruction. Remember that you can always go back and reteach a grammar lesson, but creating a positive classroom culture from the start is something you cannot afford to get wrong. There are also some simple guidelines you can follow to create a positive classroom atmosphere, where even the most difficult topics can be discussed safely:

1. Share what you're comfortable with and know enough about.
2. Ask questions and ask them with positive intent.
3. Seek to understand; don't criticize others if they don't understand.
4. Show respect to everyone, regardless of opinions.
5. Give positive suggestions.
6. Don't share other people's personal business.
7. Expect and respect mistakes.
8. Avoid jumping to conclusions and judgmental words (e.g., good, bad, right, wrong).
9. Don't be afraid if you don't know the answer – this usually leads to the best discussions.
10. And always remember a quote from diversity advocate Verna Myers: Diversity is being invited to the party – inclusion is being asked to dance.

3. If you are passionate about issues of equality and inclusion, and respectful understanding of other people's culture, beliefs, abilities, etc., it is easy to want to take on everything at once. However, these issues should not be confined to a single lesson. Instead, think of them as a lens through which you can teach other topics. For example, if you are teaching a nonfiction reading unit on biographies, choose texts that feature the lives of Black people, indigenous people, and other people of colour. If your students are crafting opinion essays, why not have them write about current events or social issues? etc.

## Lesson ideas

Depending on the level and the topic, there are various ways of introducing taboo topics in your lessons. Here are some examples.

With younger students, a good way to introduce sensitive or difficult topics is using books

that deal with, for example, racism, (expressing) emotions, death, homosexuality, physical disabilities, etc.

The books that I used and then built my lessons around the stories are:

- My Many Coloured Days (Dr. Seuss) – expressing emotions
- The Black Book of Colours (Cottin Menena) – blindness
- Rosa Parks (Kitson Jazynka) – racism, racial inequality
- The Lonely Tree (Nicholas Halliday) – death
- The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (John Boyne) – war, racism
- The Book Thief (Martin Zusak) – war, racism

I also prepared a set of lessons on the topic of the Holocaust (connected with the topics of war, race, etc.). I found several lesson plans on this topic on the Facing History and Ourselves website, ranging from diary writing, reading diary excerpts, watching short videos, interviews, observing maps, etc. As a follow-up activity, we watched the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and discussed it afterwards.

Another lesson I did with my high school students was a lesson on social inequalities. I got the idea from the Slovenian Amnesty International website, which has numerous wonderful lesson plans and activities that can be done in the classroom. The lesson I did was as follows:

1. The students were first introduced to the topic of social inequality (race, social status, environment, schooling, etc.).
2. They were then each given a role that the others did not know about, and they first had a few minutes to think about their role, to try to put themselves in the position of the person whose role they had, and so on.
3. The students then all formed a line and I started reading out different statements. If the students could agree with the statement in their assigned role, they could take a step forward. If not, they stayed in the same place. At the end of the activity, the students told each other their roles and could see where each of them was left standing. A discussion about social inequalities followed.

This was a great opportunity to discuss inequalities and how to overcome them. The students were able to step out of their comfort zones in an organised and safe environment, which allowed them to see the bigger picture and understand relations, prejudices, stereotypes, and different perspectives.

(The activity can be found in Slovene on Slovenian Amnesty International website and can easily be adapted to English.)

## Conclusion

Introducing and discussing taboo topics in the classroom presents uncharted territory. Nevertheless, this should not be a reason for us as teachers not to visit this territory and give our students the opportunity not only to learn the language, but also to learn about life and all its shades. After all, where will they learn about how to deal with difficult,



sensitive topics if not in a place where diversity, equality and differences of opinion should and are promoted?

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# USING ONENOTE IN ENGLISH LESSONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

**Rok Škrlec**

## **Abstract**

It is common for students to lose handouts or simply toss their marked assignments away even though they might need them later. Including OneNote in our lessons and assignments, whether face-to-face or online, should help students and teacher to keep some important handouts and notes saved online. It is an intriguing tool that allows students to publish their word and the teacher to give them feedback.

**Keywords:** OneNote, secondary school, e-notebooks, assignments, handouts

## **Abstract**

It is common for students to lose handouts or simply toss their marked assignments away even though they might need them later. Including OneNote in our lessons and assignments, whether face-to-face or online, should help students and teacher to keep some important handouts and notes saved online. It is an intriguing tool that allows students to publish their word and the teacher to give them feedback.

**Keywords:** OneNote, secondary school, e-notebooks, assignments, handouts

## **Introduction**

Why do teachers need all our handouts printed when we can tie students' phones and computers into our lessons and create an e-notebook? It was the pandemic in the last two years that prevented teachers from giving students handouts as sheets of paper, so we had to resort to other alternatives. One of them was OneNote, a Microsoft application, which was available to use for all our students in the school. The online tool, which can be used on any gadget or device with an Internet connection, has the potential to improve the quality of online classes or face-to-face lesson provided the students have access to the Internet. OneNote is available on our smart phones, smart tablets, or computers where we can open it in a browser or computer program.

## **Significance of technology in class**

Technology should never be seen as a substitute for traditional teaching methods. Contrary, it should enhance the student's experience of learning from home or in class. Flanagan and Shoffner (2013) argue that the usage of technology supports student-centredness and enables students to develop higher-order thinking skills, and can motivate them greatly when used correctly. The role of the teacher changes to the role of a mediator where a teacher can really boost motivation and encourage students to complete their assignments on their electronic devices.

The usage of technology can cater for different learning styles as well. Visual learners can benefit greatly when the teacher includes lots of pictures. While we can add videos and audio files for auditory learners, kinaesthetic learners are able to write by hand and use their hands more often when using the electronic devices.

Another important point that cannot be ignored is the fact that technology has become ubiquitous. Teachers have had difficulties preventing students from using their smart phones in class, so the easiest solution is to use their devices wisely. However, using technology in class provides a teacher with numerous opportunities how to use it so it is important to teach yourself and your students that it is not the quantity of exercises that matters – it is the quality. Every single task in lessons, be it online or in class, needs to be done with purpose and not as a means to pass spare time.

## Section of OneNote used for teaching

OneNote provides teachers with four sections. Each of them can be divided into multiple sub-sections and numerous pages. The first section that is useful for teacher is the Content Library. Instead of outdated posts or e-mails, the software enables teachers to post anything they need in the library section. This can be done for any kind of handouts: grammar exercises, vocabulary quizzes or instructions for assignments. The teacher can divide study material chronologically or by topic.

The second section is the Collaboration Space which is of great value when it comes to pair work or teamwork during lessons. Students can now easily work in groups and present their work in digital form – as a presentation, image collection, or simply taking a photograph of their notes. The section can be edited by anyone in the group simultaneously. This method of group work also provides the teacher with the opportunity to monitor group work and assign tasks more clearly.

All the handouts from the Content Library can be copied into the students' private notebook, where students can do exercises by typing or even writing if they have a device with a touch screen. The teacher can access each student's notebook and grade their work, make comments, and everything can be done according to student's individual learning style. The last section is restricted to teachers only. Here, teachers can save their resources and edit their handouts before posting them in the Content Library. Furthermore, curriculum, lessons plans, and notes about the class can be included in it. It works like a word processing software, but it is more user-friendly. The teacher can either attach files that are linked to other handouts and presentations, or paste a printout of the file so the content is easier to see. The combination of typing a text or writing on a touch screen is a great advantage of OneNote as well, providing teachers to use the software according to their needs.

## Using OneNote for literary lessons

OneNote can be used for any subject or topic, but it is a very useful replacement for handouts or materials. Not only do we use it for grammar exercises, vocabulary lists, and extra weblinks for students to read, but we have also implemented it in our literary lessons in the final year of grammar school, where students are required to read two literary works for their final Matura exam: *Lord of the Flies* and *Never Let Me Go*. Since there is no official material for teachers to use, this is a great opportunity for a teacher to practise creating study material and using OneNote for lessons and homework. For example, when discussing the setting in the novel *Lord of the Flies*, students were able to draw the map of the island and label the places of it. Their drawings were photographed and added to the Collaboration Space. If a teacher is worried that students might delete each other's text or pictures, students can submit their drawings in the Student Notebooks where they are private.

Another great way of using Student Notebook is assigning an essay title with instructions. Students can then write an essay in their word processing software, paste it to their

individual notebook and it is automatically saved. The teacher can easily access it as there is an option that enables the teacher to review student work. Students can also find the essay criteria attached to the page in the Content Library. Furthermore, the teacher is able to design handouts which we have done in the way that helps them revise knowledge needed for their final exam. We have created exercises that are based on the literary work to help students practise similar types of exercises as in the final exam, such as gap fill, verb gap fill and word formation exercises. Finally, it is common for students to lose their tests and forget about the corrections. If the teacher asks students to upload the photo of their test and correction to the student notebook, then students do not have to worry about losing their tests again.

## Conclusion

OneNote is a remarkable tool that can really help teachers make the lesson more diverse and visually attractive. It enables students to be able to access all the material and handouts in one place and revise more easily before their examinations. However, it can be hard for students to grasp the concept of the software at first, so it is encouraged that students get to know the software as soon as possible. Additionally, a teacher can start using OneNote gradually and not replace all paper handouts instantly, especially because it is very hard to use OneNote in class when students are limited only to their mobile phones. Due to the size of their screens, mobile phones it can be challenging to display the entire page as it is displayed on the computer. OneNote is most useful when used for homework or online classes but teachers can still use it to help students commit their work in class, draw, or write short texts during lessons at school.

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# I BELIEVE I CAN PROJECT

**Mojca Šterk**

## **Abstract**

I will describe the way I approach teaching, starting with a good rapport and safe environment and upgrading to international projects. The advantages of doing projects will be presented, development of certain skills, the fun and the motivational factors among others, as well as some possible disadvantages. Teachers' platforms and some good examples of projects will be presented.

**Keywords:** international projects, rapport, positive learning environment

## Introduction

The title *I believe I can project* basically means that everyone can do projects, any teacher with any class. My firmest belief is that a good rapport and safe environment are the necessary foundation for upgrading to international projects as well as any other classroom activities. According to Sergiy Movchan (2018), an expert in elearning at Racoon Gang, the factors that make a *positive learning environment* are establishing a supportive learning culture, addressing learners' needs, keeping it positive, providing feedback, celebrating little successes, feelings of safety and comfortability (one of the most important factors), and employing interactive games and activities. In line with prof. Richard Feynman (2021) »*Students don't need a perfect teacher. They need a happy teacher, who's gonna make them excited to come to school and grow a love for learning.*« the importance of a happy and emotionally intelligent teacher cannot be stressed enough. We are allowed to have bad days though, we are only human, no one is happy all the time.

## Projects

In my opinion one of the most motivational parts of my lessons is doing *international projects*. Among others they encourage creativity, problem solving, communicating, understanding of other cultures, productivity and there are benefits for future employment as well. Nevertheless, there are some disadvantages, they can be definitely time consuming, in some classes it is more difficult to implement some parts of the process or some teachers can stop participating in the middle of the projects. Different levels of English among students are an issue as well, however, tasks can be differentiated, the weaker students can get the easier tasks, such as creating logos, posters, drawings, taking pictures, creating simple presentations, the high achieving students can do more problem solving tasks, reading the articles, writing stories, creating longer presentations and videos. Everyone loves meeting new friends from other countries and most of them also like participating in live meetings. Even the shy ones, they observe from the background.

## Platforms

There are different platforms where you can search for projects or create your own and find partners for collaboration.

- The biggest and leading European educational platform is eTwinning, the number of registered teachers there is over 1 million. The possibilities of collaboration are endless.
- If you do not want to be limited to Europe, IEARN is for you. International Educational Association and Research Network is the leading educational platform in the world, there are many American, Asian and African teachers. You just choose the project of interest and join.
- There are also People to People International, an American non-profit organisation for global education, and epals.com where you can find e-penfriends for your students. One of my students had visited his penfriend in the USA and their story was published in the local newspaper.

I have been active in eTwinning and IEARN since 2007 and participated in quite some good projects.

### **Examples of good use**

One of the most memorable projects was the first *Teddy Bear Project* with Qatar. We exchanged our teddy bears which were then photographed in their school and at home and they were sent back with many gifts. It was quite an experience for the kids. Looking at the girls' pictures who were all covered and went to girls' school only was their first experience with the Muslim country.

Every year from 2008 we have been participating in *Holiday Card Exchange*, which is always great fun especially when we manage to organize some Zoom meetings with friends from Japan or Taiwan. One year we exchanged cards with Betlehem which was also a special experience. Every arrival of the envelopes with cards is an exceptional experience, the children get very excited. We make an exhibition in the hall and prepare a video as well.

The last memorable IEARN project was *Global Citizenship Community project* in which we participated with class 9. It was a year-long project and there were a lot of discussions, live debates and problem solving activities in Zoom meetings on Sundays. We covered the topic of a global citizen and all the sustainable goals. The students loved exchanging ideas with peers from Uganda, Ghana, Israel, Pakistan, Mexico, and the USA. It was unforgettable. Especially the end project when they decided we have to collect food for the families in need and it was a huge success.

In eTwinning we participate in different projects every year, some are short, (1-2 months), some are a year-long. Every year we join a project on the topic of the *European Day of Languages*, because it is always fun to learn some expressions in other languages, receive cards from other students and watch their videos. And we did many more. In *A Million Thoughts: My Journey 2020* we wrote our quarantine diaries and met in Zoom meetings. It received a National and European Quality label. In *Global Education with Web 2.0 Tools* we tried many new web tools for making logos, comics, crosswords. This year we are in four eTwinning projects and one IEARN project: *European Day of Languages 2021*, *Holiday Card Exchange 2022*, *E-kids learn together* (with class 5), *Mystery in Nature* (with class 7), *If Not Now When* (with class 6).

### **Conclusion**

I strongly believe that it is our duty to bring the world into the classroom. Projects are one of the best ways for broadening the students' horizons. Through them we are not only developing their language skills and solving problems but also promoting peace, love and understanding, which is a powerful ethical principle underlying all English projects.



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# ELEMENTS OF MOTIVATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

**Tjaša Šuc Visenjak**

## **Abstract**

Nowadays classroom activities differ in their use during the lessons. There are various activities that can be used during lessons. The most trending usage is the combination with ICT technology (information and communications technology). Where does their magic come from? They make the lessons interactive, because several ICT elements can be used (such as interactive worksheets, applications with quizzes, short videos, etc.), the lessons become more interesting (because students can relate to topics that seem interesting to them, are “up to date” and evoke their eagerness to actively participate during a lesson). Interactive activities carry several motivational elements and resultantly include each member of the classroom. The magic lays simply in different elements of motivation and topics students can relate to. This keeps students focused and they even enjoy a topic they mostly wouldn’t, like for example teaching grammar. Students don’t like a typical teacher, who is just a presenter, but a teacher, who is an entertainer.

**Keywords:** motivation, English, ICT, teaching

## **Introduction**

Nowadays classroom activities differ in their use during the lessons. There are various activities that can be used during lessons. The most trending usage is the combination with ICT technology. They make the lessons interactive, more interesting and include each member of the classroom. The magic lays in different elements of motivation and topics students can relate to.

## **The Key of Motivation**

Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning. Learners with good attitude towards English are more likely to work hard and keep going when learning gets challenging. Considering Cambridge English (2022) there are two main types of motivation. Learning English for a particular purpose and learning English because you enjoy learning, having fun and making progress. Learning for a particular purpose includes abilities to get a job, get into university, to travel, etc. Learning for joy and fulfilment tends to be the most effective form of motivation. During the lessons, I always focus on cultural aspects of a foreign language, like music, films, certain celebrations and holidays, sports, etc. Students are also more motivated when they have a positive impression of English-speaking people and cultures. If they like the music, films, games or sports, they are more likely to want to learn the language. Motivation is key or represents a kind of magic that evokes the students' interest and makes them memorize the content of a lesson.

Therefore, I will share a successful lesson experience, where my students broadened their horizons during a lesson for the exam preparation. The lesson was a mixture between grammatical and vocabulary tasks, as well as listening, reading and writing comprehension. To make a common lesson appealing to my students, I decided to use various applications, where they could do a variety of tasks and check their knowledge before the exam. Some students were participating remotely from home (because of quarantine); therefore I decided to make this exam preparation different from the others to include all students. The students working online, gathered in the virtual Google classroom, where absent students of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade already had their English classes. Due to current circumstances, lessons for some students had to be held online and the students got used to it surprisingly fast. It really shows how older students adapt quickly to certain situations.

## **The Lesson: Exam preparation differently**

First, I would like to share some facts about the lesson itself. There were 18 students from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The name of the lesson was Exam preparation and we devoted 2 lessons to it. The type of work was solitary and group work. There were also elements of interdisciplinary teaching (English, Computer science, History, Geography). The goals were to improve language skills, speaking fluency, and self-evaluation skills. The tasks themselves were interactive. Each student also got a tablet (school belonging for teaching) to participate during the lesson.

At the beginning we talked about the lesson itself. They already knew how the typical exam exercises look like, because they had already written a pre-test before. The first lesson was

focused on grammar and vocabulary. In the second lesson we focused on listening, reading and writing. After we checked the presence of all students attending, we watched a short video about a musician's day and completed a mind map (a word cloud) in Mentimeter (an interactive presentation software), where students had to write the vocabulary they remembered from the video. Afterwards we played quizzes on two different interactive platforms (Quizizz and Kahoot), where the students practised their knowledge about the present tenses (Present Simple and Present Continuous) and adjectives for describing personality.

Then we continued with interactive worksheets. The students had to test their vocabulary skills about countries and nationalities, as well as writing the correct numerals. We used interactive worksheets on Liveworksheets.com, where a lot of different types of worksheets can be found. They were eager to participate and wanted to correctly complete the tasks. The writing task was about a holiday, where they had to fill in the blank space on the assignment page in the Google classroom.

After the students completed all the tasks, I wanted to get their feedback about the different lessons we had. Each of the students got a poll to complete in the Google classroom, where all had the possibility to easily access the poll and give feedback. You can create the polls in the assignment page and determine whether you want short polling questions or multiple choice types. I asked them to rate the lessons about exam preparation, where they had 5 possibilities: bad/pointless, satisfying, indecisive, good and excellent. 16 from 18 students rated the lessons as excellent, 2 of 18 students rated the lessons as good. I was aware that the students will like a different learning experience, but that the rating would be as high as it was, that surprised and motivated me at the same time.

## Conclusion

Nowadays there is no room left for standardized frontal lessons with typical workbook work, there has to be more. The lessons should involve a variety of tasks, information and motivational work to keep the students' attention and make them resultantly memorising things better. It is the teachers where the magic lies, because we are not only presenters, but entertainers as well. Students like topics and people they can relate to. Considering the type of learners today, the teachers have to stay creative, inspirational, and informative. We have to simply challenge ourselves to simply teach and receive: be a motivation but never stop to learn.

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# FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ESL CLASS

**Mateja Trebec,** *Osnovna šola Mislinja*

## **Abstract**

The article describes formative assessment tools, which are a great way to achieve greater students' activity in a classroom and encourage responsibility in your students.

**Keywords:** formative assessment, tools, feedback, students' activity, responsibility

## What is formative assessment?

Formative assessment, also called assessment for learning, is a continuous process that includes methods and tools that support students in reaching learning goals. Teachers use these tools and methods to monitor students' progress and provide students with ongoing feedback that supports students' learning process (Silver et al., 2018). It differs from summative assessment since it does not grade students and does not happen only at the end of the course. As students learn, they encounter problems and challenges along the way. Formative assessment tools provide great way for students to take responsibility for their learning and help teachers provide a supporting environment.

## Why do I use formative assessment in my classes?

I have two main goals in my ESL classes. I want students to be *active* and I want them to *take responsibility for their work*. Formative assessment tools help me achieve this. I make sure that students are familiar with learning intentions and involved in the process of learning. I encourage students to set learning goals and help form success criteria because then they know what is expected of them and they know what to do so they can reach a certain goal or standard. Feedback is the key element which shows students not only what they did well but also how to improve their knowledge and skills.

## Personal learning goals

I always start a new school year with students *setting their personal learning goals*. This is important for enhancing motivation, it gives students a sense of purpose and helps them manage tasks. I help them set and meet small goals consistently, so they become independent and sure of themselves. Once they demonstrate they can accomplish their goals their motivation increases. Students usually all have similar goals: they want a good grade, want to work well, be successful at English to name a few. However, setting goals is not an easy task for everyone. I encourage students to set a few goals for the subject for the year and at the start of every unit. I also emphasize goals that support the learning environment, attitude to work, and behaviour. Students prioritize one or two meaningful goals. These should include guidance on how to achieve reachable goals.

Here is an example:

### MY GOALS FOR THIS YEAR

My goal is to...

Here is what I will do to achieve my goal:

Here are a few examples of goals that are not set well:

My goal is to <i>have good grades</i> .	Here is what I will do to achieve my goal: <i>I will study more.</i>
My goal is to <i>chat less during the lessons</i> .	Here is what I will do to achieve my goal: <i>I will not talk.</i>
My goal is to <i>improve my handwriting, keep my notebook neat</i> .	Here is what I will do to achieve my goal: <i>I will write neatly.</i>

There is no guidance on how to achieve the goal. Students brainstorm on how they can demonstrate their goals every day. I support them with questions: *What will you do to study more? Will you have a schedule? How often will you study? What do you need to make your studying successful? Who can help you? How will you do this? Where will you sit? Who will you sit with? What strategies will you use to talk less? Will you make notes of when you talk?*

See goals after discussion / brainstorming / guidance:

My goal is to <i>have good grades</i> . <i>I will study English every weekday for 15 minutes. I will read two books by December.</i> <i>I will ask Mija for help when I don't understand something. I will stay after class on Mondays and study with Mija.</i>
My goal is to <i>chat less during the lessons</i> . <i>I will keep a reminder on my desk: a note that says Don't talk. I will sit alone at the front of the class.</i>
My goal is to <i>improve my handwriting and keep my notebook neat</i> . <i>I will copy everything from the board. I will ask Ajda to lend me her notebook.</i> <i>I will stay after class to copy from her notebook. I will stick all worksheets.</i> <i>I won't forget my notebook at home.</i>

Students often need *check lists* so they can monitor their progress. If necessary, students change their goals (they are already successful at achieving the first one), they adapt some strategies, they ask for help.

Setting personal goals improves students' engagement in class and forces them to take responsibility for their work. Goals are strongly linked to motivation because they keep students moving through the process of studying. Consequently, students strive to do their best and take responsibility for their actions.

### **Forming success criteria**

Clear and understandable learning intentions and success criteria help students to track their own progress. Here is an example for a writing task I gave to six graders (students aged 11) and criteria we formed together. There is a tick box against each criterion, students have to tick the box before they hand the paper in.

Task: Write a short text about your typical day.

Criteria:

Phrases to describe your daily routine	
Adverbs of frequency	
At + time	
Punctuation (full stop at the end of the sentence)	

**Note-taking**

*Window notes (Tools for classroom instruction that works)* is a useful tool that helps students develop note-taking, a really important part of learning. This tool makes note-taking more interesting, focused and personal. It also focuses on writing skills (organizing ideas, expressing opinion, spelling), encourages thinking increases students’ discussion and most importantly students become active note-takes.

Here is an example: After reading a text about space explorers, I invited students to fill in the chart below. Students worked in pairs and shared their ideas.

<p><b>Facts</b> (What did you learn?)</p> <p>1969 Armstrong, Aldrin landed on the moon Apollo 11 – their spaceship collecting material 1<sup>st</sup> man on the moon spacesuit – 21 layers – extreme temperatures (day 120°C, night –150°C)</p>	<p><b>Feeling and reactions</b> (How did you feel about what you saw / read / heard?)</p> <p>It must be interesting to go on the moon. 21 layers??what?? I was impressed by N. Armstrong and his life.</p>
<p><b>Questions</b> (What do you want to know or wonder about?)</p> <p>What was it like to wear 21 layers of clothes? What were they made of? Who made them? How did they know the temperature if they were the 1<sup>st</sup> on the moon? How long did it take to build Apollo 11? How much did it cost?</p>	<p><b>Connections</b> (Can you make any connections to people, places, things you know about, experiences you’ve had?)</p> <p>I knew Armstrong was the 1<sup>st</sup> man in space, I saw a documentary. We learnt about this in history class. I believe they were on the moon but some say it was all a fake.</p>



## Effective feedback

*Self-assessment or peer- assessment* are useful tools when assessing writing and speaking. Students can check their own work or school-mate's work. I think giving proper and immediate feedback is one of key elements in class. It provides students with an opportunity to improve their skills.

*2 stars and a wish* is a tool I use all the time in all my classes. Here is an example: students read the text, check the success criteria, write down two things they think were done well and one recommendation.

Task: Write the pros and cons of distance learning.

Criteria:

- ☐ Do I have paragraphs?
- ☐ Have I supported my ideas with arguments, examples?
- ☐ Is my spelling ok?
- ☐ Have I used a vast, appropriate vocabulary?
- ☐ Have I used appropriate tense?
- ☐ Is the word order ok?
- ☐ Have I used any linking words?

*Write two things you liked and give one idea on what to improve.*

*Star:*

*Star:*

*Wish:*

ELENA (from Julija):

Star: You used paragraphs. I think your text is interesting to read.

Star: You used well supported ideas and you also used linking words.

Wish: You could list few more negatives sides.

ELENA (from Živa):

Star: I think she supported her ideas and thoughts well with different arguments.

Star: Her use of linking words is also greatly developed.

She used paragraphs and the right tense most of the time.

Wish: She could check her grammar a bit more, though.

Another feedback tool I use is *grow – glow*. This tool similarly as *Two stars and a wish*, points out students' strengths while also providing specific feedback to the students on how to improve their work. Here's an example.

Task: Write a text about your dream holiday.

GROW (things I need to improve, change)	Criteria (written together before students start writing)	GLOW (things I'm already good at)
short draft not enough ideas, not well developed lots of mistakes (!!)	draft ideas spelling word order present simple linking words	   ok ok ok

**Quick and easy quizzes**

I started using Kahoot quizzes during the lockdown. I find this tool one of the most useful tools for quick feedback. Quizzes are easy to create, user-friendly and provide immediate feedback for both teachers and students. I can monitor each student's progress and it takes me only few minutes to check. The quizzes are not graded and can be taken as many times as wanted.

**Being active and responsible is the future**

Formative assessment tools help students take more responsibility for their work and improves students' activity in class. Using formative assessment tools repeatedly and continuously help me achieve this. Setting goals develops intrinsic motivation which leads to independence and responsibility. When students are familiar with success criteria, they know what is expected of them. Effective feedback is of utmost importance because students then know how to reach a certain goal or complete a task successfully.

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# SURVIVE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

**Sandra Vida**

## **Abstract**

Teaching in vocational school is not the most honourable of positions in minds of many teachers or even students, but it takes a whole additional skillset to do it well and survive it. This article mentions several key insights from my personal practice, having had to pay a high price to learn them first hand. Nothing we learned at university could prepare me for it and sharing this with colleagues helped me articulate it to better use it in my future practice as well.

**Keywords:** vocational school, lower-level class, learning

## **Introduction**

Some years ago, for various reasons, I had to take over more and more of the worst classes at our school – vocational school. Worst in previous knowledge, worst in ability or willingness to learn English and worst in discipline. All those who have been through this, will know what it means. It has been hard, but I have also learned a lot and I would like to share the insights here with you.

Most of you know what I am talking about when I say vocational school. In Slovenia, after primary school, the brightest, the high achievers go to Gimnazija, finishing with Matura, aiming for university. These are great students, mostly willing to learn, well behaved, understand why they are there and sometimes even share the same passions as the teacher.

Those less eager for university, still either clever but less willing to learn or vice versa – less clever but willing, go to so called 4-year technical schools.

What is left, and that is mostly those with learning difficulties or social problems, they go to 3-year vocational schools, where most of the three years is spent at working placement or practical lessons. I know it seems wrong, but this is the reality of it in the day and age when vocations are underappreciated and underpaid.

For the teacher, this means you get a class full of students who have been left behind in primary schools, learning there that they are not good enough, giving up on schooling, themselves or people around them for reasons such as the family they come from, or learning disabilities they might have, sometimes diagnosed, sometimes not.

## **Key insights to consider**

After several years of putting myself down for not teaching the best groups and also making too many mistakes thinking I can teach them in the same way as the rest, I came up with 10 things anyone can start doing today and avoid unnecessary conflicts and even more importantly feel like a specialist in your field, whatever the field is.

### **1. Start low**

Make sure they all get a task they can manage, so they start believing it is possible. It will take some time, but most students bruised by the primary schooling will bloom when they see something can be done. Have them play games to show them English can be fun and even easy. At the same time, games afford for much needed repetitive practice. This is most clearly seen when learning numbers, which seems such an obvious and easy task, but every year, I have some students who struggle even with this. And if you think about it correctly, in a setting of any vocation, saying the price, ordering or receiving the correct number of things, getting across your address, phone number or anything similar is indeed crucial. Your duty as the teacher by the end of first semester is to persuade them all they can do this, even the ones who have been persuaded otherwise before.

## **2. Have achievable plans**

These students need structure. It makes them feel safe, so make sure you tell them what the plan is and remind them often that they are achieving it when they do. The lower achievers need it to learn the basics, the better ones can do other activities while waiting, but can then still find out what others did. For the teacher, it simply means not to plan too much for the lesson and have achievable goals to avoid disappointment if you fail to achieve your goals. It happens oftentimes that these students will forget things they already knew and understood in the previous lesson the minute they walk out of the door. If you expect from them more than they can give you, you are putting pressure not only on them, but also on yourself. Admittedly, a good coursebook helps, but they are really hard to find. It seems all global coursebooks on offer are aimed for the motivated, outgoing students who want to be something, achieve more, travel the world and live in families that have the means to afford them that. Unfortunately, none of my vocational school students are like that which is why it is often impossible to motivate them using a book that was not written specifically for them.

## **3. Get rid of assumptions**

This is a mistake I have made many times. I expected that – since we covered a topic, did all the tasks in the book, students will now be able to use this knowledge and connect it to other pieces if the information they have or even build on it. Unfortunately, this only rarely happens. It is best not to assume they remember anything from previous years or even from lessons last month. Always plan all activities as if previous years never happened. It will save you a lot of nerves to do so and you will avoid a lot of frustrations for the students as well. Of course, there will always be some who do manage to remember, but the majority will need you to start over and over again, progressing with smallest steps possible. This can be frustrating for the teacher for one reason immediately – we would not have chosen English as our field of study, had that not been easy for us and had we not managed to progress well in it. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that for some people, this just isn't the same. Expecting otherwise will only bring conflict and conflict is never a good starting point for any learning.

## **4. Theory versus practice**

I know this might sound too obvious, but too many teachers still centre their teaching around key grammar points. In vocational school, it is best to cut the theory to the minimum. What these students need is a lot of repetition of key lexical structures. Therefore, your task as the teacher is to find fun and playful ways to repeat the same thing over and over again.

## **5. Differentiate**

Those students whose English is better and are being bored while you take care of the slower students must feel they are needed and appreciated in the class as well.

Give them meaningful tasks to do. Have them tutor classmates, check their work and similar, to avoid misbehaviour, which will occur anyway. Have short games or tasks ready for them so they don't disrupt the complete lesson.

## **6. Include professional language**

Instead of working on a more and more complex grammar structures they will never need, you need to think very carefully about the language they will really need in their professional life and focus on that. For this purpose, I forced myself into groups of teachers of practical subjects when they visited firms in the region, where our students have their job placements. I needed to see, what they do exactly, so as to be able to cater for their language needs in their future profession. This is one way of doing it. The other one is to let your students know they are specialists in a field you know nothing about. Let them teach you about their work. Allow them to tell you about their days at practice, the tools they used and conversations they had. Ask a lot of questions. Stupid ones and have them explain it to you. It shifts the power position slightly and I have found it makes a whole lot of a difference. Those whose English is better will enjoy teaching you and those who are not at that level yet, will be able to follow because they know the subject matter. It is what they are interested in and know about.

## **7. Avoid professional questions**

Think carefully if you really want to ask personal questions. These students usually have a very much different life to yours or a student in Gimnazija. A simple question like: "What does your mother/father do?", can lead to really problematic answers. "What did you do during the holidays?", will bring nothing usually. My vocational students are usually from the social bottom and holidays for them rarely mean going anywhere. Why would you expose that fact to the whole class? You would embarrass the students and on too many occasions, I wanted to take the question back, when they started explaining. They usually don't have enough competences to invent a life that would sound interesting, so they start telling the truth, no matter how harsh it is, in front of the whole class. Most of my vocational students namely have problematic backgrounds – if they hadn't they wouldn't be where they are.

## **8. Adapt your coursebook**

Look through your coursebook and don't be afraid to adapt or even skip the things that have no sense in being there. There is nothing that kills students more than the sentence: Open your books on page 34. Do everything in your power to avoid this particular sentence. Remember always that you are teaching students and not the book. Listen to them and their needs and be flexible. Coursebook is not the Bible and it certainly is not the curriculum.

## **9. Show them you love them**

If you can, bring paper and pens with you to the class to avoid unnecessary conflicts. There will always be students, who come to class unprepared, without books, pens and anything else. But beware, it is a trap, that will probably cost you the lesson and their respect. Pick your battles carefully. If you start your lesson with a conflict, don't expect it to be successful for anyone. And never expect teenagers to learn from anyone they don't respect. Only assign homework if it is really necessary – keep in mind some of these students don't have access to the Internet, knowledge, sometimes even to a peaceful personal space or a desk like we do.

## **10. Sprinkle with chocolate**

Bring chocolate to class occasionally, even if they have not earned it. Tell them they have earned it anyway. Make them believe you like spending time with them no matter how hard it is. It is true, they are very sensitive and can smell fear/contempt from afar, but they also recognise when they are being taken as human beings. They are the world's future car mechanics, installers, roof menders, cleaners, mechatronics. In the future, if they are good in their job, they could be earning more than you. It is time we stop looking down on them because they don't like to read literature or understand grammar.

## **Conclusion**

I hope these lessons will help you help them become better adults, possibly able to use at least a bit of English in their lives. Never think that those teachers whose English is not very good, are only good for lower level classes. I hope all of the above makes you realise that it takes a different kind of specialist to cater for these students' needs. I hope you know you are the specialist and can be a better one every day, because they deserve nothing less.

# TURNING ARNES CLASSROOM INTO EFFECTIVE AND INTERACTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITH H5P CONTENT

**Mojca Zadavec,** *Osnovna šola Mokronog*

## **Abstract**

During the past few years, Arnes classroom has proven over and over again to be a good choice for distance learning. Moreover, students have learned to use different gadgets, such as tablets, smart phones, and computers effectively, so they should be encouraged to continue to use them at school too. The same goes for online classrooms; they, too, should continue to be used, even if students are back at school. It is important to understand that Arnes classroom is not just a place where teachers upload pdf or Word documents containing instructions for work. On the contrary, it offers numerous tools that teachers can use to prepare more engaging lessons for their students, whether for home work, distance learning purposes, or as a regular school lesson. One tool that is certainly worth exploring and using in Arnes classroom is the h5p tool. It can be used to prepare lessons that are motivating for students and enable the teachers to easily track the students' progress.

**Keywords:** Arnes classroom, distance learning, coronavirus, lockdown, h5p



## Introduction

Preparing online lessons for students during distance learning or for other purposes is a complex task, which should not be taken lightly. The teachers must follow the curriculum, prepare engaging and motivating lessons, track the students' progress, and at the same time prepare lessons with a more personal approach to maintain a relationship with their students. The latter should not be neglected; after all, when students are at school, they listen to their teachers and see them most of the time. When they work at home or in one-to-one situations, it is important to still maintain some level of personal relationship with the students. Arnes classrooms have tools that can be used to prepare more engaging lessons for students, with less input from parents.

## Disadvantages of only written instructions for work in the form of .doc or .pdf documents

If teachers want to motivate their students and keep their knowledge up to a certain standard, they should avoid providing instructions and explanations in the form of typed documents. This has several disadvantages, such as the following:

- Students are expected to perform tasks successfully while working in complete silence, which is a situation that is completely different to the one they experience at school.
- Students are expected to have a well-developed reading stamina.
- Students are expected to have well-developed reading strategies.
- Students are expected to be good at reading for detail.
- Students are expected to independently work their way through multiple pages of instructions for work, explanations, passages in their course and activity books, and texts on PowerPoints.
- Students are exposed to enormous amounts of words and letters, certainly more than they are used to.
- Students with auditory learning styles or students with learning differences find it difficult to read everything independently, so they need their parents' help, which can be a burden for the parents.

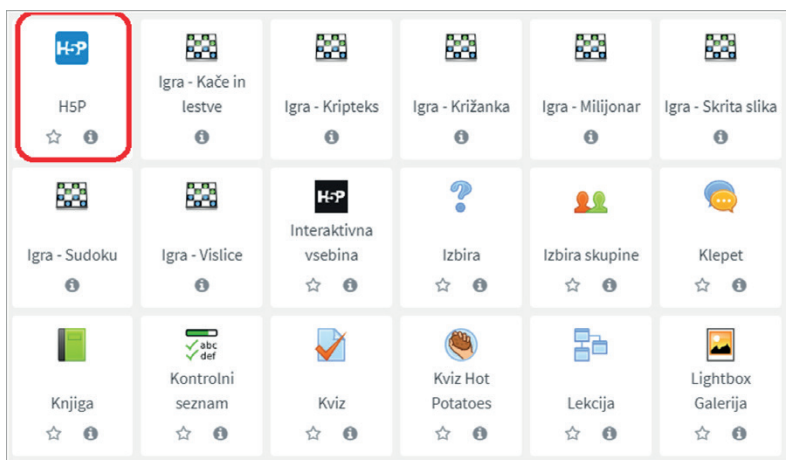
## Advantages of audio and visual instructions and lessons

Rather than typing out instructions for students, teachers should focus more on creating situations that resemble those in physical classrooms. Instructions for work should include audio and visual input. There are a number of reasons for this, such as the following:

- A lot of young learners have an auditory learning style.
- Such lessons resemble classroom situations, where teachers give instructions, sometimes repeat them, and students listen to the instructions.
- Students are more motivated to work, because they can hear or/and see their teacher.
- It is easier for students to understand the instructions with the guidance from the teacher.
- Students are more likely to work independently and consequently do not need their parents to help them.
- Teachers can provide support for students with learning differences and create a learning environment in which they can learn successfully.

## Arnes h5p tools can be used to prepare effective audio and visual lessons

Arnes classroom has proven to be a good learning environment. It is important to understand that teachers can use it to fulfil all aspects of teaching, that is for instructions, explanations, feedback, and means of communication, so there is no need for students to use other applications or programs. This in itself is an advantage, as it means that the students are not inundated with different apps and programs, all of which require different skills and knowledge to be able to use them effectively. H5p is only one of numerous tools Arnes classrooms have to offer.



*Figure 1: H5p tool is only one of numerous tools offered by Arnes classroom and which can be used to prepare interactive and motivating lessons for students (source: printscreen Arnes classroom, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022)*

## H5p Course Presentation

The H5p course presentation is an excellent tool for preparing structured and motivating lessons:

- Different slides/pages enable teachers to break down the lesson into different parts and direct students' attention on a specific thing.
- Students move through the slides and tasks at their own pace.
- Teachers can guide students with recorded instructions and explanations.
- Teachers can create tasks that test students' understanding and provide immediate feedback to both the teacher and the student.
- Teachers can embed audio and video into the slides.

Here is an example of a lesson for students in grade 4 (10-year olds) on the topic of Adjectives:



Figure 2: Example slide from Course Presentation tool with audio instructions and numbered slides



Figure 3: Example slide from Course Presentation tool with an embedded video

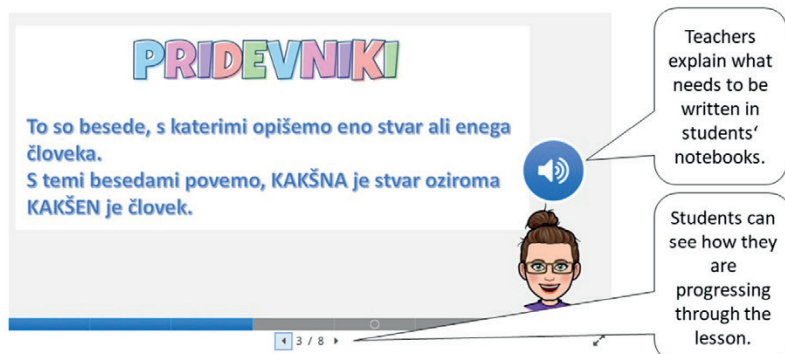


Figure 4: Example slide from Course Presentation tool with audio instructions

**Dopolni stavke z NASPROTNIM PRIDEVNIKOM.**

**Izbiraj med naslednjimi:**

**long   big   sad   dirty   new**

- 1) My schoolbag isn't **small**. It is .
- 2) Is this your bike? No, my bike is , but this one is **old**.
- 3) Look at that cat! It isn't **clean**. It is .
- 4) Why are you crying? Are you **happy** or .
- 5) I have got **short** hair but my sister has got  hair.

Teachers can create tasks to check students' understanding. Both the teacher and the student get immediate feedback.

Students listen to audio instructions, just as they would in a classroom.

Figure 5: Example slide from Course Presentation tool with an interactive task/exercise

This is my sister.

She is short and young.

She is twelve years old.

This is my schoolbag.

It is big and heavy.

It is pink and purple.

This is my toy car.

It is small and new.

It is white and blue.

Students listen to instructions about the task that needs to be done. They can also see an example.

Figure 6: Example slide from Course Presentation tool with audio instructions for work

## H5p Interactive Video

H5p Interactive Video is an excellent tool for making the most out of videos:

- Students watch the video and perform different tasks.
- The teacher can monitor their success and understanding.
- Students must watch the video to complete the lesson.
- Students and the teacher get immediate feedback.

Here is an example of a lesson for students in grade 4 (10-year olds) on the topic of revision:



Figure 7: Example of Interactive Video tool with added tasks/questions

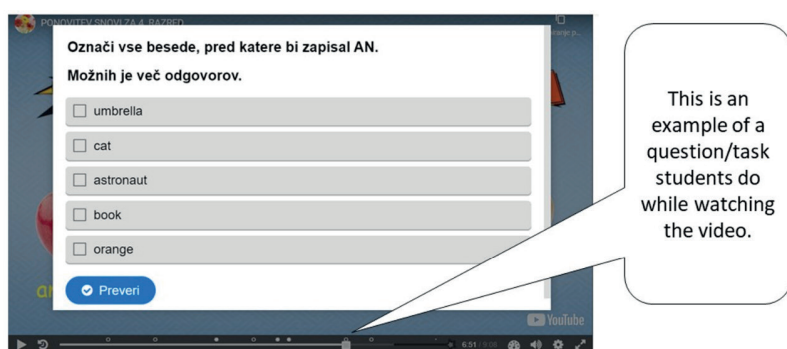


Figure 8: Example tasks/questions from Interactive Video tool

## Conclusion

For the past few years students have learned how to use ICT equipment effectively, so teachers should be encouraged to continue to implement and use the tools they used during lockdown and distance learning. While preparing online lessons, teachers should think about different aspects of their work: how to prepare and provide feedback for motivating and engaging lessons, how to incorporate guidelines from national curriculum into lessons, how to keep students' knowledge up to a certain standard and not burden parents with extra schoolwork, and how to maintain an emotional relationship with their students. Such lessons must include video and audio feeds from the teacher, as this has a positive effect on the students' learning process and motivation. Arnes classrooms were widely used during the lockdown and provide excellent h5p tools for creating such lessons. Course Presentation is a tool which can be used to prepare well-structured lessons, and Interactive Video is a tool that allows you to get the most out of videos.

# ATTENTION-GRABBING OPENERS

Ivana Zidanšek

## **Abstract**

How do we start our lessons? Are the teaching goals, learning outcomes and attention-grabbers in alignment with each other and why is that important? The article takes a look at some of the ways of grabbing and keeping the students' attention from simple, momentary actions to working and long-term memory storage.

**Keywords:** openers, memory, learning outcomes, audience

**Introduction**

If you search the web for attention grabbers and openers, there are various fields that the topic relates to, from attention-grabbers for writing a captivating story, a novel, or a persuasive essay (Hills, 2018) to advice on openers for delivering a speech, a presentation, etc. By narrowing down the search and focusing on attention grabbers in teaching, there are also numerous hits. It seems that the topic of catching and maintaining attention is highly relevant in all the situations involving audience and content delivering. So, how to start? What to say? What information to provide? How can we deliver the content which is captivating, relevant, meaningful and memorable? These are all questions we need to keep in mind as we prepare the audience and deliver the content.

**Attention-grabbers in related areas (essays, speech, teaching)**

As there are many things in common regarding the openers no matter the area we can easily adapt the following definitions related to openers in writing and speeches to the teaching environment:

ESSAY/SPEECH OPENERS		TEACHING SITUATION
An "attention getter," also known as an "attention grabber," "hook," or "hook sentence," refers to the first 1-4 sentences <i>of an essay</i> and is always found in the introductory paragraph. It consists of an intriguing opening that is designed to grab your <i>reader's attention</i> .	turns into	An "attention getter," also known as an "attention grabber," "hook," or "hook sentence," refers to the first 1-4 sentences <i>of a lesson</i> and is always found in the introductory part of it. It consists of an intriguing opening that is designed to grab your <i>students' attention</i> .
The first few sentences of <i>a speech</i> are designed to catch and maintain the <i>audience's</i> attention. Attention getters give the audience a reason to listen to the rest of <i>the speech</i> . Your attention getter helps the audience understand and reflect on your topic.	easily becomes	The first few sentences of <i>a lesson</i> are designed to catch and maintain the <i>students'</i> attention. Attention getters give <i>the learners</i> a reason to listen to the rest of <i>the lesson</i> . Your attention getter helps <i>the students</i> understand and reflect on your topic.

What is common for attention-grabbers no matter the area seems to be *their purpose*. All attention-grabbers are meant to either draw attention, maintain focus, help understanding, provide a reason, etc.

However, when searching the web for attention-grabbers at school, there are many that are aimed at younger audiences and serve more as calmers or motivators (for example: audio and physical responses – ‘One two – says a teacher, eyes on you – respond the students’, ‘I say class you (the students) say yes’, One clap (teacher) – two claps (students), morning meetings, games, movement, ...) but we do not know if they can respond to the needs of older students as well.

Whatever the answer we cannot neglect the fact that attention-grabbers are and should be a part of the lessons for older students as well due to the reasons provided before (purpose, attention, understanding, reflecting the topic, ...).

### **Attention-grabbers for older students**

What should be kept in mind is that there is a significant difference in the needs and the levels of cognition in younger and older students so maybe we cannot easily transfer the openers from younger audience to older learners. Or can we? According to Gardiner (2016) getting the attention from 14 to 18 year students is hard. They have their mobile phones, friends to talk to, even the food is present, so we need to attract their attention in various ways. What is more, they quickly become used to the activities/openers and start to ignore them, so the variation is really necessary. Reynolds (2017) further on mentions the following six tips that are short and effective and can be used with older students:

1. Counting down (standing in front of the class and simply counting down from 4 or 3 to 1).
2. Zone of proximity (standing close to a student, putting a hand on a child's shoulder, tapping on a desk, moving an object in front of him/her (paper) – making them aware of your presence).
3. Tossing snacks/sweets/small gifts for doing an extra good job.
4. Doing something absurd, different (90% of how we do things today is how we did them yesterday, so introducing an element of surprise catches students off-guard; e.g., instead of: ‘Good morning.’ we can say: ‘Hello ... future intellectuals/aliens/etc.’ as long as it is not offensive).
5. Having a relationship with students (based on being interested in them as human beings).
6. Sharing small motivational things (putting a note on their desks, handing out stickers).



So, which openers can be used probably depends on the preferences and personality of the individual teacher as well as his/her teaching style and the group of students he/she is teaching.

On the other hand, there are other types of attention-getters which relate to higher 'mental activities' and cognitive skills, such as:

1. references to the audience
2. quotations
3. references to current events
4. historical references
5. anecdotes
6. startling statements
7. questions
8. humour
9. personal references and
10. references to the occasion

They are more 'toned down' as compared to the first group and refer more to the content and memory and not so much to the students' behaviour.

## Conclusion

Whatever the audience, the attention-grabbers are purposeful and engaging. Their presence adds to the relevance of teaching and learning and/or classroom management. Their choice depends on the teaching style and teacher's personality. Their diversity helps maintain students' attention in the long run so it is always a good idea to have a collection of different attention-getters to be able to choose from and use when needed.

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# DO, DID, DONE – IRREGULAR VERBS CAN BE FUN

**Mateja Žgur**

## **Abstract**

This article offers you new ideas, tips and materials to learn irregular verbs in a more successful and fun way. These include various speaking, listening, writing and reading activities. Some are done individually, others in pairs, little groups or with the whole class together. They are adapted for the kinaesthetic learners and for home-schooling as well.

**Keywords:** irregular verbs, learning styles, peer learning

## Introduction

Irregular verbs have always been quite infamous in English classes. They present some challenges already for the advanced students. However, the less-able students always struggle the most.

In order to be able to use an irregular verb successfully, one has to understand it when they hear or read it, pronounce it correctly, spell it the right way and be able to use it in different contexts (when speaking and writing). To facilitate and improve the learning process, I decided to take a slow, step-by-step approach. During that prolonged period of time, irregular verbs are integrated in all the lessons and revised on a daily basis. The learning process includes all language skills and caters for different language styles. It also incorporates the techniques of formative assessment along the way.

## Step-by-step approach

Irregular verbs are not a separate section in learning English, they are basically part of one's vocabulary. The richer your vocabulary, the more verbs you already understand. There are, however, students whose vocabulary is rather poor and they need even more time to build it up. The aim of learning irregular verbs is hence not only to be able to use them in Past Tenses, but also to enrich one's vocabulary. The more verbs you know, the more you understand when listening or reading in English and you can also improve your speaking and writing skills.

I will now present the basic steps in our learning process. Firstly, students start with irregular verbs in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Their final goal is to learn a total of 118 irregular verbs. They are divided into 12 smaller units that consist of 10 irregular verbs. Only the last unit is a bit shorter with the remaining 8 irregular verbs. Students start with the first ten verbs at the beginning of September and finish in January by the latest.

Before we start learning the irregular verbs, we talk about the whole learning process. That activity is done in our mother tongue. Together with the students, we brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- What are verbs?
- Why is it important to learn verbs?
- When do we use verbs?
- How can I learn new words successfully?
- How can I test my progress?

Students talk to each other and then we collect the ideas and write them down on the board and in their notebooks. I introduce to my students the weekly plan. We choose the day in the week when we will focus on irregular verbs – e.g. Monday. Then every Monday we learn 10 new irregular verbs and students write short check-back tests to evaluate their progress. That is the basis of the whole learning process – later on we often talk about our initial ideas and check if students follow their own advice. This is especially important for those students whose learning outcome is not as successful as it could be.

Then it is time to start learning.

## Methods and materials

On the chosen day of the week we go through the new unit of ten irregular verbs. Special attention is paid to the pronunciation. Students repeat the verbs after me and jot down the more difficult sounds in certain verb forms. In order to distinguish between different verb patterns, we also use simple body movements, which is especially useful for kinaesthetic learners. The gestures are very simple. Preferably you should stand up, stretch your arms and follow the instructions.

- Touch your head. (1<sup>st</sup> form)
- Touch your shoulders. (2<sup>nd</sup> form)
- Touch your hips. (3<sup>rd</sup> form)

For those irregular verbs that have 3 different forms (e.g., do – did – done) we touch three different body parts one after another – head, shoulders and hips. If there are 2 different forms, we touch 2 different body parts, as shown in the examples:

- bring – brought – brought; HEAD – SHOULDERS (TWICE);
- run – ran – run; HEAD – SHOULDERS – HEAD.

For those irregular verbs that remain the same, i.e., their forms do not change, the movement remains the same as well – you touch your head three times. Students are advised to learn the new unit of irregular verbs regularly – preferably on a daily basis – and to revise the “old” verbs. We constantly emphasise the importance of loud learning as well as writing to learn both the pronunciation and the right spelling of every irregular verb form.

Throughout the school week, irregular verbs are practised at school, too. Sometimes I divide the students in pairs and they practise the verbs doing the following simple exercises:

- translate the verb: English-Slovene and vice versa;
- say and “show” the forms (“show” means include the pre-arranged body movements);
- “show” the forms and name a verb that fits.

We often revise irregular verbs as a warm-up activity. Every time I choose a different student to lead this revision. The student comes to the front and chooses any irregular verb we have learnt so far. Then they choose a schoolmate who has to say the forms. The leading student writes down ten verbs on the blackboard and all the students write them down in their notebooks adding the past tense and the participle forms as well as the Slovene translations. Then the students swap their notebooks and check the verbs.

It turned out many times that students are much more alert and precise when checking someone else’s solutions than they are when checking their own ones. That is why I also included peer-assessment in our weekly check-back tests. These always include all the 10 irregular verbs from the last unit (the one that students started learning a week ago) and some verbs from the previous unit(s). Every now and then the check-back test is longer

and includes more irregular verbs to give a better insight into every student's progress. When students fill out the check-back test they swap it with a schoolmate and check each other's results using the list of irregular verbs. At the end of every check-back test there is a peer-to-peer advice corner, where students are asked to comment on their schoolmate's progress in Slovene. In their comments, students include:

- What is good (e.g., the handwriting; there are few mistakes; the schoolmate knows the translations very well; the result is better than the previous time; the schoolmate has improved their spelling etc.)?
- What should be improved (e.g., the handwriting; the spelling; the translations, etc.)?
- What advice can you give your schoolmate?

Most of the students enjoy correcting the mistakes their schoolmates have made, not even noticing that they are revising irregular verbs at the same time. Initially they need some support when commenting on their schoolmate's achievement. We often discuss the features they can comment upon (handwriting; spelling; translations, etc.) and we always emphasise the importance of finding something positive first, before advancing with the problematic points. Later on, the peer-to-peer advice corner becomes a routine and students really enjoy reading their schoolmate's comments (especially when they can be praised a lot).

If there are any mistakes either in those check-back tests or during our daily revision exercises, students are asked to copy those verbs they still need to learn in their notebooks and practise speaking and writing them at home.

When this writing and checking procedure is over, students put their check-back tests in their individual folder and return it to me. At that point it is time for me to check every individual's progress and every student is asked to say out loud a few verbs so that I can check their pronunciation as well.

This weekly check-back process lasts approximately 15 minutes. When the check-back tests are longer, the duration of the activity is a bit longer, too. The time needed to introduce a new unit of 10 irregular verbs is 10 minutes. All in all, the total timing is a bit less than half an hour every week. The short revision sessions during the rest of the weekly lessons are shorter and last about 5-10 minutes.

Due to distance schooling we started adapting the whole learning and assessment procedure so that in future it can be carried out online as well. The whole material will be accessible to our older students as well so they can use it as a revision tool later on.

## **Conclusion**

The step-by-step approach of learning irregular verbs over a longer period of time has proved to be useful for all the students, especially for the less-able ones. The various revision methods used (speaking, listening, writing, reading, body movements, online videos and various online exercises) satisfy different learning styles.

Students like being involved in the preparation activities and they enjoy the peer-learning process. It turned out to be very stimulating that the students receive not only the feedback from the teacher but also from their schoolmates. Most of the students are very fair and strict judges.

The whole prolonged learning process is a bit time-consuming, but according to my experience it all pays back. Most of the students who learn irregular verbs in this slow but thorough manner remember them better i.e. they really enter their long-term memory.